Schools, Scripture and Secularisation:

A Christian Theological Argument for the Incorporation of Sacred Texts within Australian Public Education

David Matthew Benson
BAppSci.HMS-Ed, MA (Theological Studies)

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Queensland in 2016
School of Historical and Philosophical Inquiry
Abstract

This thesis concerns the purpose of education, and the role of Scriptures therein, centred on the Australian Curriculum. Through ACARA’s (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) commitment to “equity and excellence”, the telos of this curriculum is the formation of students who are “successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens”. The Shaping of the Australian Curriculum documents offer a vision of youth who can “make sense of the world” and “work together toward the common good”. Working from a practical theology paradigm, the question animating this thesis is, What should be the place of Sacred Texts within Australian public education? Set within the broader issue of religion in education, I seek a mutually critical correlation between the vision in the Australian Curriculum and a Christian theology of education, in arguing for the incorporation of Sacred Texts within Australian “secular” schools for Year 7 to 10 students in the subjects of History and Civics and Citizenship.

In Part I, I describe and interpret the place religions and their revelations occupy in overarching curriculum aims, and specific content for two subjects. At the Shaping level of curriculum philosophy, the civic goals and rhetoric of religious inclusivity suggest a meaningful role for Sacred Texts: capturing diverse visions of the common good in Civics and Citizenship; and making sense of motivations that propelled significant events in the past and shape contested interpretations in the present as studied in History. As the Shaping documents translate into the Australian Curriculum content, however, Scriptures disappear, moved into the null curriculum. This disparity calls for explanation.

Employing a sociological perspective, I contend that ACARA’s treatment of religious revelation is consistent with the perspective of the classic secularisation thesis. According to this narrative, Scriptures are dangerous in Civics and Citizenship and irrelevant in History. While these assertions are deconstructed in light of the post-secular turn, I crystallise the concerns of secularists and multiculturalists alike into a “plural principle”. Across any unit of study, the incorporation of Sacred Texts must meet the criteria of relevance to curricular aims, accountability to professional educators, diversity in perspective, veracity in re-presenting the Other and critically analysing truth claims, and respect for students to determine their own beliefs and practices; it must ultimately foster the integration of a student’s life toward holistic flourishing, and help form a robust, just, inclusive and peaceful democracy.
In Part II, I seek to understand what should be going on, discerning the common ground between theological and philosophical accounts of education’s end. A narrative theology of education is constructed to consider what function Scriptures may perform toward the telos of education for shalom. “God’s Curriculum” represents the core teaching and learning under divine tutelage for humanity to come of age. Across a six leg journey of Creation, the Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, and the New Creation, we learn about work, knowledge, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness and hope. We are formed as active citizens under the liberating reign of God in the way we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile, and worship. In turn, this vision suggests a meaningful role for the study of diverse Sacred Texts in restoring humanity to right relationship with the Transcendent, others, self and the planet.

Through a dialectical hermeneutic, and in dialogue with Dwayne Huebner among other educational theorists, the Australian Curriculum and God’s Curriculum fuse in a vision of education for holistic flourishing. That is, education may be reimagined as aiming at responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion and integration. Sacred Texts can be appropriately incorporated to serve the common good: preserving difference and fostering harmony in Civics and Citizenship; and discerning the wisest path to follow together in the present given our contested past in History.

In Part III, I seek to change the situation, pragmatically exemplifying how this curriculum vision may be implemented as part of a school-based syllabi for the Year 8 study of freedom of speech in Civics and Citizenship, and the Year 10 study of modern conflict and migration within a globalising world in History. I develop a narrative pedagogy comprising a five-movement hermeneutic of encounter, questions, stories, synthesis and response. Adapting this model of engagement to accord with ACARA’s stipulations, I reshape practice to demonstrate how such an approach can augment the curriculum.

In short, while Sacred Texts are largely silenced in secular education, they have a meaningful role to play. By engaging students in explaining, understanding and changing the world through established subjects, the selective incorporation of Scriptures can sensitise adolescents to the many sacred stories at play. In so doing, potentially transcendent revelation may illuminate and enrich our immanent frame as the one thing we must all share.
Declaration by the author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

I acknowledge that an electronic copy of my thesis must be lodged with the University Library and, subject to the policy and procedures of The University of Queensland, the thesis be made available for research and study in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968 unless a period of embargo has been approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

I acknowledge that copyright of all material contained in my thesis resides with the copyright holder(s) of that material. Where appropriate I have obtained copyright permission from the copyright holder to reproduce material in this thesis.
Publications during candidature


Publications included in this thesis


This article appears in Chapters 3 and 6 of this thesis, analysing Civics and Citizenship in the Australian Curriculum. As sole author, my contribution is 100 per cent to this article.


This work is incorporated in Chapters 1 and 4 of this thesis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributor</th>
<th>Statement of contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Benson (candidate)</td>
<td>Conception and project design (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background research (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wrote and reviewed the paper (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter C. J. James</td>
<td>Conception and project design (60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Background research (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wrote and reviewed the paper (70%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this essay, I researched and wrote sections II (“The Challenge of Liberal Democracy for Spirituality and Education,” 132-137) and III (“The Secularist ‘Solution’,” 138-141), additionally framing the syllogism in VII (“Conclusions—The Future,” 151-152, cf. p138). My contributions alone have been incorporated in this thesis.

**Contributions by others to the thesis**

No contributions by others.

**Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree**

None.
Acknowledgements

Education is a communal journey from ignorance to enlightenment, from insularity to interconnection, and perhaps even from death to life. Reflecting back upon my postgraduate process, I am pleased to acknowledge the input, direction and encouragement of six groups of fellow travellers who have made my own pilgrimage possible.

To the Malyon College community under the leadership of Rev. Dr. John Sweetman, thank you for providing a vibrant, challenging and yet safe place to experiment with these educational ideas in my own curriculum writing and pedagogy. Countless conversations shaped this project, my students ensuring that big ideas remained grounded.

To Drs. Neil Pembroke and David Pitman, your grace in reading the longest drafts in recent academic memory, alongside clarity of thought, charity in reply, and wisdom to re-edit, has been crucial in completing this project. I am honoured to count you as both advisors and friends. The staff and scholars in the Studies in Religion unit have been so supportive, especially Judy King as administrative officer extraordinaire.

To Drs. David Ford, Mike Higton, Robert Jackson, Leslie Francis, Julia Ipgrave, Rebecca Catto, Trevor Cooling and John Shortt, your astute research and generosity has been an inspiration. I trust you find your own legacy imprinted upon this dissertation. Thank you, also, to The University of Queensland’s Graduate Student International Travel Award, which afforded me a year in the UK to partner with and interview many scholars within the University of Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme (especial thanks to Dr. Daniel Weisse and the Scriptural Reasoning Programme), the University of Warwick Religion in Education Research Unit, Canterbury Christ Church University National Institute for Christian Education Research, Ian Jamison from Tony Blair’s Face to Faith Programme, Siobhán Anderson from the Three Faith Forum, St. Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace (particularly the Narrative Practitioners Forum), and Tim Fawssett from “The Feast”.

To Bruce Blackshaw and Craig Sargent, you are both faithful friends and critical thinkers who have engaged with this project from the start, wisely commenting on each chapter as it emerged. To Peter James, your amazing generosity amidst a busy schedule, offering a bird’s eye view of which trails to let go and the best path through the wilderness in making my argument cohere, is greatly appreciated. Thank you, also, to Graham, Justin and Rach Cole, for your realistic take on curriculum implementation in class. May you continue to inspire your students as amazing teachers. On a different note, thank you to Ryan Vallee for
saving my sanity with humour and regular mantivities, preventing this pilgrimage from becoming a death march! Lindsay Farrell, your advice and encouragement are a God-send.

To my fellow PhD students—Chong, Sanam, Ross, Sam, John, Prithvi, Chris, Graham, and the wonderful community gathering annually for the colloquium—I am honoured to walk this road with you. Who else can empathise like a fellow student?

Finally, I wish to acknowledge three teachers who set me on this path, and my wife. Both Darryl Clarke and Ric Benson (my father) are the best teachers under whom I have studied. At numerous points in this thesis, their curricular innovations and creative pedagogy would come to mind, embodying the vision for education of which I write. That Darryl is decidedly agnostic reminds me that transformative learning is not the possession of any one perspective, be it religious, spiritual or secular. The third teacher is my mother, Anne. Beyond the bounds of any classroom, through her patient care, consistent example, and probing conversation, she has formed my character and taught me to desire holistic flourishing as part of a community that celebrates difference. My greatest thanks, however, are reserved for Nikki. None of this was possible without you. You are loving and longsuffering in equal measure, teaching me to take these many words and translate them into a life well lived. May we continue to journey together, discovering “moreness” as we set our feet toward shalom.
Keywords
australian curriculum, public school, sacred text, scripture, education, narrative theology, secular, secularisation, common good, shalom

Australian and New Zealand Standard Research Classifications (ANZSRC)
220401 Christian Studies 50%
220202 History and Philosophy of Education 30%
220405 Religion and Society 20%

Fields of Research (FoR) Classification
22 Philosophy and Religious Studies:
   2204 Religion and Religious Studies 70%
   2202 History and Philosophy of Specific Fields 30%
Note

# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... i
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures and Abbreviations ...................................................................................................... xiii

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
   A. Situating the Thesis ................................................................................................................... 2
      Secularist Concerns over Religion in Schools ................................................................. 4
      Religious Literacy and Social Cohesion ............................................................................. 6
      The “End” of the Australian Curriculum ......................................................................... 7
   B. The Topic and Structure of the Thesis ............................................................................... 9
      Contributions of the Thesis ................................................................................................. 10
      Limitations ......................................................................................................................... 11

## CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY ............................................................. 13
   A. A Practical and Public Theology Methodology ............................................................... 13
      Public Theology and Mutually Critical Correlation ...................................................... 14
   B. Five Movement Method .................................................................................................... 16
      The Interpretive Movement: Why Is This Going On? ................................................. 19
      The Correlative Movement: Where Is the Common Ground? .................................... 21
      The Pragmatic Movement: How Might We Respond? ............................................... 22
   C. Methodological Tension .................................................................................................... 24

## PART I EXPLAINING CURRICULUM: SCRIPTURES IN SECULAR EDUCATION

## CHAPTER 3 THE PLACE OF SACRED TEXTS WITHIN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM ...... 28
   A. Why Telos Matters ............................................................................................................. 28
      The Postmodern Turn ......................................................................................................... 29
   B. ACARA’s Curriculum Story .............................................................................................. 30
      Defining Curriculum .......................................................................................................... 30
      Curriculum Narratives .................................................................................................... 30
Plotting ACARA’s Account .........................................................32
ACARA’s Confusing Story ..........................................................34
C. Scriptures in the Shaping Documents ......................................35
    History ....................................................................................35
    Civics and Citizenship ............................................................39
D. An Appraisal ............................................................................42

CHAPTER 4 CAN SECULAR EDUCATION PERMIT SCRIPTURES? ..........47
    A. “Secular” and “Secularising” Education ...............................48
       The “Secular Principle” .........................................................51
       Secularisation Theses ...........................................................54
    B. ACARA’s Secular Narrative .................................................56
       History: Sacred Texts Are Irrelevant .......................................56
       Civics and Citizenship: Scriptures Are Dangerous ...............62
       New Criteria Orienting Equitable Incorporation of Sacred Texts ....69

PART II UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM: SCRIPTURES SERVING SHALOM
CHAPTER 5 SACRED TEXTS AND EDUCATION’S END: A BIBLICAL STORY ...76
    A. Education, Revelation and a Biblical Curriculum ..................76
       Orienting the Curricular Story .................................................77
       Re-Scripting Sacred Texts in Secular Education .....................79
    B. Sacred Texts and the Story of Shalom ...................................82
       Making Shalom: Cultivate God’s Garden ...............................82
       Breaking Shalom: Repent over the Tower ...............................85
       Seeking Shalom: Bless from the Tent .....................................91
       Saving Shalom: Love on the Mountain ...................................96
       Embracing Shalom: Reconcile in the House .........................101
       Entering Shalom: Worship in the City ...................................108
    C. Human Participation in Divine Pedagogy ...............................115

CHAPTER 6 HOW SACRED TEXTS SERVE THE COMMON GOOD .................118
    A. God’s Curriculum and ACARA’s Curriculum ......................121
       Wisdom, Blessing and Diverse Cultural Perspectives in History ....121
       Reciprocity, Love and Social Capability in Civics and Citizenship ....128
Hope, Worship, and ACARA’s Integrated Curriculum ......................... 137
B. Scripture, Shalom and the Common Good in Synergy .................... 146

PART III  CHANGING CURRICULUM: SCRIPTURES AND FLOURISHING

CHAPTER 7  INCORPORATING SACRED TEXTS IN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM .......... 153
A. Pedagogy for Holistic Flourishing .............................................. 157
   Civics and Citizenship ............................................................. 157
   History ..................................................................................... 163

CHAPTER 8  CONCLUSION ................................................................. 172
Persistent Questions ......................................................................... 176
A Path Forward ............................................................................. 177

List of References ........................................................................... 180
List of Figures

Figure 1  Five Movement Model of Practical Theological Reflection (p17)

List of Abbreviations

9/11 Twin Towers Terrorist Attack, New York (September 11, 2001)
AARE Australian Association for Research in Education
AC Australian Curriculum
Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (AC:CC)
Australian Curriculum: History (AC:H)
ACC Australian Curriculum Coalition
ACARA Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER Australian Council for Educational Research
ACSA Australian Curriculum Studies Authority
AHRC Australian Human Rights Commission
ATSI Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CRE Christian Religious Education (book by Thomas Groome)
DIMIA Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
FIRIS Fairness in Religions in Schools
GC God’s Curriculum
GCAC General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum
GPS Global Public Square (book by Os Guinness)
GRE General Religious Education
JVG Jesus and the Victory of God (book by N. T. Wright)
LC Learner-Centred
LT Lure of the Transcendent (book by Dwayne E. Huebner)
HGBK How God Became King (book by N. T. Wright)
MCEECDYA Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MD Melbourne Declaration
NTPG New Testament and the People of God (book by N. T. Wright)
PFG Paul and the Faithfulness of God (book by N. T. Wright)
RE Religious/Religions Education
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REDCo</td>
<td><em>Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REENA</td>
<td><em>Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RiSE</td>
<td><em>Religion in Secular Education</em> (book by Cathy Byrne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td><em>Scholar-Academic</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| SAC     | *Shape of the Australian Curriculum*  
|         |  *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum, Version 4.0 (SAC4)*  
|         |  *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (SAC:CC)*  
|         |  *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History (SAC:H)* |
| SE      | *Social Efficiency* |
| SecularR&E | *Secular Religions and Ethics* (subject proposed by Cathy Byrne) |
| SOR     | *Study of Religion* |
| SR      | *Social-Reconstructionism* |
| SRE/SRI | *Special Religious Education/Special Religious Instruction* |
| TGS     | *Taking God to School* (book by Marion Maddox) |
| WRERU   | *The University of Warwick Religion in Education Research Unit* |
| WVS     | *World Values Survey* |
Chapter 1
Introduction

What is the place of Sacred Texts in Australian public education? And what, from a Christian perspective, should be the place of Scriptures in secular schools? This thesis will correlate the insights of curriculum writers and theologians of education in seeking constructive ways forward that serve a pluralistic society. Before outlining the scope of this thesis, we must first focus the terms religion and Sacred Texts.

Defining religion is a thorny matter, inherently resisting conceptualisation. Many have argued that religion is a western construction emerging from the Enlightenment Project that dichotomised sacred and secular, revelation and reason, Church and State, to empirically study a phenomenon that for most people in the world was simply experienced as life in all its fullness. Nevertheless, “religion” is referred to in the Australian Curriculum. Thus, we need working definitions with widespread acceptance.

The High Court of Australia’s (1983) definition, now used for Census purposes, recognises two criteria for a religion: “First, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief …” A richer definition is also needed, one that reflects the universal human desire to ground and rise above our contingent experience in the quest for authentic existence, where our lives take on meaning as part of a larger vision. In this sense, religion and story are inseparable. Thus, for this project I am adopting a working definition wherein religion represents the pursuit of the transcendent, which offers an overarching interpretation of the world and our place therein, aligning our believing, behaving and belonging as together we seek the supreme good of human existence.

Sacred Texts are closely related, for every religion records and retells its foundational stories that define the tradition, often collecting these accounts in authoritative holy books. Interchangeable with Scriptures, Sacred Texts characteristically embody the wisdom of a people,

1 In Australia, all public education is State education, independent of religious control.
5 David Tracy, Blessed Rage for Order (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 93-98.
the shared symbolic world that guides life together and forges identity by claiming to tell the story of the world, thus orienting the individual.9

In short, Sacred Texts promise to integrate all of life. This unique vantage point may be understood as transcendent revelation, whether in the sense of a personal and divine Being disclosing that which we could not ascertain for ourselves (in the case of the Abrahamic faiths), or a higher and integrative perspective achieved through ascent to Enlightenment (in the case of Buddhism).10 Clearly, then, Scriptures—such as the Torah, Nevi' im (“Prophets”), and Ketuvim (“Writings”) in Judaism, the Qur’an in Islam, the Bible in Christianity, the Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana and Mahabharata in Hinduism, and the Tripitaka in Buddhism, to name but a few11—are not making private assertions to merely shape one’s subjective experience. Rather, these texts make “paradigmatic claims to truth and reality” which cannot be reduced to empirical verification, “a manifestation of the meaning and truth of the whole by the whole.”12 These claims should not be viewed as a totalising discourse, but rather as a narrative which invites us to make sense of our life story within its pages.13

A. SITUATING THE THESIS

My interest in this topic emerges from fifteen years of experience in State high schools as both a teacher and youth worker. While completing a Masters dissertation in Canada, focused on adolescent engagement with the Bible,14 I discovered that this messy metanarrative for many youth served to locate their individual stories in a larger and communal frame. During a developmental phase characterised by questioning that emerges with formal-operational (“hypothetico-deductive”) thinking, it is beneficial to bring one’s deepest and often subconscious beliefs to the surface.15 As teens interact with a range of perspectives, they learn to integrate their identity around critically held beliefs that can exist amidst a plurality of positions.16 I suspected that diverse Sacred Texts may play a comparable role for devotees of other religions. As philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues, humans are essentially “story-telling animals”: 9 Paul Gifford, “Religious Authority,” and Robert Segal, “Myth and Ritual,” in The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion, ed. John Hinnells (London: Routledge, 2010), 389–405 and 373, respectively.
I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’ … Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things.17

I also found that many educators from a range of beliefs were expressing their cultural concern that youth today are ignorant of these “initial dramatic resources”.18 Apart from a working knowledge of religious imagery and narratives, much in the study of art and literature remains opaque as a meaning-making resource for students.19 Public schools have, however, largely eradicated the study of Scriptures, despite their indelible imprint upon human history and the rise of universal education.20

Ignorance of Sacred Texts also signals a civic concern. Religious educators largely concur that the primary purpose for incorporating religions and their revelations in public education is social cohesion: finding unity amidst a fragmented multicultural and multi-faith diversity.21 Religious literacy is a pressing need in a globalised world characterised by multiple visions of the good life which compete in close proximity.22 Religious rhetoric is on the rise, where Scriptures are superficially referenced in supporting or challenging complex political positions surrounding terrorism, marriage, abortion, immigration, the environment, to name just some of the major issues facing us today.23 As Stephen Prothero points out, “Religion is now emerging alongside race, gender, and ethnicity as one of the key identity markers of the twenty-first century.”24

The study of Sacred Texts alone will not suffice. Ideally, this should be bolstered by a broad religious education. Nevertheless, Scriptures should not be overlooked as a potential component of contemporary education, integrated into existing subjects. As Jacque Berlinerblau, himself a secularist, explains, ignorance of Scriptures that shape the lives of people groups is “a looming public liability” for we live in a world where “Sacred Texts are not the irrelevant artefacts that nonbelievers once thought they would be.”25

18 Marie Wachlin and Byron Johnson, *Bible Literacy Report* (New York: Bible Literacy Project, 2005), 1-5.
24 Ibid., 3-5.
The educational import and curricular implications are significant. Even so, we are caught between resurgent religious conviction in the public sphere, and a secularist stranglehold on many institutions such as schools which frame religions and their revelations as a private predilection, inadmissible in public discourse. Practical theologians are called to the persuasive task of communicating across divided communities, seeking a way forward.

**Secularist Concerns over Religion in Schools**

Few issues cause more contention than the place of religion in schools. As R. Murray Thomas has documented, the controversy is global: headscarves in France; removal of Hindu Scriptures in Indian textbooks; attempts to include Intelligent Design in Science classes in America; addition of secularism to compulsory Religious Education in England; privileging Catholic Dogma in Spanish State Schools; dismantling Islamic madrassas in Pakistan. Examples multiply by the day. Australia is no exception.

Vocal opposition by secularists centres on State funding of private religious schools and the National Schools Chaplaincy Program, teaching of Creationism that contradicts neo-Darwinian theories in Science, and the provision of extra-curricular Special Religious Education (SRE) in State Schools. Objections to religion in public schools at the popular level assume a simple syllogism.

Major premise: Australian society and our public education system are secular.
Minor premise: Secular means this-worldly and non-religious.
Conclusion: Religion has no legitimate place within Australian public education.

Turning to academic critiques, similar concerns about the disintegration of Australian society as the result of poorly addressing the place of religion in public education have been expressed by many academic commentators, principally Marion Maddox and her protégé Cathy Byrne. The mantra of nineteenth-century Australian public education being “free, compulsory and

---

35 Cf. Marion Maddox, “The Church, the State and the Classroom,” *The University of New South Wales Law Journal* 34, iss. 1 (2011), 300-315; Cathy Byrne, “‘Jeesis Is Alive! He Is the King of Australia’,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 34, iss. 3 (2012), 317-331.
secular” has apparently been eroded beyond recognition, thereby undermining its purpose of contributing to the “common good”.36

According to many secularists, “secular” schools presuppose “secularism”, that being ideological opposition to the influence of religion on the public sphere.37 Religious citizens must leave their “private convictions” at the school gates, for they are both irrelevant to life together in the here and now, and inappropriate in the contemporary educational context.38 With good cause, they contest the legitimacy of confessional indoctrination. On the question of comparative General Religious Education (GRE) and incorporation of Sacred Texts across the curriculum, however, matters are not so clear. What happens when secularism collides with pluralism?39 Can secularism permit public expression of diverse metaphysical perspectives in State schools?

Secularists rightly deny privileged access to power by one religion over other religious and non-religious ideologies, and reject the absolutising of special received revelation such as the Bible. Simultaneously, however, most claim that secularism has no interest in “muzzling or devaluing the valuable contributions to public life made by many people motivated by religious belief,” whether in politics or education.40 Debating ideas is the “stuff” of engaging liberal learning.41 Consequently, beliefs derived from Sacred Texts should not be ruled inadmissible, provided students are prepared to dialogue respectfully with a range of viewpoints, defending and commending their positions in a dynamic rather than doctrinaire environment. Caution is warranted, however, for permitting religions in public education may be a “slippery slope” where dialogue precedes domination.42

As prominent secularist Max Wallace acknowledges, Australia does not officially have Church–State—let alone the more expansive and volatile religion–State—separation, either in its constitution or educational policy.43 He frames secularism as “a form of neutral government that listens to all points of view and tries to strike a balance between conflicting ideas.”44 This suggests an openness to transcendent perspectives in national curriculum development.45 Nonetheless, his ideology only acknowledges the exercise of “rational” public reason to the exclusion of faith-based

39 Ibid., 7.
41 Jane Caro, “The Culture Wars, Schools and Secularism,” in Realising Secularism, 94-100.
42 Muriel Fraser, “Introduction,” in Realising Secularism, 8, 15.
justifications.\textsuperscript{46} That is, religious people can express their views, provided they are premised upon “secular” arguments accessible to all.\textsuperscript{47} As contrasted with a truly liberal democracy, this secularist vision is neither inclusive of nor impartial toward diverse traditions, essentially enshrining secularism.\textsuperscript{48} As such, it remains unclear what place Wallace envisages for the use of any Scriptures in Australian public education.

Secularists are united in their opposition to State-funded dogmatic instruction that privileges any particular religion. However, secularists are divided as to whether “secular” means the inclusion or exclusion of supposedly transcendent revelation in pluralistic public education.\textsuperscript{49} The potential for incorporating Sacred Texts across the curriculum is dismissed as too difficult and dangerous, or it is ignored as a low priority in public education.\textsuperscript{50}

**Religious Literacy and Social Cohesion**

Thus far I have sketched a divergent argument for the inclusion of both religions and Scriptures in Australian public education. I have also suggested some of the barriers to such an endeavour. My interest extends beyond the Bible to the place of a diversity of Sacred Texts within the Australian Curriculum. These texts function as repositories of wisdom which shape through rich religious stories the “social imaginary” of a whole people group, whether operating explicitly or implicitly.\textsuperscript{51} As we crystallise these issues and move toward the focus of this present study, it is important to emphasise how pressing the need is for a workable solution. Understanding our neighbours and their deepest beliefs should be at a premium in a precarious pluralistic democracy.\textsuperscript{52}

Indeed, in this nation’s most comprehensive community consultation, it was recognised that “Australia exists in a very religious world” and is experiencing significant increases in religious diversity. Comprehensive religious education in State Schools is both a “critical need” and a key plank in any proposal to constructively harness Australia’s diversity and “reduce discrimination and


prejudice”.

Among heated debates and a plethora of opinions, the importance of educating all students in multiple worldviews toward developing “awareness, familiarity, and respect for difference” was among the few unequivocal findings for religious, spiritual and secular people alike. As such, there is much to be gained by stepping back from the controversy over religion in State schools for a broader perspective, bringing into dialogue educational, sociological and theological disciplinary insights to remedy widespread religious illiteracy among today’s youth.

What role, then, might Scriptures play in the educational process? To answer this question, we must consider the stated aims for Australia’s emerging curriculum.

The “End” of the Australian Curriculum
After a century of State directed curriculum, the Melbourne Declaration (MD) represents the first national vision to direct Australian education from 2008-2018. This statement recognises that “major changes in the world” have placed “new demands on Australian education”, necessitating global citizenship, Asia literacy, flexible skill development, integrated education and collaborative creativity. Australian education has nationalised, birthing ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) which is responsible for progressively translating federalised goals into guiding curriculum documents for implementation from 2011.

The telos, or “end” of Australian education boils down to two goals: “Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; [and] all young Australians [will] become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.” In pursuit of this goal, it is noteworthy that religion and spirituality are mentioned seven times as integral to this vision. This recognition accords with numerous international reports; the 9/11 terrorist attacks were arguably a defining event of this century, acting as a “wake up call” to take religion seriously at a global level. In Europe, this has spurred multi-million dollar projects like REDCo (Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict) that have delivered constructive models for comparative religious education wherein students in public schools learn about, and

---

54 Ibid., 58-59.
55 Prothero, Religious, 21-38.
56 MCEECDYA, Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians [hereafter MD] (Melbourne: MCEECDYA, 2008), 4.
58 Ibid., 7-9.
from, religions and their revelations. Religions literacy, understanding and respect—beyond mere tolerance of the persistence of religion in public life—are key factors for Australia as part of a globalised and pluralistic world toward social cohesion and discovering unity amidst multi-religious diversity.

There exists a superficial resonance between the function of sacred stories and MD’s purpose that students “make sense of their world” in “working toward the common good.” Thus, it is reasonable to expect that both religions and Scriptures would appear in the various “Shaping of the Australian Curriculum” documents downstream of this declaration. The majority of the world’s population presently acknowledge one or more Sacred Texts as transcendent wisdom and a live option for conceiving of our existence. As such, to exclude these sources from the Australian Curriculum would seem to fall short of the stated principles of fostering a “democratic, equitable and just society.”

Critiques of the curriculum thus far suggest that, despite the promising rhetoric, religion has been a marginal concern at best. Specific traditions barely warrant a place in ACARA’s accounting, and Scriptures secure an even smaller place therein. The founding Chair of ACARA, Professor Barry McGaw, acknowledged that “religion was not included in its framework,” never explicitly mentioned in the eleven learning areas, seven general capabilities, or three cross-curricular priorities comprised of Indigenous history and culture, Asian literacy, and sustainability.

How, then, has the religiously-interested telos of the MD been translated into the Australian Curriculum? The overriding “Shaping” document by ACARA only mentions “religion” twice, both times quoting MD. A concentrated study is required.

---

63 MD, 8-9, 13.
64 Cf. Smart and Hecht, Sacred Texts, xiv.
66 Personal email from ACARA consultant Cathy Byrne, June 7, 2012.
The question animating this thesis is, *What should be the place of Sacred Texts within Australian public middle-school education?* Set within the broader issue of religion in secular schools, I am seeking a mutually critical correlation between the vision of education implicit in the Australian Curriculum and a Christian theology of education. In so doing, I am arguing in principle for the appropriate incorporation of Sacred Texts within Australian public education for Year 7 to 10 students.

This thesis is divided into three parts, aligned with Gerben Heitink’s action model of practical theology.69 This meta-structure comports with a five movement model adapted from the method of Richard Osmer, though with the addition of a correlative task to make explicit the dialogue between experience and theological insight. That is, this public theology thesis will follow five movements that collectively seek to discern what actually is, and what should be, the place of Sacred Texts within the emerging Australian Curriculum.70

In Part I, I seek to explain the situation, that being the place of Scriptures within ACARA’s translation of MD into the Australian Curriculum. In the descriptive-empirical movement (Chapter 3) I undertake a qualitative study centred on History and Civics and Citizenship as two subjects where Scriptures are most likely to appear. By analysing these *Shaping* documents, I demonstrate that religions and Sacred Texts are conspicuously absent from ACARA’s curriculum philosophy and prescribed content. In the interpretive movement (Chapter 4) I employ sociological insights to suggest that the narrative underlying the classic secularisation thesis has influenced the marginalisation of religious revelation in ACARA’s practice of curriculum writing.

In Part II, I seek to understand the situation through a mutually critical correlation of disciplined secular and theological perspectives. In the normative movement (Chapter 5) I consider what place Sacred Texts should occupy in a Christian theological vision of education for all people, not simply Jews or Christians. That is, I have applied a narrative approach to the biblical canon as implicitly revealing “God’s Curriculum” for humanity, discerned through key episodes in the story that speak to the *telos* of education as a whole. Centred on *shalom*, I argue that this vision yields a non-totalising rationale for the incorporation of diverse Scriptures in Australian public middle-school education. In the correlative movement (Chapter 6), I pursue a multi-disciplinary dialogue between educational, sociological and theological perspectives to discern the common ground beyond the current impasse of secularists wishing to exclude all religion from public education, and sacralists seeking to enshrine their particular dogma. I contend that Sacred Texts can serve the

---

common good in Australian public education by taking an immanent turn toward this world as part of a truly secular education, offering different angles on humanity’s *sumnum bonum* alongside practical wisdom for pluralistic communities in constructively dealing with everyday concerns.

Finally, in Part III, I seek to change the situation with renewed practice as part of a school-based syllabus. In the pragmatic movement (Chapter 7), I construct an overarching pedagogical model that is open to transcendent perspectives, demonstrating how Sacred Texts may be appropriately incorporated to enrich specific units of study in both History and Civics and Citizenship for middle-school students. In Chapter 8, I summarise the project and suggest to ACARA a path toward implementation whereby diverse Scriptures may play a curriculum role commensurate with their global influence, illuminating our shared secular existence.

**Contributions of the Thesis**

Aligning with the overlapping publics of practical theology, this thesis makes contributions to society, church, and the academy.71

First, this thesis contributes to society, particularly curriculum writers, by charting a way forward in a fragmented world. *MD* desires to form students who work together for the common good. This necessitates an inclusive process to discover common ground that gives voice to competing perspectives. As cultural diversity increases and visions of our *sumnum bonum* multiply, Australian public education will need the support of traditions whose formative narrative extends beyond individual happiness to the transcendent, embracing the flourishing of all.72 In a pluralistic democracy, religious and non-religious conceptions of the human *telos* warrant a place at the table.73 This thesis offers solutions for State schools that bridge the sacred–secular divide.74

Second, this thesis contributes to the church. Facing a profusion of cultures, beliefs and ways of life, Christians are tempted to privilege their authoritative sources and hijack education as a vehicle for inculcating their particular faith. Simultaneously, there is a tendency to withdraw from public education and redirect students and energy into private institutions where they possess a greater measure of influence. Both trends arguably inflame cross-cultural tensions and threaten efforts at establishing cross-curricular religious literacy.75 Evangelical churches and organisations,

---

in particular, are pivotal in either blocking or facilitating proposals that would enable the majority of impressionable youth to engage, understand, and respect the religious Other.76 This thesis challenges triumphalism and insularity. It constructs a legitimate and biblically inspired theological rationale for supporting central ACARA values and incorporating not only the Bible, but also other major Sacred Texts, into the curriculum. It reminds the church of its call to serve collective flourishing. In so doing, we move one step closer to brokering an appropriate place for religions and Scriptures in public education that helps a cosmopolitan society prosper.77

Third, this thesis contributes to the academy, particularly the discipline of practical theology. While thankful to Schleiermacher for establishing this discipline, many scholars note that he bequeathed a silo mentality that privileged clerical and ecclesial paradigms, resulting in Christian-centrism.78 Consequently, “it is of urgent importance that practical theologians provide more input into scholarly engagement with religious pluralism.”79 A globalising world requires us to move beyond restrictive and increasingly redundant categories that compartmentalise church and society, to see God at work through practices outside Christian communities.80 Therefore, my attention to macro-level social policy and methodology, centred on the study of ACARA’s curriculum writing in advocating for a diversity of Sacred Texts, is timely.

Limitations
To manage the scope of this project, two limitations are necessary. First, I am restricting my attention to ACARA’s overarching Shaping documents and the content of History and Civics and Citizenship for Year 7 to 10 students only. My initial analysis included all eleven subjects, with a concentrated mutually critical correlation in English, Science and Geography resulting in modified practices and curricular recommendations. As such, I contend that the findings of this present study are applicable to ACARA’s curriculum writing as a whole.81

Second, I am presupposing the importance of Sacred Texts for the life of religious communities and to understand diverse cultures.82 Ignorance of purportedly authoritative revelation

77 Cf. Thomas, Religion, 55-68.
and the reduction of the transcendent to an individualised source of support for one's immanent spiritual quest is, however, commonplace, among even devout adolescents. Furthermore, the use of Scriptures in liberal schools raises questions of the truth of metaphysical claims. Whether and in what sense these stories are trustworthy is debatable; that for many they function as “true” and thus influence public behaviour is widely accepted and therefore assumed. Such a realisation circumvents the need for a foundationalist grounding of religious beliefs by adopting a “taking-as-true” epistemology. Both sets of questions are thereby bracketed, instead emphasising the civic benefits of incorporating Sacred Texts in public education.

---


Chapter 2
Methodology

This thesis is a literary-philosophical research project that conforms to a public practical theology paradigm of mutual critical correlation. In this chapter I will characterize this perspective and outline the “five movement” method this project follows. Finally, I will seek to resolve a methodological tension inherent in this project.

A. A PRACTICAL AND PUBLIC THEOLOGY METHODOLOGY

Theology has traditionally been understood in the Anselmian sense as “faith seeking understanding”.85 In this paradigm, God discloses God’s self in divine revelation; humans, then, seek to understand this revelation and put it into practice.86 Schleiermacher conceived of theology as like a tree: fundamental philosophical reflections (roots) pass life-giving sap through systematic and historical theology (trunk) to be applied in practical theology (branches and fruit). Beyond the traditional frame, however, he argued that intelligent practice requires an intentional dialogue between a theological and a “scientific spirit” at the intersection of church and world.87 This hermeneutic effectively marked the birth of practical theology as a discipline.

At its most basic, “practical theology [is] a study which is concerned with questions of truth in relation to action.”88 British practical theologian Stephen Pattison describes his primary task as “correlating experience with theological insight” built on the premise that “theology cannot supply all the knowledge and insight it needs if it is to fully engage with reality. Thus it is necessary to be interdisciplinary and dialogical in investigation.”89

Practical theology, then, is concerned with faithful practice. Using Aristotle’s categories, we are not simply interested in “What is the nature of things?” (theoria, or scientific reason), or “What are the most effective means to a given end?” (technē, or technical reason). Rather, both contribute toward practical reason, answering “What should we do? and How should we live?”90 Practical

86 Tracy, Analogical, 51.
87 Friedrich Schleiermacher, Brief Outline of the Study of Theology (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1850), 187, also 37, 103.
88 Forrester, Truthful Action, 22.
wisdom, or *phronēsis*, translates into reflective action, or *praxis*, whereby practical theology is faith seeking truthful action.⁹¹

Since Schleiermacher’s time, the organic connection between theory and practice has been recognised. The branches and leaves replenish the roots in pursuit of more informed actions as co-workers in the mission of God.⁹² The problem of top-down, one-way approaches has largely disappeared, with most models recognising that we must begin with the concrete and local situation.⁹³ Don Browning, in particular, has helped practical theology evolve from the linear application of theory to practice, to a bi-directional movement “from present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of more critically held theory-laden practices.”⁹⁴ Broadly described and adopted for my purposes, practical theology is “critical reflection on the church’s dialogue with Christian sources and other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social and individual transformation.”⁹⁵ The goal of this theological reflection is not merely private or ecclesial edification. Rather, it is a truly public theology that “address[es] issues of general public concern, in a genuinely public arena, in a publicly accessible way, using publicly comprehensible concepts and mechanisms. This with a view to effecting some kind of transformation of public views, policies and actions.”⁹⁶

**Public Theology and Mutually Critical Correlation**

David Tracy has long argued that genuinely theocentric representations of reality are inescapably public, as God by definition is the foundation and *telos* of all being.⁹⁷ Furthermore, Tracy identified the primary public of practical theology—beyond the academy and church—as wider society, including within its scope social policy such as public school curriculum.⁹⁸ Consequently, this discipline is ideal to explore cultural situations possessing religious dimensions where there is conflict, such as ACARA’s apparent neglect of Sacred Texts even as they aim at helping students make sense of life. This situation invites a theological response.⁹⁹

---

⁹⁶ Pattison, *Challenge*, 212.
⁹⁹ Ibid., 57-61.
The public agenda of practical theology was given great impetus at the first International Academy of Practical Theology gathering after the 9/11 Twin Towers attack. Attention is often centred on politics. Educational curriculum, however, is a relatively unexplored field. The study of Sacred Texts in State schools is especially important at a time when public–private and secular–religious dichotomies are being dismantled. Public theologians are tasked with speaking to matters of widespread concern from their traditioned perspective. Simultaneously, their communication must be “bilingual” and accessible for diverse decision makers, dialogical in nature, modest in rhetoric, and transparent in motive. As prophetic advocates seeking the welfare of all people, public theologians in a post-Christendom context need to eschew privilege; instead, they must discern and contribute to the common good, humbly offering this gift to a pluralistic public domain.

Practical theology typically focuses on Christian practices. Nevertheless, as globalisation continues to blur boundaries, increase interdependence, and challenge fixed self-definitions, theologians such as John Reader suggest that our inherited paradigms are outdated. “Zombie categories”—such as dualistic distinctions of church–world and clergy–laity—must be replaced by fluid approaches that are open to the insights of other disciplines and recognise the practice of God in individuals and institutions beyond the ecclesia. Christians were involved in the initial formation of public education, and despite the abandonment of an explicitly transcendent orientation in education’s telos, from a biblical perspective God is yet at work in this institution. As such, it is warranted that my thesis bypass exclusively Christian education to consider the overriding purposes of public education, beginning with the study of ACARA’s curricular practices. This, in turn, requires a receptivity to secular visions of and for State schools.

We must not minimise the tension between secular and religious perspectives in this process. We need to be critical of any model that has the cultural “situation” pose the questions and the theological “message” provide the answers. Thus, Tracy commends a revisionist model entailing a mutually critical correlation that takes seriously “the dramatic confrontation, the mutual illuminations and corrections, the possible basic reconciliation” between “two basic phenomena: the

---

100 Cf. Duncan Forrester, “Theological and Secular Discourse in an Age of Terror,” in Pathways to the Public Square, ed. Elaine Graham and Anna Rowlands (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005), 31-40.
101 Graham, Between, 69.
104 Forrester, Truthful, 8, 149.
105 Browning, Fundamental, 57.
106 Cf. Ibid., 44-46; Tracy, Blessed, 45-46.
Christian tradition and contemporary understandings of human existence.”

Answers and questions from both sides must be brought into dialogue. Placed within Poling and Miller’s typology, my project represents a fully public theology as “a critical correlation of the Christian tradition and contemporary philosophy and science in its concern for the formation of society.”

In short, I will bring educational and sociological perspectives into dialogue with the biblical narrative in seeking to discern what place should be given to Sacred Texts within the Australian Curriculum, developing a robust rationale for such a proposal. Furthermore, out of this mutually critical dialogue, I will suggest to ACARA a revised practice that finds common ground for the incorporation of diverse Scriptures in Australian public education, toward the common good of a cosmopolitan society.

**B. FIVE MOVEMENT METHOD**

There is no shortage of schemes for conceptualising the practical theological process. The triple concern for interrelating social reality, faith traditions and practice has developed from simple three-movement models of “see–judge–act” to the four-movement “pastoral cycle”. This involves experience of the concrete practice in a local context, exploration of the situation through insights from secular and religious critical perspectives, reflection upon these insights through a correlative process seeking guides for action, and finally action as practitioners implement new practices, initiating another progressive cycle.

Poling and Miller further elaborate with a six-step process that factors in prayer and communal discernment. Irrespective of the number of steps, every model shares a concern for describing and explaining a practical situation, understanding the situation through a critical dialogue between secular and theological perspectives, and finally changing the situation with renewed praxis.

That is, the process of theological reflection I employ must serve to describe and explain the place of Sacred Texts within ACARA’s translation of MD into the Australian Curriculum. It must foster understanding of the situation through a critical conversation between educational, sociological and theological points of view. Finally, it must facilitate a change of the situation via action plans that benefit wider society through appropriately

---


109 See James Poling and Donald Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 36, also 42-46 elaborating on Type IIA.


112 In Heitink’s meta-model, he labels these the **empirical**, **hermeneutic** and **strategic perspectives**, respectively. See his *Practical Theology*, 165, also 6, 102-103, 164-166, 228-235.
incorporating Sacred Texts within Australian public middle-school education. For this, I have adapted Richard Osmer’s four-task scheme into the “five movement” model depicted below.\textsuperscript{113}

**Figure 1: Five Movement Model of Practical Theological Reflection**

This approach is not new, reflecting Browning’s strategic questions that underlie practical theological thinking.\textsuperscript{114} Osmer’s scheme is, however, more accessible. While Osmer’s model is designed for congregational leadership within the church,\textsuperscript{115} his framing displays a winsome spirituality for engaging the public sphere: priestly listening, sagely wisdom, prophetic discernment, and servant leadership.\textsuperscript{116} My approach is distinct from Osmer’s in the addition of a correlative task that seeks to answer, Where is the common ground? This facilitates an explicitly cross-disciplinary dialogue as the last step before the pragmatic task, generating guidelines for action.

While practical theological method is ideally multidirectional, the structure of this thesis will largely flow through the five movements in order, progressing from description and explanation to understanding and action.\textsuperscript{117} That said, the five way arrow indicates the interrelationship between each task, and my intention to cycle backwards and forwards toward reformed interpretation in a hermeneutic spiral.\textsuperscript{118} Within the confines of a dissertation, time does

\begin{itemize}
  \item Osmer, *Practical*, 4, 10-14, 28-29.
  \item Ibid., viii-x. Cf. Browning, *Fundamental*, 55-56.
  \item Osmer, *Practical*, 25. This is counterbalanced by a stress on societal transformation (ix-x).
  \item Ibid., 27-28.
  \item Kathleen Cahalan and James Nieman, “Mapping the Field of Practical Theology,” in *For Life Abundant*, ed. Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 84-85.
  \item Forrester *Truthful*, 28-31. I have fused Osmer’s various “spiritualities” (e.g. Priestly Listening) with Ray Anderson’s emphasis on Christopraxis in *The Shape of Practical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 7, 29-31, 47-60. The practical theologian is free to follow whichever of Jesus’ actions best serves shalom
\end{itemize}
not permit a subsequent spiral, though in Chapter 8 I suggest further research that may emerge from this project. In what follows, I briefly outline the method depicted above, before addressing a methodological issue inherent in this project. This practical theology thesis follows five movements that collectively seek to discern what really is, and what should be, the place of Sacred Texts within the emerging Australian Curriculum.

The Descriptive-Empirical Movement: What Is Going On?

First, the descriptive-empirical movement (Chapter 3) involves “gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts.” It is characterised by a spirituality of priestly listening that seeks to answer the question, What is going on? In this movement, I consider the episode of ACARA forming Shaping documents that translate the educational philosophy contained in MD (2008) into the Australian Curriculum (2009-2014). This episode is part of the ongoing situation whereby Australia’s educational curriculum is being federalised. In turn, the episode and situation must be analysed within the context of debates over the place of religion in public education.

Although this is primarily a literary-philosophical thesis, I begin with a detailed study of the emerging curriculum to ascertain what place, if any, is given to the study of Sacred Texts. For this, I employ the qualitative-textual approach of content analysis, moving beyond numerical data to capture the richness and polyvalence of ACARA’s curriculum writing practice. This involves analysing the various Shaping documents, recording and describing explicit references to Sacred Texts (whether as a category, for instance “Scripture”, “Revelation”, or by particular title such as the Qur’an and the Bible) and religion (e.g. “faiths”, “belief systems”, “Buddhism”, “Hinduism”). I repeat this process, recording implicit links to Sacred Texts and religions that naturally call for the consideration of Scriptures. This thesis delves into Year 7 to 10 classroom level content associated with History and Civics and Citizenship as two subjects wherein religion is most likely to appear. A complete analysis of the middle-school curriculum, conducted in preparation for this dissertation, further grounds subsequent interpretations.

In this movement, I study the practice of ACARA’s curriculum writing, being a “patterned activity—not random or haphazard, but with an inner or outer coherence. It is a structure of

(holistic flourishing) in that particular moment within the “five movements”, not constrained by the overall linearity of the process.

119 Osmer, Practical, 4. Each of the following movement descriptors in quotations is on page 4.
120 Cf. Ibid., 12.
behaviour.”123 In line with an expansive understanding of practice as articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre, Dorothy Bass, and Hans Schilderman, ACARA’s curriculum writing may be categorised as a macro-level societal action that is aimed at the telos supplied by MD.124 Following Hanan Alexander’s educational epistemology, empirical and constructivist methodologies may be complementary rather than in ideological opposition when one recognises the underlying norms, narratives and traditions which supply the data with meaning and enable judgment of complex abilities.125 As such, I pursue a thick description of ACARA’s curriculum writing practice, beginning with their explicit process of curriculum design and concrete practices and tendencies,126 progressively constructing a descriptive theology which elucidates their vision for and story of Sacred Texts in secular education.127

The Interpretive Movement: Why Is This Going On?

Second, the interpretive movement (Chapter 4) involves “drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring.” It is characterised by a spirituality of sagely wisdom that seeks to answer, Why is this going on? I consider religiously-interested notions of education as “secular” from a sociological perspective through the lens of privatisation of belief as part of a general narrative of secularisation.128 These presuppositions elucidate ACARA’s treatment of Scriptures.

Supporting this exploration, I adopt the method of social policy, that being “the study of systems and social relations upon which human well-being and human flourishing depend.”129 At most, a practical theologian may contribute one piece of the puzzle when interpreting highly integrated and complex systems. Nonetheless, social policy facilitates an interdisciplinary “magpie analysis” that “raid[s] the social sciences for whatever ideas are actually useful in order to explore the problems associated with policy-making.”130

123 Forrester, Truthful, 3.
128 Browning, Fundamental, ix, 7, 48-49, 77-80.
130 Ibid, 153-156.
The Normative Movement: What Ought to Be Going On?

Third, the normative movement (Chapter 5) involves “using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses.” It is characterised by a spirituality of prophetic discernment that seeks to answer, What ought to be going on? Though story involves many dimensions, my central focus will be upon the Bible’s narrative structure: that is, the plot. This includes elements such as sender, agent, task, object, receiver, antagonist and helper, arranged in a time-sequence.131 This approach illumines key movements, driven by tension and resolution toward the telos of shalom. This epic story is divided by pivotal moments into discrete acts or chapters. Within this structure we may organically abstract both a biblical theology of education (“God’s Curriculum”), and the role of Sacred Texts.

Most theologians contend that the categories employed in Systematics are largely abstracted from the underlying story in the Bible.132 Though it is not particularly controversial to construe this book of books as “a single comprehensive narrative”, this canon lacks its own systematisation.133 Any scheme imposes an order upon the text, even as it may be justifiable in light of the whole and useful in understanding our situation.134 Thus, we must acknowledge that there are many ways to tell the biblical story.

My account should be recognisable to diverse communities as “speaking Christianly” about education within a generous orthodoxy.135 Nevertheless, and without arguing for the superiority of any particular reading, my narration emerges from within evangelicalism, characterised by the priorities of conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.136 This perspective is taken because it is authentic to my experience, it is relevant to the viability of comparative GRE in schools (with evangelicals constituting a growing and influential demographic that can facilitate or hinder Scriptures in schools137), and because any articulation of why Christians should engage Sacred Texts must be intrinsic to their particular reading of the Bible for this demographic to consider supporting such a proposal.

For these purposes, my reading closely aligns with the work of N. T. Wright as a narrative theologian bridging evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox and liberal interpretations. I have adopted Wright’s “Six-Act” hermeneutic of Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, and the New Creation. Though the “narrative turn” was carried by postliberals, it has since gained acceptance among evangelicals. Thus, my method of forming a narrative theology of education and Sacred Texts should resonate with theologians and diverse Christians alike.

The Correlative Movement: Where Is the Common Ground?

Fourth, the correlative movement (Chapter 6) involves an explicitly cross-disciplinary exchange of ideas between contemporary understandings and the Christian tradition via comparing and contrasting thick practices and theory. It is characterised by a spirituality of therapeutic mediation that seeks to answer, Where is the common ground? In particular, I will engage in a multi-disciplinary dialogue between cultural interpretations (both educational and sociological) and theological perspectives (a biblical account of education’s telos and the role of Sacred Texts toward this end) to determine if there is common ground for the incorporation of Scriptures into the Australian Curriculum.

Following Thomas Groome, I employ a dialectical-critical hermeneutic to bring these three sources into conversation. That is, having fairly recounted each perspective, they are correlated in three movements:

There is an activity of discerning its truth and what is to be affirmed in it [compare], an activity of discerning the limitations in our understanding of it that are to be refused [contrast], and an attempt to move beyond it, carrying forward the truth that was there while adding to it in the new understanding [synergy].

Thus, we move from comparing and contrasting to creating a fusion of horizons in which we transcend the current impasse with faithful practice where Scriptures find a fitting place at the curriculum table. Only then can guides be prescribed that should result in transformative action toward a common good.

All criteria for judging competing interpretations unavoidably emerge from within respective worldviews. Nevertheless, we cannot avoid the pragmatic necessity of bringing our

---

religious beliefs into dialogue with cultural experience. Subsequent interaction and analysis is not sufficient to prove that a particular paradigm or construal entirely corresponds with reality. It is, however, enough to seek new metaphors for improved praxis that more adequately furnish coherent solutions to intractable problems, explain the limitations of former paradigms, and account more completely for all the data and experiences at hand. Consequently, discerning “common ground” is an ongoing project rather than a presupposition.

The Pragmatic Movement: How Might We Respond?
Fifth, the pragmatic movement (Chapter 7) involves “determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation.” It is characterised by a spirituality of servant leadership that seeks to answer, How might we respond? In this stage, I will work from common ground and guides for action, established in the correlative movement, to create new practices exemplifying how Scriptures can be appropriately incorporated into Australian public education for Year 7 to 10 students.

Borrowing from Jürgen Habermas’s theory of communicative action, Heitink highlights the importance of finding commonality among key actors. In the context of negotiation and coordinated action, “one must accept three validity claims: that the alleged facts are true, that the norms are correct and fair, and that the feelings are genuine. The actors want truth, fairness, and genuineness. They must reach a preliminary consensus on this.” When such agreement is found, “communicative action” is likely as it is built upon democratic negotiations. When, however, no agreement can be found—or consensus is reached by excluding powerless parties from the dialogue—then the more powerful actors typically direct “strategic action, using mere power to exert influence.”

This theory will interrogate any proposals I generate by raising important questions. Does my plan of action give a genuine voice to all actors without unfairly privileging any particular perspective? That is, beyond the concerns of secularists and Christians, does my curriculum proposal fairly represent and invite into the conversation religious minorities? As key actors in the process, do ACARA’s curriculum writers and evangelical churches perceive as true the fact that ours is a pluralistic society where religion has not drifted off into the private sphere as predicted by the secularisation thesis? Would both parties perceive my proposal as correct and fair, adopting the

---

146 Heitink, Practical, 135; emphasis mine.
147 Ibid., also 126, 132-140.
norm that students should receive a liberal education to understand their neighbour’s deepest beliefs, drawing on wisdom from Sacred Texts as we work together for holistic flourishing? Is there a genuine feeling of reciprocity that it is desirable to incorporate the study of Sacred Texts within Australian public education? Without this commonality, ACARA may pursue strategic (non-democratic) action in a secular direction, compartmentalising religion and marginalising Scriptures to the periphery of curriculum concerns. With this commonality, however, communicative action may result in transformative praxis whereby religion and Sacred Texts play a curriculum role commensurate with their global influence.

Note, however, that as a theologian with no direct links to ACARA, I lack the power and position to implement these recommendations. One may thus ask whether this thesis truly serves liberative praxis that progresses from rhetoric to action.148 Perhaps, however, this lack of power is appropriate. Heitink notes that practical theology addresses three action domains: the individual, the church, and the society.149 While theologians have leverage to enact change in the first two domains, “public Christianity” at the macro-level must be “diaconal”. That is, in the public sector, diaconia describes the vocation of the church to act as humble and altruistic servants (diakonoi) who follow Christ in emptying themselves of power (kenosis) out of love for the Other.150 Thus, my strategising for transformative action may well be carried by individuals who write the curriculum and work within these organisations, making modest changes from below rather than offering dictates from above.151 Any change will be the result of faithful presence and cultural persistence in altruistic service, built on listening to the Other and cooperative endeavours that serve the common good.152

Following Jesus’ example of servant-leadership, my goals concerning ACARA are few: I seek fresh vision for a way forward that shapes the imagination of a culture out of which policy is formed, offering prophetic challenge to current practices that silence transcendent perspectives. I intend to persuade ACARA that my model enriches their secular aims in a pluralistic context. Through sharing theological fragments in public discussion, drawn from the quarry of Scripture critically correlated with experience, I hope to offer slivers of light as “glimpses into another world” which “generate a vision that many can share.”153

In summary, my thesis conforms to a public practical theology paradigm concerned with wider society beyond the church and academy, carried forward in five movements of a hermeneutic

151 Heitink, Practical, 242, 294-297.
153 See Forrester, Truthful, 143-157.
spiral: descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, correlative, and pragmatic. I will bring sociological and educational perspectives into conversation with a suitably ecumenical interpretation of the biblical narrative, discerning what place, if any, should be given to Sacred Texts within the Australian Curriculum. Out of this mutually critical dialogue, I will suggest a revised praxis that finds common ground for the incorporation of Sacred Texts in Australian public middle-school education, toward the common good of a pluralistic society. The methodological foundation underpinning this thesis is now laid. It remains to resolve a tension central to this public theology proposal, in that I am fusing a narrative theology with a correlational frame.

C. METHODOLOGICAL TENSION

Since the narrative turn beginning in the early twentieth century, it has been widely recognised that “story” is a primary category, both in making sense of our human experience, and engaging the Christian Scriptures.\(^{154}\) With Hans Frei, most theologians acknowledge that the rise of the historical-critical method and an apologetic concern to find common ground with those outside the Christian community have to varying degrees obscured the actual message of the Bible—a message which is inextricable from the realistic narrative in which it is set.\(^{155}\) Critical interpretation is unavoidable, for there is no “neutral” reading. Nevertheless, some lean toward preserving Scripture’s unique voice independent of cultural insight.\(^{156}\) Others prefer to emphasise and incorporate into their theological reflection the challenges of “historical, philosophical, and social scientific research”,\(^{157}\) embracing the “risk-ridden response of participatory and critical interpretations of both situation and event.”\(^{158}\)

Of importance to my project, there is a longstanding tension between postliberal schools of thought tracing back to Barth, and correlational schools of thought tracing back to Schleiermacher.\(^{159}\) As such, it must be demonstrated methodologically that I can coherently employ a correlational frame for the thesis as a whole (following Paul Tillich, David Tracy, Don Browning and Richard Osmer), while centring the normative phase on a narrative reading of Scripture (following Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, Stanley Hauerwas and N. T. Wright). At their worst,


\(^{156}\) Ibid., 3, 130-135.

\(^{157}\) Tracy, *Blessed*, 32, also 15n7, 22, 32-33, 48, 63.

\(^{158}\) Tracy, *Analogical*, 375.

narrativists tend toward insularity by ignoring non-theological voices, and correlationists tend
toward distortion as they repackage revelation in non-theological categories. Nevertheless, at their
best, both camps are concerned with faithfully representing the biblical story, and bringing this
story to bear on the world God loves, in a meaningful way that engages all people regardless of
their beliefs. As such, a fruitful tension is being sought by theologians downstream of Barth and
Schleiermacher that acknowledges the concerns and preserves the strengths of each perspective.

Both Don Browning and Duncan Forrester have suggested models of practical theology that
centre on the “narrative envelope” that animates all actions, recognising the biblical story and
communities of interpretation as primary, even while taking the risk of comparing competing
cultural-linguistic interpretations of the world. Indeed, as Lesslie Newbigin argues, the more
deeply Christians immerge themselves in the Scriptures, the more they are thrust out to engage
society with public news (kerygma) believed to offer hope for the whole world. Similarly, Elaine
Graham’s groundbreaking work on public theology critically fuses the emphasis of conservatives,
postliberals and proponents of radical orthodoxy on faithfulness and “authenticity”, with the
emphasis by liberals and correlationists on reason and “participation”. The bridge is found in the
underlying narrative and symbolic structure of the Scriptures and human interpretations of
experience alike, facilitating a meaningful dialogue as we make sense of the world within different
paradigms. The path forward is for the public theologian to adopt the posture of an imaginative
apologist, telling stories emerging from one’s deepest commitments that resonate with and may
persuade a pluralistic populace concerning the “conditions for human flourishing”.

This integration of narrative and transformative models of theological reflection within a
frame of mutual critical correlation is coherently employed by Thomas Groome in pedagogy and
Donald Capps in pastoral theology, moving freely between biblical story and cultural
engagement. It remains to be employed in curriculum writing, centred on public education.
Methodologically, then, it is warranted to develop a narrative theology in the normative movement
which may be fruitfully correlated with the latent narrative underlying ACARA’s translation of MD
into the Australian Curriculum. Through this dialogue, moving from contrast to constructive

---

160 Cf. Karl Barth, “Faith as Confession,” in his *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 2001), Ch. 4, where he
exhorts translation of the Word of God into today’s vernacular for Mr. Everyman to engage.

161 See Stephen Stell, “ Hermeneutics in Theology and the Theology of Hermeneutics: Beyond Lindbeck and


164 Graham, *Between*, 220-225, also 97-104, 106-139.


comparison, we may discover truly common ground for the common good, facilitated by the incorporation of Sacred Texts in Australian public education.
PART I

EXPLAINING CURRICULUM: SCRIPTURES IN SECULAR EDUCATION

“But if you know about God, why don’t you tell them?” asked the Savage indignantly.

“Why don’t you give them these books about God?”
—“For the same reason as we don’t give them Othello: they’re old; they’re about God hundreds of years ago. Not about God now.”

“But God doesn’t change.”
—“Men do, though.”

“What difference does that make?”
—“All the difference in the world,” said Mustapha Mond.

Aldous Huxley, Brave New World, 1946
Chapter 3

The Place of Sacred Texts within the Australian Curriculum

In this chapter, comprising the descriptive-empirical movement, we seek to explain the place of Sacred Texts within ACARA’s translation of the Melbourne Declaration (MD) into the Australian Curriculum. Are Scriptures included, ignored, or undermined? Across the subjects of History and Civics and Citizenship—where religion is most likely to feature—intersecting with seven general capabilities and three cross-curriculum priorities, what explicit and implicit references are there to religions and their revelations? The primary content for data analysis will be the overriding philosophy and aims of education outlined in the Shape of the Australian Curriculum (SAC) documents. This is further elucidated by content descriptors and elaborators within the scope and sequence of the Australian Curriculum proper (AC). Building upon more comprehensive analysis of the remaining nine subjects elsewhere, I contend that the treatment of religious themes and Sacred Texts is problematic throughout ACARA’s offerings. 168

First, however, we must unpack the importance of curriculum vision within educational philosophy. 169 The most significant educational disagreements, such as the place of religions in education, often trace back to one’s perspective of what education is for. 170 The telos for ACARA’s documents must therefore be understood within a wider conceptual framework of curriculum types.

A. WHY TELOS MATTERS

Without a clearly defined purpose one cannot distinguish the important from the unimportant, separating what should be included in, or excluded from, the curriculum. As Postman argues, this requires educators to move beyond the question of means (the how of “mechanics”) to address ends (the why of “metaphysics”)—from “how to make a living” to “how to make a life.” 171 Education requires a larger story centred on “a transcendent and honorable purpose” that is capable of capturing the heart and mind of students and orienting them in the world: “Without a narrative, life has no meaning. Without meaning, learning has no purpose. Without a purpose, schools are houses of detention, not attention.” 172 Indeed, without a sense of who we are (anthropology) and where

---

we’re going (telos), educational aims become arbitrary.\textsuperscript{173} This need for clarity is, however, complicated in this “postmodern moment”.\textsuperscript{174}

**The Postmodern Turn**

There has always been a diversity of curriculum visions simultaneously shaping the educational landscape. What is relatively new, however, is a growing “incredulity towards metanarratives.”\textsuperscript{175} Any big story, religious or secular, claiming to offer a singular account of our collective past, present and future is deconstructed as a power-play. Kennedy reminded educationalists in 2009, while ACARA was writing its first documents, that “the school curriculum is a cultural construction …. The debates are not merely academic—they are debates about a nation’s soul. About its values. About its beliefs.”\textsuperscript{176} Thus, we must be alert not only to what the curriculum includes, but also to the equally significant student learning as a result of what the curriculum excludes, forming the “null curriculum”.\textsuperscript{177} It is illiberal for any one perspective to dominate this discussion. If public funding demands that public education serve the public—that is, common—good, then competing voices should be fairly represented, having some say in what the curriculum delivers.\textsuperscript{178}

Growing plurality has necessitated a shift in curriculum models from emphasising subject matter and objectives, to a focus on process, development and dialogue with diverse and previously marginalised voices.\textsuperscript{179} This requires a kind of “curriculum wisdom … denoting a soulful and holistic practical artistry directed toward personal and social goods” within a democratically liberating educational system.\textsuperscript{180} Our vision of the good life is intertwined with our curriculum vision for education as a whole, and the aims of teaching specific subjects therein. In turn, this warrants a mutually critical conversation with wisdom traditions and their particular stories of the world in Sacred Texts.\textsuperscript{181}


\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 4-6; Henry Giroux, *Border Crossings* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 202-203.
B. ACARA’S CURRICULUM STORY

Defining Curriculum

What, then, is ACARA’s curriculum vision? How have they sought to bring together competing perspectives in a coherent story that responds wisely in this postmodern moment? Before we proceed, we must tighten our terminology. Significantly, ACARA has offered no definition for, or unifying vision of, curriculum as a practice in any document.182 Given ACARA’s brief to circumscribe education for the 21st century, curriculum is understandably equated with content—“what teachers are expected to teach and students are expected to learn,” expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions.183 Nevertheless, a broader definition of curriculum must include “all those discursive practices which affect what and how students learn, and what and how teachers teach.”184 Specifically, my interest is the purpose of ACARA’s formal curriculum for Year 7 to 10 students.185

We may also understand curriculum through the motif of narrative.186 In Madelaine Grumet’s influential reformulation, curriculum is “the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present, and our future.”187 Furthermore, curriculum is a story educationalists see themselves within, thereby guiding their practice of curriculum writing. As such, we can plot ACARA’s tale relative to other educational accounts. This has implications for the role of Scriptures in public education.

Curriculum Narratives

There are many ways to categorise curriculum.188 Schiro’s meta-model, comprised of four archetypes, is particularly helpful.189 Proponents for each ideology claim to possess the master plan for education, often unaware of their contested presuppositions.190 At the risk of oversimplifying

184 Alan Reid and Bruce Johnson, “Introduction,” in Contesting the Curriculum, ed. Bruce Johnson and Alan Reid (Katoomba, NSW: Social Science Press, 1999), ix.
185 Ibid., 11-13.
190 Ibid., 1-2, 8-9.
Schiro’s scheme, I shall reframe each ideology as a narrative of tension and resolution, where curriculum is aimed at a particular telos.

According to Scholar Academics (SA), education is for the extension of academic disciplines, via the transfer of knowledge.\(^{191}\) This knowledge is organised into subjects such as History and Mathematics, aligned with the Academy. By apprenticing, or discipling, students into defined ways of knowing, driven by critical thinking, the curriculum serves to build our collective information base and thereby benefit society with the insights and mastery gained. This is a story of ignorance resolved by enlightened minds, culminating in intellectual progress. The SA account is not necessarily opposed to religion, seeing Sacred Texts as sources of wisdom, values, and referents for cultural literacy. Inasmuch as Scriptures are obscurantist and incompatible with disciplinary assumptions, they are disparaged.

According to advocates of Social Efficiency (SE), education is for the propagation of society, via the formation of skills.\(^{192}\) These macro skills—reading, writing, arithmetic, communication—comprise behavioural objectives students must master to become competent citizens. Students develop abilities through empirically verified techniques that harness technology to shape their environment, serving political and economic needs. By training students into particular ways of doing, the curriculum develops a productive society. This is a story of inefficiency resolved by responsive bodies, culminating in collective prosperity. SE can accommodate Sacred Texts, provided they actually help to address material concerns—such as raising cultural awareness, thereby forging business partnerships with foreign neighbours. Scriptures are dismissed inasmuch as they lack pragmatic value, directing attention away from our shared this-worldly existence.

Proponents of a Learner Centred (LC) curriculum claim that education is for the holistic growth of students, via exposure to new experiences.\(^{193}\) Disciplines are integrated into units of work that simulate real-world interaction, aligned with psychological stages of development. By helping individual students construct meaning, moving from concrete experiences to abstract ideas, a learner discovers her own way of being. This is a story of instrumentalism resolved by actualised souls, culminating in a humane existence.\(^{194}\) LC incorporates Sacred Texts for existential ends, helping a student understand and form her own sense of self in relation to others and the world. Scriptures are sidelined if used as dogmatic authorities over autonomous learners, prescribing a path of development contrary to progressive ideals.

\(^{191}\) Ibid, 4, 13-49, especially 39, 175.
\(^{192}\) Ibid., 4-5, 51-90, especially 77, 175.
\(^{193}\) Ibid., 5, 91-132, especially 116-117, 175.
\(^{194}\) By soul, I mean “that which animates one’s life”. “Soul” here includes all aspects of one’s life in synergy, not simply consciousness.
Finally, Social Reconstructionists (SR) envisage education as for societal transformation, via the acculturation of emancipatory attitudes. Exposing students to cultural crises—such as poverty, racism, and pollution—prompts deep dialogue which can facilitate a commitment to change, aligned with critical theory. In turn, this process stimulates actions that liberate the oppressed and sustain the planet. By motivating students toward more ethical actions, students see their solidarity with the powerless, thus discovering a new way of feeling. This is a story of inequality resolved by awakened hearts, culminating in a just world. Sacred Texts can support SR by highlighting subordinated visions of a peaceable society, these diverse counter-narratives exposing our culture’s hidden and yet hegemonic curriculum that often privileges the powerful. SR, however, deconstructs and deletes Scriptures from the curriculum inasmuch as they underwrite scripts of domination that threaten democracy where every individual and community has a voice.

It is important to note that Schiro’s scheme is an idealised typology. If this were a taxonomy, we would notice a blurring of plots, even as curriculum writers tend to cluster around these four scenarios. Curriculum writers must interweave diverse educational narratives, scripting a meaningful place for knowledge, skills, growth, and transformation. The key questions at this point are, how does ACARA’s curriculum story compare to Schiro’s typology, and what does this mean for the inclusion or exclusion of Scriptures in the Australian Curriculum?

Plotting ACARA’s Account
As previously explained, the Melbourne Declaration (MD) represents the first national vision to direct Australian Education. With the creation of ACARA, MD has surpassed previous aspirational declarations and become a blueprint for change. This blueprint, in turn, represents an interesting blend of curriculum stories.

Literacy, numeracy, and instrumentalist concerns that education both create jobs and train students to fill them, remain “the cornerstone of schooling for young Australians,” reflecting a SE orientation. Against LC and with SA advocates, ACARA’s former Chair, Barry McGaw, stressed that too strong an emphasis upon integration may destroy the riches of deep disciplinary thinking, which often are the base for novel solutions in a complex world. The Australian Curriculum is structured around traditional subjects because “it as important to ensure that a foundation of

---

195 Schiro, *Curriculum*, 6, 133-174, especially 157, 175.
197 Schiro, *Curriculum*, 11-12, 197, 205.
198 MD, 5.
knowledge and understanding in disciplines of knowledge is well laid by the end of schooling for those who will go on to advanced study and to become expert.”

In each case, ACARA mirrors the recent western trend toward SA and SE, and away from LC. The learner’s growth has ceased to be an “end” of education, instead becoming embedded in the developmentally progressive delivery of education.

Nevertheless, there is something radical, even postmodern, at work in the “three dimensional” grid. As explored earlier, the integration of seven general capabilities (including personal and social capability, ethical understanding, and intercultural understanding) and three cross-curriculum priorities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [ATSI] histories and cultures; Asia, and Australia’s engagement with Asia; and Sustainability) into the eleven learning areas has been controversial. Compared to the two-page Hobart and Adelaide Declarations, the twenty-page MD represents a more complex and constructivist curriculum, arguably the coming of age of the “multi-citizen”, pursuing social capital and environmental sustainability through multicultural citizenship education.

Sensitive to critical theory, this vision for Australian education speaks of “building a democratic, equitable and just society—a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse.” It seeks to nurture “an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity, and a sense of global citizenship.”

This rhetoric reflects the ascendent SR story. What, then, might this mean for the incorporation of religions and their Sacred Texts? For instance, MD emphasises that “[s]uccessful learners … are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines … [and] are able to make sense of their world and think about how things have become the way they are.” Do religious perspectives count? Elsewhere we read, “active and informed citizens … appreciate Australia’s social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, … history and culture”; in pursuit of “democracy, equity and justice”, Australian education aims to develop students who are “able to relate to and communicate across cultures … [and] work for the common good, in particular sustaining and improving natural and social environments.”

Might one reasonably expect such a curriculum to discuss core religious stories that encapsulate a vision of humanity’s sumnum bonum subscribed to by many of Australia’s citizens? These are reasonable

---

200 Ibid., 7, 23.
201 Schiro, Curriculum, 196.
204 Berg, National Curriculum, ii-viii.
206 MD, 4.
207 Ibid.
208 Schiro, Curriculum, 196.
209 MD, 8.
210 Ibid.
questions that anyone—religious or otherwise—should ask of a curriculum purporting to represent diverse interests in a cosmopolitan society.\textsuperscript{211} If students are expected to form general capabilities of collaborative problem solving that “open up new ways of thinking” in inter-disciplinary flexible and analytical thinking, then it is reasonable to assume that both religions \textit{and} Sacred Texts would feature in the various \textit{Shaping} documents downstream of this declaration.\textsuperscript{212}

**ACARA’s Confusing Story**

The clearest statement of curriculum vision by which ACARA’s diverse documents can be judged, comprises two goals:

- **Goal 1:** Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- **Goal 2:** All young Australians [will] become:
  - successful learners
  - confident and creative individuals
  - active and informed citizens.\textsuperscript{213}

In terms of curriculum types, these phrases suggest overlapping purposes. Even so, “successful learners” and the emphasis on “excellence” particularly align with \textit{Scholar-Academic} (SA) and \textit{Social Efficiency} (SE); “confident and creative individuals” indicates \textit{Learner-Centred} (LC), while “equity” alongside “active and informed citizens” resonates with \textit{Social-Reconstructionism} (SR).

Each aim is legitimate on its own terms, and would seem to accord with the principled inclusion of Sacred Texts, especially given the numerous references to diversity and religion throughout this declaration. There would seem to be something to satisfy every ideology.

It is not clear, however, how the ends reconcile. As Kitcher asks, “how do you promote individualism, citizenship, the advancement of knowledge, and the progressive development of human culture all at once?”\textsuperscript{214} Concerning ACARA’s enacting of \textit{MD}, Brennan asks whether competing agendas and the “overcrowding of specified content” caused the curriculum writers to lose the forest for the trees?\textsuperscript{215} An ideologically rich declaration was reduced to an unachievable to-do-list. Insufficiently integrated, the Australian Curriculum arguably lacks a “coherent narrative”.\textsuperscript{216}

As such, we have cause to scrutinise ACARA’s documents with reference to their \textit{telos}. The fusion of the Declaration’s four curriculum ideologies, in the absence of a unifying plot, makes for a complicated tale unlikely to capture the hearts and minds of Australian students and build this nation. Of central concern in this project, however, is whether religions and their revelations—

\textsuperscript{211} Greg Sheridan, “Pell’s Performance Was a Revelation,” \textit{The Australian}, April 12, 2012.
\textsuperscript{212} \textit{MD}, 13.
\textsuperscript{213} \textit{MD}, 7-9.
which, I have sought to demonstrate, do resonate with MD narrative—have been offered a meaningful role in the curriculum proper, or have been downplayed to a cameo, lost in the myriad twists and turns of ACARA’s convoluted interpretation.

Having placed ACARA’s task within a wider conceptual framework of curriculum types, we are now positioned to analyse the content of the History and Civics and Citizenship Shaping documents, discerning the place of Sacred Texts within the Australian Curriculum.

**C. SCRIPTURES IN THE SHAPING DOCUMENTS**

**History**

“History is a story, told by many story tellers, that links the past to the present. Through an understanding of their own and others’ stories, students develop an appreciation of the richness of the human past and its implications for the future.”

As ACARA’s concluding vision for the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History* (SAC:H), we may rightly expect to see Scriptures incorporated. Granted, Sacred Texts are never disinterested historical accounts. They are, however, genuine “primary sources” and important secondary narratives which “mak[e] sense of the past based on a selection of events”, thereby offering insights into the beliefs and motivations of key figures and cultures across history. These revered accounts of human existence claim to place the reader within a larger cosmic story that imbues one’s actions with meaning.

Initial critiques suggested that there was a “tendentious and outrageous silence” concerning religion in the *Shaping* document. Sacred Texts, likewise, are never explicitly mentioned—although cross-curriculum integration mandates the study of the “inscriptional and oral narrative traditions … of Indigenous people”, implicitly signalling the legitimacy of incorporating religious stories. Considered more broadly, however, there are hints of widespread inclusion. While no specific traditions are mentioned by name, *religion* is noted at four key points in the document. Religion is listed as one of five “key concepts” through which we may form an accurate picture of

---


the past. Teachers must be conscious of religious diversity and competing family and cultural narratives as the context within which history is studied. Furthermore, religions, beliefs and values are listed as important characteristics in the study of the ancient (60,000BC–c.500AD) and medieval world (c.500–1750AD), covered in Years 7 and 8, respectively.

The strong disciplinary emphasis, as part of a dominant SA orientation in this subject, dictates the detailed exploration of the past through study of sources; sources then constitute evidence toward forming historical “facts”. Since the postmodern turn, terms like “truth” and “facts” are contentious. Thus, the curriculum—especially from Year 7 onwards, according with LC—stresses the process and not simply the content of historical inquiry. This involves consideration of cause and consequence that appreciates motivations behind past actions, historical perspectives from different angles on the same events, empathy and moral judgment “to enter into the world of the past with an informed imagination and ethical responsibility”, and contestation and contestability, wherein students recognise the competing constructions of history that affect contemporary public debate.

On each front, Scriptures are excellent source material. Arguably, they represent the richest cultural narrative. They invite students to empathically engage unfamiliar perspectives that make sense of otherwise strange actions by historical figures. Additionally, they provoke students to test these stories and judge contemporary appeals to these texts in the public sphere. Beyond the disciplinary telos of SAC:H, their inclusion would serve the curriculum’s first two SR aims, that students would “understand the present … contribut[ing] to debate about planning for the future”, and—through developing “a critical perspective on received versions of the past”—become “active and informed democratic citizen[s]” who better understand each other.

Turning, then, to the detailed curriculum (AC:H), a complex picture emerges. Across 182 content descriptors and 291 content elaborators for Years 7 to 10, there were 21 uses of religion generically, 34 references to beliefs, and 30 specific mentions of religions. While there were no mentions of Scriptures by name, there were 3 mentions of Confucius and his teachings in a Year 7 unit on China, and 2 mentions of studying “illuminated manuscripts” as a significant “cultural

---

221 §AC:H, §5.2.
222 Ibid., §2.8; 5.4; 6.1.
223 Ibid., §3.3–4; 5.2; 5.4.3.
224 Ibid., §2.4; 4.4; 5.2; 6.6.
225 Ibid., §5.2.
226 Ibid., §2.6; 5.2–5.3.
227 Ibid., §3.1–2; cf. 2.2; 2.7; 6.3.4.
228 This includes reference to Christianity (9), Islam (8), Hinduism (3) Jainism (1), Buddhism (4), Confucianism (4), and Judaism (1). See Years 7–10 of AC:H.
229 AC:H, Year 7 ACDSEH042, ACDSEH132, and ACHHS212. This last reference is under historical skills, identifying societal views/values and attitudes in sources. ACARA’s descriptor asks students to evaluate Confucius’s sayings about women, thus critiquing what is considered by many to be a Sacred Text.
achievement”, within the Year 8 unit on Medieval Europe. Even in this busy “supermarket curriculum” — where countless dot-points place everything on show in the absence of clear criteria for determining what students should know — there seems to be a significant place for religions and Sacred Texts.

The picture is complex, however, for the references are uneven and there is a notable null and hidden curriculum. Half of the references to religion relate to antiquated civilisations and now defunct belief systems and mythologies. Helpfully, there is a depth unit on the Asian world, allowing for exploration of the origins of various forms of Hinduism, Confucianism, Jainism, and Buddhism. This could incorporate portions of their Scriptures. And yet, the emergence of Judaism, Christianity and Islam collectively comprise one optional content elaborator among eight dot points contained within a Year 7 overview unit that at most constitutes 10 per cent of total teaching time (“just a few lessons”) for the year. The curriculum gives no time to consideration of the foundational beliefs and Scriptures of these monotheistic traditions, and their contemporary relevance in our values and societal structures, whether cultural, legal or political.

To some, this may seem a non-issue. One subject cannot cover every aspect of humanity’s past. However, ACARA employs historical significance as the criteria guiding selection of curriculum content, emphasising “contemporary import, consequence, durability and relevance”. Given that over half of the world’s current population identify with the Abrahamic faiths, and that “Judeo-Christian” beliefs — however problematic this phrase may be — have been instrumental in Australia’s history, this exclusion is significant. It is strange to have four references to Confucius, a depth unit touching on Buddhism, and extensive discussion of Roman mythology, and yet no references to Moses, Muhammad, or Jesus as history’s “most influential” person, to whom the parallel dating systems of BC/AD and BCE/CE refer. This is the null curriculum.

There is also a hidden curriculum. Of the 90 collective references to religions, beliefs and Scriptures, over 93 per cent of them occur by the end of the ancient world. As Year 9 and 10 students consider 1750 to the present, “belief” detaches from tradition and is now associated with “belief in social and political equality”. “Religion” drops out as a key concept for understanding culture, and Christianity is only considered in relation to the rise of Darwinism and the questionable...
reception of colonial missions by Asian cultures. Interpreted through the filter of “continuity and change” by the end of Year 10 a student would learn that the progress of history parallels a decline of religions. Religion is given only a very brief mention in relation to the US Civil Rights movement and is completely ignored in the context of popular culture and environmental activism; students may thus conclude that religion is deemed irrelevant to contemporary concerns. The implicit story is that loss of religious belief characterises the “Australian way of life”, even amidst a globalising world. In the second half of middle-school, religions in general, and Christianity in particular, are considered as problematic, associated with violence, or not considered at all. In turn, Sacred Texts are largely overlooked, and only occasionally referenced as a hegemonic force for religious oppression. The liberative value of Scriptures in abolishing slavery—not simply rationalising servitude—undergirding common law and notions of “natural justice”, and motivating different communities to support the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is ignored.

This account of our past falls short of the contestability and empathy meant to characterise this subject. By failing to “find space between the dot-points”—ignoring majority traditions as a whole, and minority traditions in the present, especially their Scriptures as primary sources for understanding beliefs and motivations—AC:H has missed its telos of forming active citizens in a religiously diverse country who truly understand each other’s stories and thus can work together for the common good. In summary, ACARA’s History, for all its references to religious influences, is essentially the secularisation thesis writ large on an over-burdened and content-driven curriculum.

239 SAC:H, §5.2.
240 AC:H, ACHHS189.
241 AC:H, ACDSEH149.
244 Brian Hoepper, „‘Promises to Keep …’: Potential and Pitfall in the Australian Curriculum: History,” Curriculum Perspectives 31, no. 3 (2011), 68.
Civics and Citizenship

In terms of Sacred Texts, the Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship (SAC:CC)\(^\text{246}\) and the detailed “Australian Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship Foundation to Year 10” web-interface (AC:CC)\(^\text{247}\) are perhaps ACARA’s most important documents. Given the centrality of democratic citizenship to the Australian Curriculum’s telos, and the recognition that citizenship, broadly defined, includes one’s belonging to a religious community, scholarly religious educators such as Anna Halafoff were optimistic that ACARA would feature religious literacy and a “critical education about the role of religion in society” in this subject.\(^\text{248}\) “Not just a school subject,” suggests Professor Kerry Kennedy, “civics and citizenship is about a vision for the kind of life we want for Australia’s future citizens.”\(^\text{249}\) If the “we” here includes religious citizens, then it would be strange to exclude such perspectives and values from the curriculum. This, in turn, warrants exploration of each community’s founding Scriptures, the collision of which around the world has simultaneously fuelled violence and furnished wisdom, both of which impact human flourishing.\(^\text{250}\)

Appropriately, then, and in accord with MD, SAC:CC’s thirty pages contain seven calls to recognise and appreciate religious diversity,\(^\text{251}\) three mentions of Australia being “multi-faith”—albeit within the context of a “secular” governance structure\(^\text{252}\)—and five references to working together for the “common good”.\(^\text{253}\) The centrality of diversity is magnified with the integration of general capabilities—such as intercultural and ethical understanding—and cross-curriculum priorities such as Sustainability which has “worldviews” as one of its three organising ideas to mobilise students for responsible and “active citizenship”.\(^\text{254}\) Explicit references to Sacred Texts, however, are lacking, even as they could be inferred through reference to the curriculum’s stated purposes.

This curriculum has four broad aims: the development of active citizenship; deep knowledge and understanding of Australia’s democracy; critical appreciation of the duties and


\(^{248}\) SAC:CC §4b; Halafoff, “Time.”


\(^{250}\) Samuel Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Whatever your reading of this contentious text, the importance of religions and their Scripture-inspired ideologies to the future of “global citizenship” is hard to ignore.

\(^{251}\) SAC:CC, §4b, 7, 10b, 21f, and 61-62.

\(^{252}\) SAC:CC, §10c, 13, and 18c.

\(^{253}\) SAC:CC, §7, 10b, 25a and 25b, and 60.

\(^{254}\) SAC:CC, §59-62 and 46-52, respectively.
privileges of citizenship to act in a responsible way; and an informed and critical commitment to Australia as a “multicultural and multi-faith society”. The curriculum is organised into two strands: (1) Civics and Citizenship knowledge and understanding; and (2) Civics and Citizenship skills. These skills are integrated into the content of the first strand to support students becoming “active and engaged as well as informed and critical participants in their multiple communities”.

In terms of curriculum stories, the language suggests an SR plot. Such a critical orientation would support the use of a diversity of Scriptures to challenge any singulat/mono-cultural construction of the Australian identity that may inadvertently exclude the Other who believes and behaves differently. Even so, much hinges on the interpretation of “citizen”. As Professor Alan Sears complains of this “bland” curriculum, “complex ideas are reduced to slogans” with little evidence of rich thought concerning the contemporary place of religions in pluralistic democracies. Instead, we are confronted with confusing amalgams calling for student knowledge and understanding of “Australia as a secular, pluralist, multicultural society.” Indeed, the same language could be used in a SE plot that superficially acknowledges dissimilarity en route to cherry-picking common values and skills; religion is thus pragmatically useful in a “futures-oriented curriculum” to forge disparate communities into a unified country which is always “progressing”. Similarly, it is difficult to judge which curriculum vision, SE or SR, directed ACARA’s inclusion of religion. For instance, SAC:CC includes Westheimer and Kahne’s key study in their reference list, which dismantles superficial citizenship. And yet, a close reading of the content suggests that AC:CC has largely settled for developing “personally responsible citizens” now, who in the future will become “participatory good citizens” taking their place in the status quo as adults, without ever becoming “justice oriented citizens” who may challenge the “narrow and often ideologically conservative conception of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy.”

255 SAC:CC, §18.
256 SAC:CC, §22.
260 Cf. Stout, Democracy and Tradition. Stout argues for a pragmatic liberal politic that gives voice to all traditions in the public sphere, constrained only by the constitution and a consensus-making process.
Turning, then, to the deliverances of the curriculum proper for Years 7 to 10, the ideology is uneven. Positively, across 56 content descriptors and 127 content elaborators, *religion* is mentioned eight times,\(^\text{263}\) and specific religious traditions are mentioned an additional seven times.\(^\text{264}\) These references are clustered into 5 per cent of total subject content.\(^\text{265}\) This is meaningful, albeit minimal. Religious diversity is acknowledged as part of Australia’s identity, specifically considering the contribution of “Judeo-Christian traditions” to the “development of Australian society, democracy and law”.\(^\text{266}\) Significantly, Year 9 students investigate “how and why groups, including religious groups, participate in civic life”.\(^\text{267}\) They consider the charitable work of diverse organisations, “exploring the concept of ‘the common good’ using examples of how religious groups participate to foster interfaith understanding or social justice.”\(^\text{268}\) An implicit case thus exists for incorporating Sacred Texts, as each particular group’s rationale for and vision of “the common good” draws from their Scriptural metanarrative.

Nevertheless, the criticism of superficial diversity and conservative citizenship has substance. Scriptures are never explicitly mentioned. None of the twelve key inquiry questions reference religious perspectives.\(^\text{269}\) Furthermore, when religious diversity is mentioned, it is grossly simplified (e.g., Year 7 and 8 students merely define multi-faith and “identify” religious trends, without employing higher level analysis such as critiquing and debating the place of religious perspectives within society), and homogenised (e.g., Year 7 students identify “universal values” shared by all Australians toward creating a cohesive society). Students, rightly, study the general constitutional principles of freedom of religion.\(^\text{270}\) And yet, in Year 10, when critical thinking upon the particulars of worldviews should peak in the curriculum, religious perspectives are absent. Instead we find religions implicitly relativised around a shared Australian identity. Students study “the challenges to and ways of sustaining a resilient democracy and cohesive society”.\(^\text{271}\) They learn how to “safeguard … shared values” and guard against “threats” that come through “the influence of vested interests”. These aims are legitimate. However, the pursuit of superficial unity apart from discussion of deep religious differences—the kind of difference crystallised in each community’s sacred stories, shaping their vested interests—reinforces a hidden curriculum that our spiritual particularities are at best irrelevant to Australia’s culture-making project, and at worst are dangerous

\(^{263}\) AC:CC, Year 7 ACHCK051, ACHCS055; Year 8 ACHCK061, ACHCK065; Year 9 ACHCK079.

\(^{264}\) AC:CC, Year 8 ACHCK065.

\(^{265}\) All variants of *religions* are concentrated into 3 content descriptors and 6 elaborators.

\(^{266}\) AC:CC, Year 8 ACHCK065.

\(^{267}\) AC:CC, ACHCK079.

\(^{268}\) Ibid.

\(^{269}\) AC:CC Year 7 comes close when it asks, “How is Australia a diverse society and what factors contribute to a cohesive society?”

\(^{270}\) AC:CC, Year 8 ACHCK061.

\(^{271}\) AC:CC, Year 10 ACHCK094.
to democracy. Religious similarities, then, are considered inasmuch as they reinforce a unified cultural identity, and side-lined inasmuch as Scriptural perspectives may divide. This would not achieve the SAC:CC telos of building a “critical appreciation” of this multi-faith society wherein students can work together for the common good by “learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect”.  

Oversimplification is inevitable when Civics and Citizenship already receives the least curriculum time out of any subject in Years 7 through 10, despite MD’s overarching aim of education for democracy in a diverse society. If Scriptures are maps that configure reality and reveal ethically “what is done and needs to be done … establishing the coherence of such actions in events” for large communities that comprise Australia, then their exclusion undermines, even invalidates, the civic goals of this curriculum.

In summary, while there is an implicit rationale to incorporate Scriptures in Civics and Citizenship, the explicit avoidance of religious particulars does not bode well, suggesting their irrelevance to ACARA’s vision for the contemporary Australian citizen.

D. AN APPRAISAL

Having described the place of Sacred Texts within History and Civics and Citizenship, three points are pertinent to the overarching Australian Curriculum in concluding this chapter. Given that Sacred Texts are best understood in tandem with communities of belief, each point unavoidably interrelates Scriptures and religions.

First, the Australian Curriculum ignores Sacred Texts. History and Civics and Citizenship touch on religions as a generic theme, albeit treating faiths, respectively, as ancient relics or the undifferentiated source of universal values. Further analysis reveals that diverse faiths are downplayed across the remaining nine subjects. While featuring in MD, religions largely disappear as substantive and contemporary concerns in ACARA’s translation of the Shaping documents into the curriculum proper. This vanishing act is near complete in the case of Sacred Texts. Other than a few scattered references to the teachings of Confucius, examination of illuminated manuscripts, and hearing oral traditions of the ATSI peoples, the foundational stories of influential spiritualities are

---


assigned to the null curriculum. The curriculum may not be anti-religious, but the hidden lesson is that revelation is irrelevant to education and the formation of active citizens in a globalised world.

Second, subject aims implicitly invite Scriptural engagement. Both subjects are a mixture of curriculum stories that dovetail with what Scriptures functionally “do”. In History, Scriptures are important sources helping form skilled students who can empathise with the motivations of pivotal characters in our past and make sense of our contested present. In Civics and Citizenship, Scriptures capture pluriform visions of the common good which communities pursue, and thus which active citizens in a pluralistic democracy must engage. The nature of Scriptures—as overarching interpretations of the world and our place therein—intersect with ACARA’s telos, thus warranting some form of incorporation.

Third, there is inherent tension in ACARA over integration. This requires significant elaboration. It is apparent that both the cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities are not an afterthought in the Shape of the Australian Curriculum’s overriding philosophy. Beyond content and knowledge, ACARA desires to form “skills, behaviours and dispositions” that will shape students toward their end of being “successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.” In Asian literacy, ATSI histories and culture, and Sustainability, this involves consideration of “deep knowledge traditions and holistic world views”, religious beliefs and spirituality, and “ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing”. For instance, the sustainability priority requires students to learn about the key concept of “sustainability in a global context”. This involves discussing “a diversity of worldviews on ecosystems, values and social justice … linked to individual and community actions for sustainability.” Such aims align with the function of Sacred Texts.

The same natural fit presents as we consider general capabilities. Words like “empathy”, “teamwork”, “seeking alternatives”, “values”, “socially oriented ethical outlook”, “diverse cultures”, “open-mindedness”, and “cultivating mutual respect” are strewn throughout. Building on the work of Martha Nassbaum and Amytra Sen, integration centres on notions of holistic human flourishing. Through “strong and coherent inclusion” of these “essential skills for twenty-first

---

275 SAC4, §28-34, 65.
276 Ibid., §31.
century learners”, ACARA envisages that students will become “citizens who behave with ethical integrity, relate to and communicate across cultures, work for the common good and act with responsibility at local, regional and global levels.” While Sacred Texts are not mentioned explicitly, *religion* features four times within Intercultural Understanding. The key concept of “recognising culture and developing respect” involves students in “learning to value and view critically their own cultural perspectives and practices and those of others through their interactions with people, texts and contexts across the curriculum.” This requires exploration of “religious beliefs and ways of thinking”. Appreciating religious diversity and making sense of “the politics of culture on the world stage” minimally requires students to be acquainted with the authoritative texts and particular beliefs animating these global traditions.

“Religion” should not be reified as a single phenomenon, or restricted to one subject and narrow set of educational objectives. Genuine respect and pursuit of peace requires appreciation of commonalities and differences between cultures and faiths. Granted, this takes more than reading ancient Scriptures. Religious literacy, however, requires no less than exposure to a plurality of Sacred Texts. For many students, and many more global citizens, their “personal identities and narratives” are intertwined with their community’s sacred story.

The SE emphasis upon growth through progressive integration is not the end of education for ACARA. Neverthess, it is the means. The preceding goals are not platitudinous, for they translate into specific outcomes at each stage of development. According to the Intercultural Understanding Learning Continuum, by the end of Year 10, students should be able to analyse how identity is shaped by membership of particular local and national groups, “critically analyse the complex and dynamic nature of knowledge, beliefs and practices in a wide range of contexts over time”, “present a balanced view on issues where conflicting views cannot easily be resolved”, and “critique the use of stereotypes and prejudices in texts and issues concerning specific cultural groups”.

Exposure to, and empathy for, multiple perspectives is key. The same applies to Critical and Creative Thinking. By Year 10 students should be able to “pose questions to critically analyse complex issues and abstract ideas”, “create and connect complex ideas using imagery, analogies


281 GCAC, 2-3.
282 Ibid., 133, 135, 138, 142.
283 Ibid., 133.
284 Ibid., 138.
285 Ibid., 135.
286 Ibid., 135, 138.
287 Ibid., 135.
and symbolism”, “address opposing viewpoints and possible weaknesses in their own positions”, and “balance rational and irrational [sic] components of a complex or ambiguous problem to evaluate evidence”. Ethically, by the close of their compulsory years of schooling, all Australian students should be able to “investigate reasons for clashes of beliefs in issues of personal, social and global importance”, “evaluate diverse perceptions and ethical bases of action in complex contexts”, and “use reasoning skills to prioritise the relative merits of points of view about complex ethical dilemmas”. To achieve these ends requires reference to religious perspectives and their orienting sacred stories. Attempting to do so without acknowledging Scriptures is educationally suspect and inequitable, falling short of the curriculum telos. Thus, a strong case exists for incorporation.

Nonetheless, the sidelining and oversimplification of religions alongside the absence of Sacred Texts in the curriculum proper exposes a fault line in ACARA’s integration. In turn, it has cast doubt on their commitment to offer anything other than a knowledge driven neo-liberal rehash according with SA and SE curriculum stories. ACARA is right to stress the integration of general capabilities and cross-curricular priorities only when there is a “natural fit” pertinent to and enriching of a subject’s stated aims. This does not, however, explain why Sacred Texts are excluded. As Scriptures can be appropriately assimilated, their absence is noteworthy. This suggests deeper agendas at play tied to curriculum ideology.

Many have argued that such a strong emphasis upon learning areas has rendered meaningful integration highly unlikely. Thus, while Reid applauds ACARA’s three-dimensional curriculum, he argues that few schools will implement this aspiration. Lacking an epistemological and ontological rationale, without accountability for achievement or suggested pedagogical strategies for teachers, calls for integration are reduced to “tokenism”. The consequence for Scriptures in state education is this: the likelihood of incorporation diminishes as we move from MD to SAC4

293 Cf. Department of Education, “Review,” 142-146, 242-253. Despite this move away from integration, the authors—drawing on 1600 submissions—argued that there must be greater incorporation of and attention to “morals, values and spirituality as outlined in the Melbourne Declaration” (155-162, also 246 Recommendation 15), including emphasis upon understanding Sacred Texts and how they shape a diversity of worldviews (159).
296 Ibid., 51.
and *Shaping* documents, barely appearing in the Australian Curriculum proper, and thus probably vanishing as the curriculum enters the classroom. Such an approach is incapable of forming students who can understand, appreciate and respect religious diversity, making sense of the world from multiple perspectives as they work together toward the common good.

In conclusion, then, we have seen the possibility of Sacred Texts serving ACARA’s *telos* and their vision of holistic, integrated education. Used wisely, they are a natural fit to enrich curricular aims. Instead, we have seen religions and their revelations distorted and dismissed in the curriculum proper. ACARA lacks a coherent narrative to direct meaningful incorporation in its practice of curriculum writing. In Chapter 4, then, we turn from the descriptive to the interpretive movement in the practical theological spiral. By employing sociological insights surrounding secularisation theory, we may better explain this disparity.
Chapter 4

Can Secular Education Permit Scriptures?

Every Sacred Text shapes a particular community’s vision of the world and way of life therein.\(^{296}\) The dynamic power of revelation, second only to technology in shaping human history according to Huston Smith, is in its “news of another world … that simultaneously relativizes and exalts the one we normally know.”\(^{297}\) What, then, should be the place of such texts in a secular curriculum directed toward our shared, this-worldly reality?

In Chapter 3 we surveyed ACARA’s vision for Australian public middle-school education. I concluded that the subject aims implicitly invited Scriptural engagement, even as the formal curriculum ignored Sacred Texts. This demonstrated an inherent tension in ACARA’s curriculum writing over holistic integration. Why is this going on?

In the absence of disclosure by ACARA, interpretations are manifold: economic concerns invited a neo-liberal reading of the MD which side-lined what are perceived to be extraneous matters like Scriptures; political wrangling and parental complaints were assuaged by avoiding contentious issues; an expansive curriculum vision was treated as an endless to-do-list, losing religion in the details; and lack of exposure to best-practice incorporating religions in each subject meant that Sacred Texts lay beyond the educational horizon. Each hypothesis is warranted, and illuminates this curriculum disconnect.\(^{298}\) And yet, the consistently low priority given to faiths and their Scriptures—inconsistent with both their global and educational importance—suggests that ideological exclusion may be a factor.

In this chapter, then, I will adopt a sociological perspective. Through a critical exploration of the “secular” character of public education, in dialogue with both the Australian Curriculum and Cathy Byrne’s advocacy for the “secular principle”, I will argue that ACARA’s practice of curriculum writing follows a narrative akin to the classic secularisation thesis. That is, the way the curricula for History and Civics and Citizenship are shaped contribute to the privatisation of religion and the silencing of Sacred Texts. The “postsecular” turn in sociology and education, however, challenges this story, destabilising ACARA’s stance. A new way forward must be forged, capable of reconciling the pluralistic nature of contemporary society in an equitable manner. With these qualifications, secular education can permit Scriptures.

---

\(^{296}\) See Bhikhu Parekh, A New Politics of Identity (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 135.


\(^{298}\) In 2014, the Department of Education commissioned “Review of the Australian Curriculum” concluded that it is “bloated”, even as they recommended “more emphasis on morals, values and spirituality”. See www.studentsfirst.gov.au/review-australian-curriculum (accessed October 14, 2014).
A. “SECULAR” AND “SECULARISING” EDUCATION

There is great controversy over the role of religion in Australian State schools, and much hinges on the definition of “secular”.\textsuperscript{299} This is particularly so as it relates to the divide between confessional, clergy-organised, and volunteer-led Special Religious Education (SRE), and the desire of many educators for a comparative, State-organised and teacher-led General Religious Education (GRE).\textsuperscript{300} Whilst this debate is not my focus, it serves to delineate the meanings attached to this one word along the spectrum of conflicting opinions.

At one end of the spectrum, evangelical Christian organisations like ACCESS Ministries and Scripture Union\textsuperscript{301}—which presently authorise SRE and Chaplains for schools, respectively—argue that there is educational provision for SRE (historically Christian RE) in all public schools as an auxiliary to the set curriculum.\textsuperscript{302} They rightly contend that constitutionally there is no wall of separation in Australia between Church and State, a point admitted by even the strongest detractors who see the erection of an impermeable barrier between religion and State as “unfinished business in Australian political culture”.\textsuperscript{303} Section 116 prevents the Commonwealth from “establishing any religion, [or] imposing any religious observance, [or] prohibiting the free exercise of religion.”

These stipulations guard against British-style sectarianism rather than serving to enshrine secularist ideology, as reflected in the Australian Curriculum’s commitment to diversity alongside recognition of religion.\textsuperscript{304} Incorporating Sacred Texts in class does not constitute Federal religious establishment, as evidenced by the recognition of Study of Religion as a board registered subject in each State.\textsuperscript{305} The provision to teach comparatively about religion as part of the “secular curriculum” has existed continuously since the 1866 Public Schools Act, even as it has rarely been exercised.\textsuperscript{306} Thus, it is misguided to interpret “secular” education as an expansive freedom \textit{from} religion which excludes all Scriptures from school.


\textsuperscript{300} My use of SRE and GRE follows many scholars, most notably Terence Lovat, \textit{What Is This Thing Called Religious Education?} (Terrigal, NSW: David Barlow Publishing, 2009).


\textsuperscript{303} Marion Maddox, \textit{Taking God to School} [hereafter \textit{TGS}] (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2014), Kindle e-book Loc. 3470, 3419-3462, especially Ch. 3 on legal precedent and Ch. 7, “Reclaim the Secular”, 3515.


\textsuperscript{305} Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 29, 150-151, 168, 257.

\textsuperscript{306} Maddox, \textit{TGS}, Loc. 3006.
The question is not whether religion is allowed, but how it should be addressed to accord with educational aims and inclusive citizenship. The guiding principles of tolerance, egalitarianism, freedom and equity, which emerged from educational debates in the late nineteenth century, must not be ignored. As such, Christian groups are right to interpret the High Court ruling on School Chaplaincy, and the NSW ruling on SRE, as permitting their activity within a broadly conceived “secular” education. This allows for their contribution to “Big Society” as a limited partnership intended to serve the common good. And yet, detractors are also right in seeing the Chaplaincy case as a “missed opportunity for [a truly] secular education.” Christian privilege may be legally permissible even while betraying the law’s original intent of religious impartiality. What, then, does “secular” mean?

On the opposite end of the spectrum from ACCESS and Scripture Union is lobby group “The Fourth R” who seek the separation of Church and State Schools. In 1875 the Queensland Education Act promoted a “free and secular education” for all children. However, ongoing campaigns by denominational leaders, particularly calling for “Scripture classes” to help ground and reform a struggling population during the Depression, led to a re-sacralised curriculum. As such, The Fourth R’s priority is tied to “secular” rhetoric. The web-site’s authors conclude that [the] 1910 removal from the Queensland Education Act of this critical clause means that in 2010, Queensland Government staff school teachers are permitted to inject Christian beliefs and dogma including creationism and Intelligent Design into any lessons, on any subject matter, at any time. Technically this is true, even as there are few instances in practice, balanced as it is by Education Queensland’s more explicit commitment to religious diversity.

For the Fourth R and their allies, “secular” means “non-religious”, requiring the total exclusion of any and all religion from public schools. Problematically, however, these American-
style secularists overlook that most Australian framers of policy believed that religious understanding was crucial to a well-rounded education.315 As Ian Mavor concludes his historical survey, this provision was curtailed in response to sectarian dispute “rather than … a commitment to the secularization of public education.”316 With the common good under threat, and no political or educational solution forthcoming to the “religious difficulty”, religions and their revelations were temporarily sidelined.317

Times change. Education must likewise adapt.318 As new educational models have emerged, the difficulties of yesteryear are no longer insurmountable.319 Indeed, Maddox concurs with Tim Jensen, as advisor on intercultural education for the Council of Europe, that comparative religious education may even be a necessary and “defining characteristic” of the modern secular State.320 Stripping all Scriptures from public education may safeguard schools from any one religious community obtaining privileged access. Counterproductively, however, this kind of illiberal limiting of sources promotes ignorance, falling short of the “maximally inclusive” education envisaged by ACARA.321 Contemporary educational models are capable of facilitating the formation of a cohesive country while simultaneously improving religious literacy and working for peace.322

Focusing between the two ends of the spectrum, a middle reading of “secular” is offered by Cathy Byrne and Anna Halafoff.323 They define secular to mean education where no one religion is given special privilege by the State: all are on an equal playing field. Byrne’s research is the backbone for other groups like FIRIS (Fairness in Religion in Schools), who seek the removal of SRE and the establishment of GRE.324 In Byrne’s language, this is a truly “secular RE” which is “state designed and delivered, and includes various religious and non-religious ethical traditions.”325 It would be “secular” because this means “not promoting or denigrating any particular religion.”

---

315 Byrne, RiSE, 14.
316 Mavor, “Religion,” 86.
317 Maddox, TGS, Ch. 2, especially Loc. 855-921, 1009, 1285ff, also 3660, 3754.
318 Byrne, RiSE, 28, 260.
These ideas, as explored below, have since developed into a set of principles to direct the incorporation of teaching on religions and Sacred Texts in State schools.

In sum, then, we have multiple definitions of “secular” in Australian public education. Usage ranges from secularists who desire the total exclusion of all religion (and Sacred Texts therein) from education, through pluralists who want education that evenly includes or (failing that) excludes all religions, to sacralists who support education that is Government run (thus “secular”) where the State can authorise and even privilege particular religious groups to instruct students into their preferred system of beliefs.\(^{326}\) Given that secular education is “more of a vague assumption than a legislated directive”, greater clarity is required to interpret the contemporary place assigned to religions and Scriptures in the Australian Curriculum.\(^{327}\)

The “Secular Principle”

Cathy Byrne is well positioned to offer such clarity. As an educator and academic, she has spent over a decade researching the particular place given to religions in Australian public education. Whilst Byrne is an advisor to ACARA on these matters, she conceives her role as “shaking the policy tree” in pursuit of equitable social inclusion by advocating for those on the margins of political power: the non-religious and agnostic, religious minorities such as Buddhists, and those practicing “alternative” spiritualities.\(^{328}\) She has been an outspoken critic of the colonial privileging of Christianity in education and the “Australian Christian Zeitgeist”,\(^{329}\) and is in touch with international trends in best practice, particularly drawing on the work of leading scholar Robert Jackson at the University of Warwick.\(^{330}\) Further developing her sociological dissertation,\(^{331}\) Byrne’s book, *Religion in Secular Education*, is the most substantial treatment of such themes in the Australian context. Thus, Byrne is an ideal interlocutor for this chapter. Her work offers insights by which I may interpret ACARA’s ideologically-laden practice of curriculum writing. Furthermore, Byrne explicitly challenges any hegemonic tendencies in my theological musings.\(^{332}\) In short, she seeks a principle based approach to religion in education, characterised as “secular, inclusive, plural, critical, desegregated, and intercultural.”\(^{333}\)


\(^{327}\) Byrne, *RiSE*, 32.

\(^{328}\) See works.bepress.com/cathy_byrne/ (accessed June 2, 2014), and Byrne, “Diversity in Education,” *Culture Scope* 87 (2008), 36-40; Byrne, *RiSE*, 73-74.


\(^{330}\) See *RiSE*, xi, 22, 26-30, 37, 40-43, 67n49, 80, 90, 240, 280.


\(^{332}\) Byrne, *RiSE*, 34-35, 47-51, 121, 128, 130-137, 154, 193, 197, 203, 219, 224, 261.

\(^{333}\) Ibid., 262, 267, 269.
Byrne’s solution to a curricular quagmire is the “bold removal of Christian-centric, segregated Religious Instruction from a crowded curriculum, and its logical replacement with a mandatory state-devised religions and ethics program,” that being Secular Religion and Ethics (SecularR&E).\(^{334}\) At the risk of oversimplification, she envisages students sharing and encountering a diversity of perspectives on common ethical quandaries surrounding themes such as gender, race, religion, and the environment. As they accurately learn about diverse traditions and ideas, they may critically reflect upon the various dimensions (especially political/civic concerns), thus learning from one another. The teacher guides students toward common action modelled along the lines of a representative democratic process.\(^{335}\) The multicultural vision of recognising religious diversity has matured into a reflective and competency-based interculturalism that enables diverse people to passively tolerate and (ideally) actively respect each other, understanding each other’s views and thereby harmoniously sharing common space in a pluralistic country.\(^{336}\)

In the educational context, secular takes on a process-oriented interpretation, meaning “state driven, inclusive, striving to be neutral and equitable”\(^{337}\). Byrne proposes three concepts that together comprise the “secular principle” as a guiding compass for any inclusion of religion in education. We will refer back to these concepts throughout this chapter, numbered below as separate propositions:

- [Concept I] state control and accountability;
- [Concept II] removal of clerical influence and religious doctrine; and
- [Concept III] inclusive respect and equity for all religions and none (that is, agnostic “this world” philosophical and theological neutrality).\(^{338}\)

Byrne follows Jackson in distinguishing between a hard “secularism” which excludes religious perspectives, and a soft “secularity” as a type of institutional impartiality to any comprehensive view of the world, whether religious or non-religious.\(^{339}\) What Byrne calls “agnostic neutrality” has been variously understood by educators of differing metaphysical convictions as epistemological humility, procedural agnosticism, social pragmatism, and positive pluralism.\(^{340}\) The role of the State, both in politics and education, is to “promote discussion and dialogue, not to impose equality”.\(^{341}\)

\(^{334}\) Ibid., 253.
\(^{335}\) Ibid., xix, 16-25, 59-61, 224, 260.
\(^{338}\) Byrne, *RISE*, 34-35 (numeration and line-breaks mine); cf. *RISE*, 57, 120-121, 259, 261.
\(^{340}\) Cf. Denise Cush, “Models of Religious Education in a Plural Society,” in *Church–State Relations in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Irena Borowik (Krakow: Nomos, 1999), 384. She cites Andrew Wright and Trevor Cooling as Christian critical-realists espousing a similar position on political and theological grounds.
Byrne advocates for a new subject, ignoring ACARA’s preference for cross-curricular integration with which I accord. Even so, her “secular principle” has significant implications. It is intended to guide any incorporation of religions and their revelations into Australian education. As will be seen in Chapter 7, the pedagogy I construct largely aligns with Byrne’s proposal of active inclusion, question asking and multiperspectivalism. We disagree on two definitional fronts, however, concerning the supposed neutrality and synchronic framing of the “secular”.

Defining “secular” education purely in terms of governance brings clarity at one level. And yet, it is problematic to bracket substantial objections to “secularity” on the grounds that they lie outside your preferred definition. Byrne’s almost exclusive attention to Christian privilege in SRE, and how SecularR&E may solve this, obscures the privileging of substantively “secular” worldviews in Australian education as a whole. As such, while she selectively draws on Habermas’s political philosophy, she merely deflects his contention that something significant has changed in the western world which he calls the “postsecular”. Byrne grants the persistence, even resurgence, of religion in the public sphere. And yet, by her definition, “only nations awake to the potential of the secular principle are secular.” That is, because we are only now becoming conscious of this principle and its active democratic requirements, she deems the use of postsecular “unnecessary”.

This is semantically unhelpful. It obscures the complicity of liberal thought with public educational models which have marginalised religious discourse. Her analysis side-steps the growing disenchantment with “Enlightenment fundamentalism” and scientific naturalism. This is not merely simplistic rhetoric, equating “secularity” with atheism. Rather, it is a recognition that behind all these “postal” perspectives as David Carr calls them—postcolonialism, postmodernism, poststructuralism—are scholars “questioning or repudiating what [they] take to be the epistemic assumptions of ‘modernism’ … that there can be no epistemic warrant for religious faith or belief.” Such notions have continued to underwrite the silencing of Sacred Texts in the liberalism” espoused by Kok-Chor Tan, Tolerance, Diversity, and Global Justice (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 53-60.

342 Byrne, RiSE, 35.
343 Ibid., 10, 20, 123.
344 Ibid., 20-21, 37-38, 59.
346 Byrne, RiSE, 11-12.
347 Ibid., 37.
351 Byrne, RiSE, 38.
curriculum as a whole. Thus, more attention than a two-page dismissal must be given to postsecularity in education, as evidenced by recent special issues of two premier journals.\(^{353}\) Byrne’s definition falls short of the neutrality she espouses. Furthermore, Byrne’s framing of secularity lacks historical contextualisation. Helpfully, Byrne resists the polemical dichotomy of “secular” versus “religious”.\(^{354}\) Nevertheless, what she offers is essentially a synchronic definition used to circumscribe the boundaries for religion in the public sphere. Charles Taylor, however, contends that notions of the “secular” require diachronic interpretation, sensitive to larger metanarratives, the contest for power, and subtle shifts across time in our social imaginary.\(^{355}\) An a-historical framing tempts sociologists in particular to see their contemporary analysis and solutions as global, privileging a closed take on the transcendent “in which the secular lays claim to exclusive reality”.\(^{356}\) We reify the secular, secularisms, and secularisation when we treat any one term in isolation.\(^{357}\) There has been growing recognition among sociologists of religion since the 1990s that this field has been over-theorised, particularly along Marxist lines.\(^{358}\) This has prompted both an empirical turn to quantitative research, and an historical turn to the unfolding of complex reality, as a corrective to universalising local patterns and partial reading of the data.\(^{359}\) Such ideological reflexivity must also characterise our evaluation of the “secular principle”.

As such, it remains for us to consider the meaning of “secular” in relation to this historical process of secularisation, in order to evaluate the present secularity of the Australian Curriculum as regards Scriptures.

**Secularisation Theses**

The history of the secularisation thesis alone could warrant a dissertation, incorporating notions of scientific rationality and disenchantment (Max Weber), individualism and loss of group identity (Emile Durkheim), and economic prosperity undermining the need for religious consolation (Karl Marx).\(^{360}\) The basic thesis was that as modernisation increases—whether scientific and

---


354 *RISE*, 33-34, 38, 263-264.

355 Taylor, *Secular*, especially pages 171-176 concerning our “social imaginary”.


technological, economic or bureaucratic—religion would decrease in influence. For our purposes, however—and adapting the classification schemes of Casanova and Dobbelaere—we may distinguish five levels or types of secularisation, each diminishing religious authority: (1) Secularisation as differentiation: the loss of religious control over government and institutions; (2) Secularisation as privatisation: the loss of religious influence on these structures; (3) Secularisation as association: the loss of religious practice, such as Mosque/Temple affiliation and attendance; (4) Secularisation as assent: the loss of religious belief for individuals; (5) Secularisation as context: the loss of religious plausibility, such that religious belief is reduced from the default to one option among many.

The scholarship at every level is immense, and only macro-level differentiation is relatively uncontroversial. To some degree all the levels interrelate. Nevertheless, my central concern for this project is level two secularisation: privatisation. Does the Australian Curriculum mirror a traditional telling of this secularisation story through hollowing out religious influence and side-lining Sacred Texts? To answer this, we must return to the details of the Australian Curriculum. Building on my analysis in Chapter 3, I will show how History and Civics and Citizenship carry a hidden curriculum which parallels the narrative of the classic secularisation thesis. Byrne’s analysis will at times challenge, and at other times, mirror ACARA’s privatisation of religion in its practice of curriculum writing. Each section will draw on postsecular perspectives to challenge the supposed neutrality of this marginalisation, yet conclude by affirming and nuancing Byrne’s principles which can inform an appropriate incorporation of Sacred Texts in secular education.

B. ACARA’S SECULAR NARRATIVE

History: Sacred Texts Are Irrelevant

In Chapter 3 we discovered that Scriptures are important sources upon which students can draw to empathise with the motivations of key characters in our past, and thereby make sense of our complex present. And yet, Sacred Texts are ignored across the History curriculum. Furthermore, students implicitly learn that by 1750 CE “religion” was a spent force for shaping our world. Relegated to the fount of occasional cultural incursions through missionary imposition, sectarian violence, and scientific obscurantism, religions at best were immaterial to humanity’s embrace of political equality.\(^\text{368}\) Sacred Texts are ignored; they are treated as an irrelevant artefact. ACARA’s curriculum writing thus reinforces one particular telling of humanity’s story that is increasingly contested.

The classic secularisation thesis tells a tale of human progress. In simplest terms, the ancient and medieval worlds were held together by canons of conduct and an overarching cosmology supplied by “religions”. These transcendent accounts of the world, often venerated in Sacred Texts, stocked the social imaginary for culture. And yet, as humanity became more self-aware, reason refused to play hand-maiden to revelation. Our advancement required that we jettison restrictive dogmas received by trust, and instead fashion our own future with appeal to what is universally true and common to all open-minded people. Enlightenment within the frame of the classic secularisation thesis is best understood not as an Age, but rather as an ongoing project of liberating individuals from other-worldly superstition and religious control.\(^\text{369}\) This is achieved through disciplined inquiry—that is, scholarship and education—addressing every facet of this-worldly existence. According to this story, as humanity pooled its doctrine-free insights and addressed the actual causes of brokenness in the world, religions would become redundant, reduced to a private pastime. In due time, gathering places for worship would become relics, “sepulchres of God”.\(^\text{370}\) A global and irreversible transition has purportedly begun—fostered by processes of rationalism and bureaucracy, structural differentiation, individualism and religious pluralism\(^\text{371}\)—a kind of


“historical inevitability” in which “modern, secular societies will not be converted back to active religiosity.” Commensurate with this teleological rendering of our past, transcendent visions are deemed irrelevant to education’s futures-oriented curriculum. Consistent with this grand narrative, ACARA has selected against Scriptures in favour of the supposedly secular story of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, an enlightened world’s functional equivalent of a Sacred Text. Granted, the curriculum encourages a diversity of perspectives. Nevertheless, these are all human constructions; texts claiming divine revelation are ignored.

The stripping away of Sacred Texts from profane history has been internationally observed. It builds on the disciplinary presupposition that “God is either dead or irrelevant”. Furthermore, Stephen Prothero demonstrates that when religions and their Scriptures do appear in modern history, they are dramatic incursions without context—a civil rights speech here, a terrorist act there—a diversion from an otherwise irreligious story. He notes the deep irony that “while historians and sociologists are finally coming around to repudiating secularization theory, that theory continues to animate, consciously or unconsciously, the writing and editing of high school textbooks.” This deep resonance between the secularisation thesis and ACARA’s writing of the History curriculum requires illumination.

Secularisation as a sociological concept readily slides from describing the separation of Church and State (differentiation), to prescribing a modern Western society in which religion is confined to one’s personal life (privatisation). The secularisation thesis was believed by most sociologists in the 1970s to accurately represent a global loss of religious authority. Peter Berger, formerly a key proponent, has more recently depicted this story as a self-fulfilling prophecy born out of European exceptionalism, an exercise in ideological wish-fulfilment carried by secularists with “progressive, Enlightened beliefs and values” who “control the institutions that provide the ‘official’ definitions of reality, notably the educational system ….”


373 Warner, Secularization, 20.


375 Nord, Does God Make a Difference, 2, 60, 79.


377 Prothero, Religious, 54.


the opposite extreme. Even so, many scholars have noted that modern public education was birthed during the height of optimism that put its confidence in the deliverances of critical reasoning by autonomous individuals over the dictates of communal wisdom shaped by supposed revelation.381

The implications for my argument are multifarious. The late nineteenth century debates laying the foundation for the excising of Scriptures in Australian secular education were not dispassionate arguments about equity. For some—including liberal Christians who had hitched their theological carriage to higher criticism—revelation represented an obstacle to progress and emancipation through scientific rationality.382 A century later, this Enlightenment account is being deconstructed as merely one big story among others.383 This story was a totalising discourse that privileged exclusively secular ways of knowing over alternative religious stories, tending to silence Sacred Texts in the public sphere, whether politics or education.384 As we explored in Chapter 3, curriculum development is not a neutral process; it reflects the values and agendas of its writers.

Gary Bouma once described “anti-religious secularists [as] the gatekeepers of education policy and teaching in most Australian institutions ….”385 Hypothetically, then, if key strategists within ACARA are themselves secularists, or subscribe to the belief that further societal progress (read “modernisation”) is tied to the privatisation, even retreat, of religion, then they are unlikely to countenance Scriptures as part of the curriculum.386 If, however, they see the educational telos of the Australian Curriculum as producing global citizens who understand and respect religious diversity, given its socio-political significance, then a radical rethink is required.

Cathy Byrne concurs in challenging ACARA’s blind spot. Following Jacques Berlinerblau, secular primarily means “living in the world” or “being of the age”.387 And given that our age is arguably experiencing a resurgence of religion in the public sphere—particularly of the “fundamentalist” variety—it is appropriate for “secular” education to address religion within the general curriculum.388 Byrne would have us recognise “the value of religion in some people’s lives and in history” as a form of intercultural understanding, especially given that religion is a “monumental force in the human story, past and present”.389 Importantly, and aligning with ACARA’s Asian literacy emphasis, she suggests we must expand beyond our predominantly

381 Usher and Edwards, Postmodernism, 2.
383 Lyotard, Postmodern, xxiv; Tracy, Analogical, 346.
385 Cited by Byrne, “Spirit,” 42.
386 Cf. Nord, Does God, 76-78, 296n6, 302n61.
389 Byrne, RiSE, 19, 22-23.
Anglo-Catholic forebears to include Eastern history and perspectives. This includes studying the “dark sides” of religious histories. In Byrne’s words, one of the more “obvious” arguments for studying religion is that “many historical events were driven by religious theology. History is riddled with religion. … we can’t possibly remove it from education without stunting education itself.” To make sense of these theological motives across this world’s stage requires explicit engagement of Sacred Texts.

Byrne thus echoes postsecular critiques of the secularisation thesis and its sidelining of Scriptures. At the global level, while some scholars such as Köhrsen have challenged whether transcendent language has entered the public sphere, the majority agree that, post 9/11, matters of religion are significantly more central than even forty years ago, during the heyday of the secularisation thesis wherein even some theologians predicted the “death of God.” Furthermore, Casanova has demonstrated through case studies—such as the liberating role of the Catholic Church in Poland, and the return of religious association in post-Communist Russia—that social differentiation does not necessarily lead to privatisation of belief; religious deprivatisation may even be a constructive force for democracy. Indeed, rather than “privatisation” of religion, it is now commonplace for scholars to speak of desecularisation and resacralisation. There is, however, no global trend. Secularisation must be considered on a country by country basis.

Concerning Australia, then, I grant that there has been significant secularisation in both religious association and assent, evidenced by an overall decline of Church attendance and Christian belief; gains in agnosticism and atheism have not been offset by immigration or conversion to religions other than Christianity, nor the proliferation of low-demand and largely therapeutic New Religious Movements. Nevertheless, “religion”—to adopt this reified and singular term as constituted by western secular Christian modernity—is as malleable as its adherents who tend to react, adapt, reinterpret, and innovate. Modernisation has not clearly led to secularisation.

Ibid., 2, 108, 158.
Ibid., 24.
Casanova, Public; Asad, Formations, 180-182.
Rather, a more nuanced narrative recognises that “deregulation” and “detrationalisation” of institutional control (both Church and State), combined with individualism and consumerism, has allowed for a pluralisation of religions and intermixing of identity. We are simultaneously post-Christian and postsecular, challenging the privileging of any one account of history, whether religious or non-religious.

Presently in Australia, the majority hold religious beliefs, and New Religious Movements are burgeoning. Even as mainstream religious groups lose power and move to the margins, a religious revitalisation is occurring through the rise of evangelical mega-churches like Sydney’s Hillsong, and the numerical growth of high-demand religious groups that are committed to the authority of “God’s Word” in every aspect of life, personally and corporately. Consequently, far from drifting off, religion and religious issues are returning to centre stage as the subject, source and shaper of social policy. Considered on the global scale, there is a resurgence of religion, in part attributable to higher birth rates among the religious. Religions and their revelations remain relevant to society as a whole, and thus to any account of history. Why, then, does the Australian Curriculum ignore such concerns? Lacking any rationale from the relevant authorities, it is helpful to consider Cathy Byrne’s reluctance, outside of her proposed SecularR&E subject, to incorporate Sacred Texts in the study of History. In this, we gain insight into ACARA’s reticence to broach the topic.

Two barriers present, both located within Byrne’s secular principle. First, Byrne’s agenda to remove doctrine (Concept II) ends up silencing supernaturalist accounts of the past. As explored in Chapter 3, ACARA claims to recognise contested versions of humanity’s story and even the value of biased primary sources in critically reconstructing a plausible historical account. While acknowledging the power of religious stories in SecularR&E, Byrne automatically categorises Sacred Texts as non-historical tales, thus a priori dismissing their relevance to history proper. Any attempt to read these miracle-laden myths as “literally” true or even laterally touching on this-worldly existence is dismissed as ignorant and “medieval”—a threat to the “very nature of human

---

403 Bouma, Australian, 85, 105.
404 Ibid., 142, 149-152, 154-156, 171, 212; Deborah Stevenson, Kevin Dunn, Adam Possamai, and Awais Piracha, “Religious Belief across ‘Post-Secular’ Sydney,” Australian Geographer 41, no. 3 (2010), 323-350.
These concerns are not baseless, and may ground ACARA’s dismissal of Scriptures in this subject. And yet, her simplistic dichotomy of transcendent revelation versus material reality echoes Enlightenment rhetoric and enshrines secularist presuppositions, thus sidestepping the legitimate interaction of secular and sacred perspectives in history. In so doing, she disrespects and excludes the stories of many—not simply “fundamentalist Christians”—who reject this reductionism.

Second, in Byrne’s pursuit of equity and inclusivity (Concept III), she resists particular emphasis upon Christianity and the Bible. Within her frame, for minorities to find a voice, the power of the majority to speak and define history for the Other must be curtailed. She has a point. Byrne rightly questions Christian-only accounts of the world within Special Religious Education, in which “majority justifies privilege”. And yet, Byrne wrongly maps this SRE inequity onto Australian education as a whole. She presumes, without reference to the particulars of any ACARA documents, that Christians are already privileged in the general curriculum, thus any further attention to their particular Sacred Text is injurious to social inclusion. Problematically, however, she ignores the explicit cross-curricular bias toward Asian and Indigenous perspectives, overlooking the widespread minimisation of mainstream Christian perspectives. ACARA’s criteria of “historical significance” should determine curricular inclusion, rather than an idealistic reading of inclusion and an agenda to redress past inequality. By this criterion, there is educational warrant for giving greater attention to the Bible in History than other Sacred Texts which have not comparably shaped Australia’s formation as a western nation. Byrne interprets this as a privileging of the dominant story, irrespective of its educational justification. However, having downplayed the Bible on the basis of equity, no greater rationale remains to incorporate revelations less relevant to our particular history. One cannot prove that Byrne’s and ACARA’s concerns are identical. Nevertheless, this illuminates a plausible reason why Sacred Texts are sidelined. For Byrne, the “equity” principle implies equal inclusion of all religious texts. For ACARA, this same logic may

---

410 Byrne, RiSE, 2, 65, 103, 158.
411 Byrne, RiSE, 259, 263.
underwrite the marginalisation of Scriptures: there are myriad religious traditions and transcendent perspectives, and we cannot include them all; rather than risk being unfair, the “equitable” option is to evenly exclude all revelation. This decision appears logical when coupled with an anti-religious secularisation narrative that presumes all such sources to be largely irrelevant in the modern world.

Civics and Citizenship: Scriptures Are Dangerous

In our study of Civics and Citizenship, we discovered that Scriptures contain rich formulations of humanity’s *summum bonum*, pursued even today by large communities comprising our pluralistic democracy.\(^{414}\) Inasmuch as ACARA desires to form active citizens who can work together for the common good, these sacred stories should be incorporated in this subject. Unlike History, the concern to “understand, appreciate and respect religious diversity” as a contemporary reality is evident in this subject. As with Byrne’s proposal for SecularR&E, particular religious perspectives are mentioned and common ground is sought for mutual understanding and social justice. Nevertheless, the simplistic and shallow treatment of faiths in this subject tends to homogenise and relativise religions around shared Australian identity. In so doing, difference was downplayed, and the educative potential for incorporating Sacred Texts was overlooked. It would seem, then, that ACARA’s curriculum writing suffers from content overload rather than ideological distortion. Even so, it is instructive to probe another facet of the classic secularisation thesis which may inform these patterns.

Having offered a wide-ranging historical sketch in the previous section, we must focus in on the bloody post-Reformation world. One high school text covers this theme under the heading, “Why Can’t We All Get Along?”\(^{415}\) According to this story, religious rivalry between Christian sects—each vying for uniform religious belief as the prerequisite for social peace—had degenerated into the Thirty Years War. Between 1618 and 1648 Europe was decimated physically and financially. Progressively it dawned on people that “religious passion destroys social peace”.\(^{416}\) The Peace of Westphalia signalled their political salvation. This series of treaties marked an intentional differentiation of “political concerns and religious aspirations … for the good of both”.\(^{417}\) This transfer of control was active secularisation, Churches relinquishing lands and peoples to secular and sovereign States as impartial arbiters who governed by common law rather than religious writ. This secular settlement was germinal to modern political formulations which enshrined principles of “equality of respect and freedom of conscience”, enabled by the “separation of Church and State


\(^{417}\) Frame, *Church*, 25.
and the neutrality of the State toward religions”. In its early appropriation, mutual tolerance—the new prerequisite for social peace—was secured by compartmentalising religious identity and Scriptural authority, finding common ground as individual citizens loyal to their nation and the dictates of reason. More recently, and in the face of rising religious diversity and violence, the Westphalian solution has universalised. As global citizens, our commitment must be to common Human Rights which arbitrate between warring religious factions whose terror threatens to engulf us all. Local accommodations to religious identity are at times necessary concessions to secure a lasting peace where such distinctions will hopefully become redundant. From this perspective, the introduction of Sacred Texts and doctrinal beliefs into secular education, particularly Civics and Citizenship, is “either a relatively harmless mistake or a less innocent attempt to erode the state’s religious neutrality and pluralism”.

This account of secularisation, Scriptures and citizenship sounds plausible. At points, it illuminates the framing of the Civics and Citizenship curriculum, and reflects concerns raised by Cathy Byrne. At the risk of conflating their views, it is informative to consider their collective agenda. The divorce of religious and political authority is echoed in ACARA’s definition of Australia as a secular society:

Secular: Relating to the worldly rather than religion; things that are not regarded as religious, spiritual, or sacred. For example, a secular society is one governed by people’s laws through parliament rather than by religious laws.

Byrne rightly rejects this secular–religion dualism, for faiths have always been, and increasingly are, concerned with temporal existence. Nevertheless, she endorses this political separation as according with “state control and accountability” that ensures freedom from “religious interference” (Concept I) and clerical influence (Concept II) in education. Rather than excluding religions, however, she suggests that the establishment must “enable” space for the disenfranchised fundamentalists flying under the radar to enter “through the main gates [i.e., controlled within the

---

420 Huntington, Clash.
423 Byrne, RiSE, 21, 53, 259.
formal curriculum], where we can all keep an eye on it. Odd things can happen in the shadows.”^{426} This requires “vigilance against regressive religious ideas and ideologies”.^{427}

Politically and educationally, I endorse Byrne’s and ACARA’s soft secular settlement that gives a voice to religious diversity.^{428} Nonetheless, this boundary setting attitude, insulation of individual students from communities of belief, and overriding suspicion of religious devotion mirrors the mythic narrative of Westphalia; it employs secularity as a “combat concept” to reassert control over contested educational territory.^{429} It ignores the postsecular counter-narrative in which emerging States seized control from religious authorities and local governance to declare their sole legitimacy to wield the sword; their power was secured by subsequently demonising Scriptures as the source of conflict, and constituting “religion” as a private predilection.^{430} The imposition of the former interpretation through Westphalian (Western) overreach, in the name of establishing neutral democracy on a global scale, has incited violent resistance—less against another religion and more against reified “secularism”.^{431}

In reality, less than 10 per cent of wars are rightly classified as religious.^{432} Conversely, respected political scientist R. J. Rummel spent his life documenting the 262 million people killed by their government (“democide”) in the twentieth century alone.^{433} The hollowing out of allegiances between the State and the individual—whether guild or religious group—arguably laid the foundation for governmental totalitarianism, historically a greater danger than sectarian privilege.^{434} The State generates its own sacred stories to legitimate this artificial association, which in turn undermines competing transnational narratives.^{435} As such, there is reason to believe that meaningful engagement with religious groups as a “middle community” may actually mitigate the

---

426 Ibid., 15, also 262-264.
427 Ibid., 257.
428 Ibid., 46.
danger of an exclusively secular educational sphere, bolstering tolerance through fostering open and respectful dialogue.436 Citizenship education should expose students to prophetic perspectives which challenge the political status quo—voices that often draw upon Scriptural stories set against the absolutising of any immanent order.437

Religious violence is real and should be addressed. Concurrently, however, we must challenge the automatic association of religion and violence, with secularised State education positioned as the saviour. Religious and civil institutions must both learn from their failures and collaborate toward peace.438 This is hampered by a threat-minimisation justification for RE, which Liam Gearon identifies as part of a widespread and instrumentalist turn to securitisation in education. It tends to distort religions, reducing them from comprehensive ways of life to cognitive propositions about which we debate.439

Positively, a potential role for Scriptures is found in ACARA’s and Byrne’s priority of developing tolerance, mutual understanding, and common action for emancipation through critical citizenship. This reflects Lockean thought, preferring reasoned discourse about formative beliefs rather than privatisation in the public sphere; schools are where we learn to resolve apparently insuperable differences in competing visions of the common good.440 Byrne’s emphasis on philosophical ethics may be understood as a desire to move past doctrinal difference by focusing on similar ethical precepts espoused within a diversity of religious and non-religious revered texts.441 Problematically in this framing, however, Scriptural wisdom such as the Good Samaritan is readily secularised, sifting for moral “do-goodery” that props up the State in its immanent concerns while relativising the transcendent.442 In so doing, religions cease to be religiously understood, further marginalising believers of all persuasions.443 Byrne recognises this concern, but largely reproduces

---

437 Rowan Williams, Faith in the Public Square (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 25; Volf, Public, 7-8, 100-101, 104-105. Consider the faith-full activism of William Wilberforce, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, the Dalai Lama, Thích Nhất Hạnh, Desmond Tutu, and Martin Luther King, Jr.
441 Byrne, RiSE, 25.
442 Terence Copley, “Young People, Biblical Narrative and ‘Theologizing’,” Religious Education 100, iss. 3 (2005), 254-265.
it through her approach to Secular R&E which is aimed at “facilitating debate about varying religious and non-religious ideas”.

Somewhat nuancing the classic secularisation narrative, Byrne concedes that peace is not possible without necessarily engaging religious beliefs: “Although an historic justification for war, it appears that religion can also act as an ethical anchor for civility.” Similarly, the Year 10 AC:CC has students consider “challenges to and ways of sustaining a resilient democracy and cohesive society”. This involves evaluating the threat of “vested interests” to democracy, and identifying shared values and legal safeguards aligned with the Human Rights frame of International Conventions—a commitment Byrne shares. These are, in my estimation, good things. As a Christian, I have my own theological rationale to support each proposal. And yet, the failure to acknowledge the particularity and genealogy of such ideals constitutes a civil religion, “the church of Human Rights”, perpetuating a type of “epistemological violence” that censures students from traditions whose Scripturally grounded ethics prevent them from signing on.

On each of these points, ACARA’s homogenising and relativising of religions, either avoiding or secularising Sacred Texts, aligns with the story that Scriptures are dangerous. The State recognises just enough superficial difference to acknowledge and include disparate communities in a unifying national myth, gaining the benefits of their participation. Sources that nurture deep diversity in identity, however, are silenced as a threat to the common good. This, in turns, parallels and builds upon a problematic secularisation narrative embedded in ACARA’s curriculum and Byrne’s secular principle. They mistakenly conclude that Scriptures can only cause conflict in secular education and thus are best downplayed.

As with Byrne’s historical commentary, Maddox claims that debates over the Christian Scriptures in education have damaged social cohesion. “Scripture” became synonymous with sectarian religious instruction, further stoking the fire. Thus, in the late nineteenth century choice between Scriptures and a peaceful State, secular education excluding all revelation won. It must

---

444 Byrne, RiSE, 37-38, also 8, 23-24, 47-49.
445 Ibid., 26, also 11-12.
446 ACHCK094.
447 ACHCK093.
448 Byrne, RiSE, 45.
452 Maddox, “Free, Compulsory and Secular,” in TGS, Ch. 2, esp. Loc. 1067.
453 Maddox, TGS, 939-957.
be noted, however, that all parties justified Scripture reading on the basis of nurturing conservative “Christian values” to preserve a fledgling Federation from social decline. As Byrne notes, models of RE and rationales for inclusion have changed. It will not do to reject religion in education today based on nineteenth century reasons. Educational approaches develop in response to the social milieu. As John Hull analyses, during secular education’s formation there were few power brokers—Catholics, Protestants, Secularists—competing in a destabilised system; violent disagreement thus ruled Scripture out. In contrast, contemporary State education is established, and pluralisation of religious identification has decentred power structures. Additionally, nation-wide studies have found that amidst this diversity, the majority of citizens support education that will help students better understand the worldview of their neighbours to aid social harmony. We have already seen that political secularism, from the outset, was less an ideology of religious exclusion than a pragmatic arrangement to help diverse groups coexist. On the same rationale, pursuit of the common good today warrants the incorporation of Scriptures.

This requires curriculum writers to embrace some conflict as necessary on the path to maximal citizenship and substantial peace. Educational administrators must not avoid contentious subject matter—a risk averse strategy which partially explains the removal of Sacred Texts from secular education. As Cathy Byrne observes, “Australia has entrenched boundaries when it comes to religion in public schools.” Calls to make the study of religion a public priority have largely been ignored. Every State’s Education Act has provision for addressing questions of religion yet, lacking Departmental support, it has never been enforced or encouraged. Consequently, it has not happened. Presently, however, conflict is unavoidable. How, then, should curriculum writers respond? And what might this mean for the incorporation of Sacred Texts in Civics and Citizenship?

455 Maddox, TGS, 855; Byrne, RiSE, 210-211.
464 Hill, Exploring.
There has been a marked upsurge of both conservative Islam and evangelicalism on the world stage, both groups holding to their Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God and seeking to live out this vision with a “voice in the public forum.”\textsuperscript{466} If engaged well, this could become a force for literacy, education, and even revitalising ailing democracy with firm conviction and practical compassion.\textsuperscript{467} If, however, these movements are misconstrued and marginalised by paternalistic secularism that silences their self-understanding, we may expect increased violence.\textsuperscript{468} Either way, the ideological landscape is not what the secularisation thesis predicted. We find a plurality of voices with no simple way to adjudicate between their claims to rationality and justice.\textsuperscript{469} Rather than a homogenous cosmopolitanism exported to the world by the secular West, we find “multiple modernities”—religious and non-religious alike—all influencing and being influenced by a modernising world.\textsuperscript{470}

ACARA, alongside Byrne, may decry religious passion in politics and education, longing for the golden age of agnostic and nominally religious leaders who respected the ideology of inclusion and embraced a “voice from the secular middle ground”.\textsuperscript{471} Employing Concept II of the Secular Principle, they may bar religious doctrine from the curriculum. And yet, amidst such epistemic and moral confusion, it is neither neutral nor beneficial to bracket our orienting accounts of existence, especially if they derive from potentially transcendent revelation.\textsuperscript{472} These personal beliefs are not private: they have public implications, and thus require substantive debate with a conscience open to inquiry where we reason together upon common ground-rules.\textsuperscript{473}

This necessitates a national curriculum which engages with, rather than excludes, Sacred Texts from the study of Civics and Citizenship. It requires some level of theological reasoning, thus doctrinal awareness, as students engage the inner logic of their neighbour’s worldview.\textsuperscript{474} Lacking

\textsuperscript{467} Martin, “Evangelical,” 39; Berger, “Desecularization,” 14; Casanova, Public.
\textsuperscript{468} Byrne, RI\textsuperscript{SE}, 236. This “tough-minded liberal agenda” and secularist gate-keeper attitude to multiculturalism is evident in Stephen Macedo’s book, Diversity and Distrust (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 12.
\textsuperscript{471} Byrne, RI\textsuperscript{SE}, 9, 38, 224, 253, 259, 262.
this religious literacy, students are not prepared for critical democratic citizenship.\footnote{Andrew Wright, \textit{Critical Religious Education, Multiculturalism and the Pursuit of Truth} (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007).} Simply telling students who are susceptible to radicalisation that theirs is actually a religion of peace is poor education; it only serves to suppress deeply held beliefs.\footnote{Angela Quartermaine, “Discussing Terrorism,” \textit{British Journal of Religious Education}, iFirst (2014), 13.} Precisely because of the misuse of Scriptures in the cause of terror, students must be taught to respectfully read and critically deconstruct these documents.\footnote{John Renard, \textit{Fighting Words} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012); Sebastian Kim and Jonathan Draper, eds. \textit{Liberating Texts? Sacred Scriptures in Public Life} (London: SPCK, 2008); Roxanne Euben, “Killing (for) Politics,” \textit{Political Theory} 30, no. 1 (2002), 4-35.} In so doing, and as Byrne desires, we may discover that “greater understanding enables and engenders greater tolerance and capacity for appreciation”.\footnote{Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 6, also 25, 48-49.} This aligns with ACARA’s inclusive vision of education that equips students in our simultaneously “secular, pluralist, [and] multicultural society” to discover “overlapping consensus” for constructive action.\footnote{SAC:CC, §21f. C.f. John Rawls, \textit{Political Liberalism} (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 153-154; Maclure and Taylor, \textit{Secularism}, 11-12; Masoumeh Bahram, “Habermas, Religion, and Public Life,” \textit{Journal of Contemporary Religion} 28, no. 3 (2013), 353-367.} Sacred Texts can serve this telos, cultivating a “democracy of interconnectedness” for the common good.\footnote{Fischer, Hotam and Wexler, “Democracy,” 272.}

**New Criteria Orienting Equitable Incorporation of Sacred Texts**

Can secular education permit Scriptures? In this chapter I have sought to interpret ACARA’s sidelining of Sacred Texts through sociological parallels with the classic secularisation thesis and Cathy Byrne’s “secular principle”. In History, the story that Sacred Texts are irrelevant was discredited. Instead, on a global scale religions are on the rise. Locally, Scriptural illiteracy is a liability for understanding our contested past, particularly as it impacts upon matters of public concern amidst multiple modernities and resurgent Islam and evangelicalism. In Civics and Citizenship, the simplistic assertion that Scriptures are dangerous was contested. The homogenisation of religions and the sidelining of revelation in the curriculum, rather than securing our safety, tends to agitate religious conservatives by misrepresenting their self-understanding and extending the secular State’s paternalistic boundary setting through imposing “universal” human rights. In contrast, critical use of Scriptures can reveal the particular motives of diverse communities toward discovering overlapping consensus in civil discourse, thus promoting peace. On each front, a postsecular perspective was employed to deconstruct this secularisation narrative, finding it wanting. An exclusively closed take on the world distances communities which are open...
to the transcendent, seeking wisdom for this life from revelation above. This is counterproductive in a cosmopolitan context, obscuring the warranted educational incorporation of Scriptures in the Australian Curriculum, and working against ACARA’s explicit aims that students would make sense of the world and work together for the common good.

What, then, of Byrne’s “secular principle”? Our projects differ, necessitating careful critique. Byrne’s focus is Religious Education, removing enfaithing SRE which educates into religion, and replacing this with her comparative SecularR&E subject that educates from and about religion. My focus is incorporating Sacred Texts into the formal curriculum of established subjects. Nevertheless, Byrne intends for her ideology to broadly apply to Australian State schools, under ACARA’s purview. Her principle is intended to circumscribe any incorporation of religions and their revelations in a secular curriculum. Thus, my critique is warranted, even as I have applied her principle to a situation she did not envisage.

My critique exposed two persistent flaws. First, by adopting a procedural/governance definition of secularity, which she deemed “neutral”, Byrne has ignored the cross-curricular privileging of substantively secularist ideology which has shaped disciplinary presuppositions and propositions. Second, by failing to engage foundational curriculum documents, she has presumed the purpose of each subject and thereby compartmentalised Scriptures, absented from the three-dimensional integration mandated by ACARA.

Even so, my interpretation in this chapter demonstrated that the “secular principle” is a helpful guide to Scriptural incorporation. State control and accountability (concept I) were consistently affirmed, provided counter-narratives could be voiced to challenge governmental overreach and potential totalitarianism. The removal of clerical influence and religious doctrine (concept II) was found to be more problematic. In principle, curriculum writers—as professional educators—must be free to direct what they believe Australian students need to learn. If by “doctrine” Byrne means the privileging of one religion’s dogma, taught as true despite being culturally contested, then I concur. However, she reaches further, undermining the direct consideration of revelation across the curriculum, and virtually isolating educators and Australian students from their diverse communities of interpretation, thereby privileging her disputable and progressive doctrine to the exclusion of conservative voices. Scriptures are not identical to the doctrine believers generate, so they cannot a priori be excluded on her criteria. Likewise, clerical input into which passages are studied and how they are typically understood should not necessarily

---

481 Taylor terms this “exclusive humanism”, enabled by an “anthropocentric immanentization”. See his Secular Age, 143, 221-224, 309-310. On wisdom for secular flourishing, see Volf, Public, 7-8, 100-105.
484 Cf. Byrne, RiSE, 7-9, 55-59, 223.
be construed as a violation of the secular principle, lest we presuppose an “antiquated epistemology” of the learner as reducible to an autonomous mind which may objectively know all that is apart from trust.\footnote{See Elmer Thiessen, \textit{Teaching for Commitment} (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 154, 216, 239, 273; Mike Radford, “Faith and Reason in a Post Secular Age,” \textit{Journal of Beliefs and Values} 33, iss. 2 (2012), 229-240.} Educators must be free to draw from wisdom in the local community that serves curricular ends, whatever its source.\footnote{Norma González, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti, \textit{Funds of Knowledge} (New York: Routledge, 2009); Trevor Cairney, “Beyond the Classroom Walls,” \textit{Educational Review} 52, no. 2 (2000), 163-174. Cf. Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 21, 48 (in tension with 53, 259), suggesting that under tightly controlled situations and exposed to plural perspectives, youth must be permitted to do their own theologising—that is, meaning-making—in response to what they encounter and the “big questions” of life.\footnote{Julia Ipgrave, “From Storybooks to Bullet Points,” \textit{British Journal of Religious Education}, iFirst article December 21 (2012), 7.} Minimally, youth must be permitted to do their own theologising—that is, meaning-making—in response to what they encounter and the “big questions” of life.\footnote{Cf. Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 213, 258-259.}

Finally, concerning inclusive respect and equity for all religions and non-religions (concept III), I support institutional agnosticism, provided it does not enervate student passion, privatise convictions, or misrepresent beliefs, as Byrne has done with conservatives, fundamentalists, and evangelicals throughout her book.\footnote{Cf. Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 74, 154.} Respect and equity are admirable, albeit ill-defined, aims. Nonetheless, I reject a neo-Marxist reading of “active inclusion” which polarises education in a zero-sum battle between majorities and minorities.\footnote{See Friedrich Schweitzer, “Children as Theologians,” in \textit{Education, Religion and Society}, ed. Dennis Bates, Gloria Durka, and Friedrich Schweitzer (London: Routledge, 2006), 181-182.} Respect requires that we move beyond identity politics and embrace the intercultural skills Byrne emphasises, where everyone’s orienting narrative is heard.\footnote{Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 72-74, 154-155, 163-165, 172, 210-211, 216, 223. Byrne labels as “extremist” anyone who reads their Scripture “literally” \textit{(inter alia, for instance 2, 56-57)}, falling short of her espousal of unmitigated inclusion and radical diversity (55, 123, 260). On the importance of precisely using the term “fundamentalist”—which Byrne applies to Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and sundry others whose interpretation of revelation presumably has illiberal implications for the modern world—see Scott Appleby, “Rethinking Fundamentalism in a Secular Age,” in \textit{Rethinking}, Chapter 10.} The great religious stories hold spiritual and moral significance for all students irrespective of one’s personal creed and devotion; they are the inheritance of humanity as a whole, not possessed by any one community.\footnote{Cf. Byrne, \textit{RiSE}, 59-66, 124-125, 143. Cf. Byrne, “Freirean Critical Pedagogy’s Challenge to Interfaith Education,” \textit{British Journal of Religious Education} 33, iss. 1 (2011), 47-60.} As such, “substantial acquaintance with such key narratives is the general educational right of all rather than just some.”\footnote{Cf. Halldis Breidlid and Tove Nicolaisen, “Stories and Storytelling in Religious Education in Norway,” in \textit{Diversity as Ethos}, ed. David Chidester, Janet Stonier and Judy Tobler (Cape Town: Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa, 1999), 140-154.} Deep equality requires that we cease tallying references to each text,\footnote{Julia Ipgrave, “From Storybooks to Bullet Points,” \textit{British Journal of Religious Education}, iFirst article December 21 (2012), 7.} and instead give primary consideration to educational grounds for content selection, dynamically responding to the diversity of students in one’s class.
Byrne’s usage of “secular” has muddied the waters. She positions this perspective as the stance of a neutral negotiator, rather than the lingering spirit of attenuated liberal Protestantism which haunts secularisation’s chequered sociological past. Her narrow usage misaligns with senior bodies such as the Australian Human Rights Commission. They adopt a substantive definition surrounding identity and belief, eschewing this loaded word in preference of “civil society”—presumably also deeming “civil education” as more inclusive than “secular education”. Byrne approves the simplicity of John Stuart Mill’s definition of secular as “whatever has reference to this life”, yet her differentiation of subjects privatises beliefs and disregards Scriptural wisdom for all of life. In short, while the criteria of “equity, state neutrality, professionalism and accountability” can safeguard education against religious imposition, her use of “secular” is not inclusive or clear enough.

As sociologist Lois Lee argues, the multiple uses and ideological freight of this word has brought us to an impasse. Her solution, intended to align the micro, meso, and macro levels of analysis, simply defines secular as “something for which religion is not the primary reference point”; it is a matter of priority rather than polarity. It is centred upon our common existence in this time and place, rather than aimed at the transcendent above and beyond our worldly horizon. In accepting this definition, the “secular” integration of Scriptures must serve the Australian Curriculum’s telos rather than become a religious end in itself.

As we seek guidelines for the incorporation of Sacred Texts in secular education, Byrne’s “plural principle” is preferable. At the class level, this principle “recognises (and encourages students to respect) differences, but demands equitable treatment of individuals despite those differences.” At the curriculum level, this requires three things:

that religions can be studied in the plural, not simply through a single tradition (thus religions not religious); that secular study should be “about” and “from” religions and therefore include an ethical component; and that this study can and ought to consider non-religious points of view (thus religions and ethics, not religions or ethics).

---

497 Byrne, RiSE, 53.
499 Defending this approach against charges of instrumentalisation, see Robert Jackson, “Intercultural Education and Religious Education,” in Education, 52. Provided faiths are not distorted to serve secular ends, this is legitimate as part of a liberal education.
500 Byrne, RiSE, 224-225.
Tying these threads together with insights from the subjects analysed, I suggest that secular education can permit Scriptures, provided the following seven criteria are met. First, relevance. The incorporation of Sacred Texts must clearly serve ACARA’s curriculum aims. Second, accountability. Professional educators determine and deliver the curriculum, even as this permits community consultation with recognised authorities. Third, democracy.\(^ {502}\) The use of Scriptures, while neither downplaying difference nor avoiding necessary conflict, must in a deep sense contribute toward a more inclusive, just, and peaceful society that is characterised by active citizenship where students work together for the common good. Fourth, respect. A student’s right to the final say is protected, never coercing belief or practice and always excluding approaches that may be construed as indoctrination. Fifth, veracity.\(^ {503}\) While the State should not be the arbiter of metaphysical beliefs, students should work towards accurately representing and critically engaging these texts, forming their own views. Sixth, diversity. Within a given subject, the curriculum must encourage equity among students and between diverse worldviews—whether religious, secular, or spiritual—engaging individual stories and communal narratives that are functionally “sacred” to members of the class and wider community. Seventh, integration. The use of Sacred Texts must help students put life together as an ecological whole, connecting ways of knowing, doing, being, and feeling to support the flourishing of all.

Relevance, accountability, democracy, respect, veracity, diversity, and integration—together these seven criteria comprise my modified “plural principle”. They must not be employed so stringently as to silence all but the most banal use of Scriptures. Rather, these criteria acknowledge the core of ACARA and Cathy Byrne’s concerns to preserve secular education, and orient the equitable incorporation of Sacred Texts by curriculum writers.

As we turn to consider a theology of education and the place of Sacred Texts therein, it is timely to complete Huston Smith’s assertion at the beginning of this chapter. How can revelation simultaneously relativise and exalt our secular existence? He responds:

> It relativizes the everyday world by showing it to be less than the “all” that we unthinkingly take it to be and that demotion turns out to be exhilarating. By placing the quotidian world in a vastly more meaningful context, revelation dignifies it the way a worthy setting enhances the beauty of a precious stone. People respond to this news of life’s larger meaning because they hear in it the final warrant for their existence.\(^ {504}\)


\(^{503}\) Cf. Byrne, RISE, 269: “Such freedom, especially in regards to religion in state schooling, includes the freedom to doubt, critique, question, and challenge the prevailing order; to be religious, or not.”

\(^{504}\) Huston Smith, “Foreword,” in World’s Wisdom, ix.
Fusing the various definitions we have encountered, the *secular* may be understood as a principal emphasis upon the here and now. To the degree that Sacred Texts can support our living together in this world, and serve the Australian Curriculum rather than “religion” as the primary reference point, secular education can permit Scriptures.
PART II

UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM: SCRIPTURES SERVING SHALOM

We are our stories. We become our stories. And sometimes these stories are taken from the communal imaginings that have been disciplined for public sharing. As public, they are visible psyches to us, alternatives and visions, projections and reflections that are our contemporary mythologies, and that may seed our own future imaginings.

*William Doty, “The Stories of Our Times”*

Every teacher ... who becomes a disciple in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a homeowner who brings from his storeroom new gems of truth as well as old.

*Mathew 13:52 (NLT)*
Chapter 5
Sacred Texts and Education’s End: A Biblical Story

Having explained the place of Sacred Texts in Australian public middle-school education, we now turn to understanding what, from a Christian theological perspective, should be the place of Scriptures in secular schools. It is one thing to assert that religions and their revelations, by definition, offer overarching interpretations of the world and our place therein. It is quite another to demonstrate that a particular Sacred Text—in this case the Bible—yields wisdom that may inform the practice of contemporary curriculum writing in a pluralistic setting.

In this chapter, then, I construct a normative vision for Sacred Texts in secular education as serving the end of shalom. First, however, we must reconnect curriculum theorising and theology, for the secularisation of schooling has severed modern educational reasoning from its ancient revelatory roots.505

**A. EDUCATION, REVELATION AND A BIBLICAL CURRICULUM**

Religion and public education are not as disparate as may first seem. Indeed, Alfred North Whitehead suggested that “the essence of education is that it be religious”.506 Far from a novel assertion, Whitehead was echoing the majority of philosophers from ages prior to the Enlightenment: education serves a transcendent *telos*, guided by a metaphysical agent as the ultimate pedagogue.507 Consider the four curriculum types from Chapter 3. Each purpose, variously represented in the Australian Curriculum, is religiously interested and requires a larger frame of reference for justification. What does it mean for a limited and biased proto-academic to “know” something? What idea of society gives priority to one set of skills over another? Beyond describing how human development unfolds, is there a plan or exemplar guiding educationalists as they facilitate learner-centred growth? And what is the *sumnum bonum* of our communal existence by which we may judge this world as in need of reconstruction, thereby pursuing transformation? Answers differ according to one’s metanarrative. Weighing competing educational visions lifts our eyes from the horizon of “What is most worth knowing?” to ask “What makes something worthwhile?” At this point we are dealing with transcendent notions of the true, good, and beautiful that interweave teleological and theological language.508

---

507 Hodgson, *God’s Wisdom*, 2-6, 11-49.

76
Others have extended this interrelationship. William Pinar, in particular, has called for “porous borders” and “hybrid theories” which amalgamate diverse conceptions of curriculum development to refresh what was a moribund field. Pinar champions a reconstruction of educational vision that starts with larger questions of purpose as potently explored by religious accounts of the world. Curricular theorist Dwayne Huebner, to whom we will return in Chapter 6, is extolled as the prime practitioner of this cross-pollination. As such, the reconnection of theology and public education is both warranted and required.

Orienting the Curricular Story

How, then, may we best access Christian theological thought as a conversation partner? I contend that the most fruitful meeting point emerges from the etymological roots of education. As Huebner explicates, *education* derives from *educarē*. Beyond educing what students already know, the Latin evinces a “leading out” from somewhere and to somewhere. Aligned with the narrative turn in curricular theorising, the religious motif of education as the story of a communal journey is appropriate. In this context, Sacred Texts represent the memories and traditions of whole people groups, and their vision of the “good”, called forward by the essential Otherness and mystery of the ground of all being. There is, however, no universal narrative or singular take. I speak from within the community of Christian theologians. The story we tell is diverse in authorship and plotline. It is one account among many. Even so, this particular narrative has indelibly imprinted itself upon modern notions of curriculum which signpost where Australian students may together travel. Like “education”, *curriculum* comes from Latin roots meaning “course”, originally the route of a chariot race. In the broadest sense, “curriculum”—as in *curriculum vitae*—described the meandering course of one’s life. In a pedagogical sense, curriculum was an open-ended pursuit of wisdom to direct one’s path. And yet, as the Protestant Reformation morphed into the Enlightenment “rage for order”, curriculum in the educational context narrowed from learning about and for life, to a

---

particular method and course of study, finally reducing to specific content in pursuit of control.\textsuperscript{517} William Doll thus calls for a return to the vitality of earlier notions of education. We must widen our horizon from \textit{curriculum} as a noun that defines a set course, to \textit{currere} as a verb emphasising the transformative and dialogical experience of running as an individual located within larger communities on a trek.\textsuperscript{518} It begins with autobiographical reflection, and helps us negotiate difference “between ourselves and the text, between ourselves and the students, and among all three. Herein is born a new curricular spirit.”\textsuperscript{519} The sharing of stories thus bridges secular curriculum theorising and Christian educational theologising.\textsuperscript{520}

Such themes invite theological reflection upon where our various chariots may be headed in a pluralistic society, and how education may facilitate the journey.\textsuperscript{521} Such visions resonate with constructive pedagogy, where the “multiple telling of [students’ own] stories … is likely to avoid the pitfalls of singularity”, and the school can become the central locus for democratic transformation through critical and engaged citizenship.\textsuperscript{522}

Which story, then, shall I tell? In simplest form, a story plots the journey across time and place from “here” to “there”; it is driven by tension and seeks resolution through the movement of key agents toward a \textit{telos}.\textsuperscript{523} As we seek a broadly Christian account of education and the place of Sacred Texts therein, what is the narrative hinge, and whence is the destination? There is no shortage of theological proposals for education’s end. Goheen and Bartholomew list recurrent themes in the literature, including “educating for responsive discipleship, for freedom, for responsible action, … for commitment.”\textsuperscript{524} We may further add education for integration and for the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{525} While each of these visions illuminate important aspects of this endeavour, there is a tendency in many of these proposals toward Christian-centrism: an excessive focus on Christianity and Christian agendas to the exclusion of others.\textsuperscript{526} Goheen and Bartholomew, for instance, suggest that the richest \textit{telos} integrating a Christian theology of education is “education for witness.” This approach is theologically sound and educationally rich in the context of Christian Schools.\textsuperscript{527} Nevertheless, talk of divine reign ushered in by elect witnesses derails dialogue with

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{518} Doll, “Ghosts,” 43-45.
\item \textsuperscript{519} Ibid., 45.
\item \textsuperscript{520} Ibid., 61n30.
\item \textsuperscript{521} Molly Quinn, “Holy Vision, Wholly Vision-ing,” in \textit{Curriculum Visions}, 232-244.
\item \textsuperscript{522} Vicki Crowley, “Towards a Postcolonial Curriculum,” in \textit{Contesting the Curriculum}, 100-111.
\item \textsuperscript{524} Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew, \textit{Living at the Crossroads} (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 170.
\item \textsuperscript{525} Ken Gnanakan, \textit{Integrated Learning} (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2011); Groome, \textit{CRE}, 35-36, 49.
\item \textsuperscript{526} Greider, “Religious Pluralism,” 459.
\end{itemize}
secular educationalists, perceived as the triumphalist exclusion of every non-Christian story-teller who refuses to bow the knee. Evangelical authors, in particular, tend to construct a Christian theology of Christian education. What, though, of a biblical vision fitting for pluralistic public education? We require a more irenic and inclusive frame.

Biblically conceived, the most comprehensive purpose for humanity as a whole is arguably shalom. This Hebrew word, translated as “peace”, exceeds the absence of hostility to embrace the completeness of life abundant.528 Shalom comprises duty and delight through right relatedness with God, others, self, and the world.529 In short, shalom represents the common good of humanity and the holistic flourishing of all creation.530 From a biblical perspective, education is ultimately in service of shalom.531

**Re-Scripting Sacred Texts in Secular Education**

Adopting shalom as the fulcrum of the story will not, however, allay the legitimate concerns of secularists. As with the classic secularisation thesis, universal theological narratives tend to be dangerously totalising and unhelpfully “epic”.532 That is, they downplay interpretive plurality in an overly neat and near deterministic retelling of human history. Conversely, reducing the biblical story to merely another subjectivist and “lyrical” take on the world undercuts the power of revelation and potential for a fusion of horizons with ACARA’s educational vision. The challenge is to construct a middle way, rescripting the role Sacred Texts may play in secular educational theorising.

Following Hans Urs von Balthasar, Ben Quash explains that *theodramatics* “concerns itself with human actions (people), temporal events (time) and their specific contexts (place) in relation to God’s purpose.”533 The genuine agency of the characters is the bridge between the lyrical experience of humanity from below, and the epic unfolding narration from above, pieced together theologically from Scriptural revelation.534 In this reframing, the *secular* represents the worldly stage

---

529 Stackhouse, *Making the Best*, 205-220.
534 Ibid., 5, 41-48.
which hosts the divine drama “on which the dignity of the human person [is] played out”.\textsuperscript{535} Secularisation centralises human agency, understood as an ongoing conflict as people pursue genuine liberty, taking responsibility for the world, or end up enslaved as they idolatrously enshrine some immanent authority—whether religious, spiritual or secular/political—as absolute.\textsuperscript{536} In this context, Scriptures function as timely stage direction in the drama of life.\textsuperscript{537} Mixing metaphors, they offer track notes for a community educating its children to walk in the way of wisdom.\textsuperscript{538} Rescribed thus, the Christian Scriptures may be a bulwark against domination, for they function as “a word that journeys with us, … part of the drama itself” stimulating insight and calling human actors to make sagacious choices on the path to life.\textsuperscript{539}

If the Bible is understood as a relatively “open” and non-foundationalist metanarrative with an underdetermined end comprised of “little narratives”, then we may resist postmodern deconstruction and secularist objections alike, which a priori dismiss divine authorship and metanarrative as totalising discourse.\textsuperscript{540} A “responsible plurality” of readings is invited, leaving space for human improvisation as actors in a theodrama.\textsuperscript{541} This hermeneutic has been employed by leading educational philosophers to demonstrate that Christians can simultaneously hold to the authority of their Sacred Text without it becoming authoritarian, thus making space for a constructivist pedagogy.\textsuperscript{542}

In dialogue with secular educational theorising, this hermeneutic makes space for Spirit-led serendipity—call it luck or providence—as a community creatively brings this Scripture to bear on contemporary questions.\textsuperscript{543} While never the final word, such explorations may start new conversations that better fuse theory and practice.\textsuperscript{544} Undoubtedly, the Bible does not speak directly about “curriculum”; it is anachronistic to read secular schools with a pluralistic clientele into this

\textsuperscript{537} Kevin Vanhoozer, \textit{The Drama of Doctrin}e (Louisville, KT: Westminster John Knox, 2005).
\textsuperscript{538} Cf. Hardy, “Reason,” 75-77; Volf, \textit{Public}, 100-105.
ancient text. Furthermore, we must avoid a flat and ahistorical mapping of the past onto the present. Nevertheless, there remains warrant to wrestle with the Christian Scriptures by applying what Zoë Bennett terms the “hermeneutic of immediacy”. Through the overlapping of the biblical story and our contemporary educational context, we may “illuminate the meaning in practice of the biblical text” and discover fresh resonance which resources prophetic critique.

In this spirit of a dramatic rescripting and a playful hermeneutic, this canonical account offers a creative window into what I will term God’s Curriculum. As Gabriel Moran suggests, divine revelation and human response may be understood through the metaphor of the teaching–learning relationship. God speaks and draws humanity toward life abundant for the sake of holistic flourishing in all creation. We, however, have the freedom to participate or resist. Only as we actively journey with God in the present—remembering the past yet with our feet set toward shalom—may revelation be deemed a living reality. The Creator is our Teacher. Through God’s explicit commands and the narrative flow from our infancy at Creation to our adulthood in the New Creation, we can trace an implicit core curriculum for humanity to come of age. Consequently, in response to each of the six narratival epochs that follow—Creation, Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, and the New Creation—I will centre on a representative place (garden, tower, tent, mountain, house, and city) and a potent action (cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile, and worship) capturing our genuine agency and fundamental posture if we are to join the divine pedagogue on this educational journey. In so doing, I will demonstrate that at the heart of this biblical narrative is a meaningful role for diverse Sacred Texts within God’s Curriculum. This will not deliver a particular educational design. It will, however, yield an open approach that may enrich secular curriculum development, capable of a meaningful dialogue with principles undergirding Australian education.

To this travelogue we now turn.

545 Smith and Shortt, Bible, 16.
551 Cf. Wright, Last Word, 121-127; Bartholomew and Goheen, Drama; Stackhouse, Making the Best, 181-220.
552 Smith and Shortt, Bible, 56-66.
Making Shalom: Cultivate God’s Garden

The first leg of our transformational journey is Creation.⁵⁵³ In the opening chapters of Genesis we read how humanity and the whole world were designed for good. This passionate and relational Creator paints an Oasis and plants us there. And in this garden of delight, Adam (the man) and Eve (the life-giver) are told to multiply and cultivate the world. And from cultivation comes culture; the divine plan was always for us to spread out and construct a God-centred city. This is the quintessential human task: making shalom. We are to employ ourselves toward creational fullness, peace, and flourishing. God designed us to love him, love each other, and lovingly garden the planet as the Creator’s collective image-bearer.⁵⁵⁴ This simple narrative, familiar to Christians, is profuse in meaning as one considers the purpose of education. At the centre of God’s explicit curriculum is a task. We join this educational journey as we cultivate God’s garden.

While many have collapsed the telos of education for all into the end of education specifically for Christians, John Stackhouse helpfully teases them apart. From a Christian perspective, our human mission in this world consists of two sets of commandments which direct our participation with the God on mission.⁵⁵⁵ The Creation Commandments—“to love God and our neighbours as ourselves as we cultivate the world”—describe the original and ongoing purpose of life (and thus education) for all people. Not everyone will choose to align with this purpose, but it aligns with who God created humans to be.⁵⁵⁶ The Redemption Commandments—to which we will return when we consider Jesus’ role in saving shalom—are a restorative response to a world gone wrong. They represent God’s particular purpose for some people (“the elect”), so that all people will return to, and fulfil, their creational intent.

This original purpose is wrapped up with the multivalent phrase “the image of God”. This language may include essential aspects of human identity that mirror our Creator, such as self-awareness, rationality, and responsive, wilful love. Nevertheless, the proximity of this phrase to the task of “subduing” and having “dominion” over the created order suggests that “image” is primarily a royal and functional role humanity is to play in the stead of its fecund source.⁵⁵⁷ Even as the whole universe is God’s, responsibility for the world has been entrusted to us.⁵⁵⁸ Granted, this

---

⁵⁵³ Cf. Gn 1-2; Dt 32:4; Pss 8; 19; 90:2; 139; 144:3-4; Prv 8; Is 40:28; 45:18; Jb 7:17-18; Mt 22:37-40.
⁵⁵⁴ In keeping with an orthodox retelling of the biblical story and Christian tradition, I have at times employed “him” for God. I am aware of arguments for and against this usage, recognising that God has no gender and gendered language is oftentimes exclusive. I beg the reader’s indulgence if such language is offensive.
⁵⁵⁵ Stackhouse, Making, 205-220.
⁵⁵⁶ Ibid., 215.
mandate has been misused to despoil the planet.\textsuperscript{559} The text, however, suggests that humans are part of creation. We receive power and authority from God to name and order the world, functioning as servants rather than overlords who dominate other creatures for selfish gain.\textsuperscript{560} Our subduing of and dominion over the world is to be expressed as an extension of how the Creator “blesses”, “tends” and “keeps” us.\textsuperscript{561} As stewards, then, we are to reflect divine creativity in separating chaotic elements and filling this ordered space with new forms of life and culture to the glory of God. We shall soon consider the implications for incorporating Sacred Texts into secular education. Presently, however, we must connect this creational mandate to a broader theology of education for shalom, realised through our primary work as image bearers.

The assertion that “work” is essential to education’s end requires further qualification, lest we succumb to instrumentalism. Educators with a Christian commitment are right to critique economically driven Social Efficiency models which centralise student jobs after graduation.\textsuperscript{562} The Sabbath is creation’s peace-full crescendo, not merely a rest-stop before another working week.\textsuperscript{563} With Qoholeth, we must acknowledge the vanity of toil as education’s end, in and of itself.\textsuperscript{564} Thus, education is more than preparation for employment. It is not, however, less. In an expansive understanding of vocation in which “all relational spheres … are religiously and morally meaningful as divinely given avenues through which persons respond obediently to the call of God”, work is hallowed as part of humanity’s glory, displaying God’s likeness.\textsuperscript{565} As we educate to support everyday labour, through which we keep and create culture, both conserving and transforming the world, we may contribute to the common good.\textsuperscript{566}

The affirmation of our responsibility to work for the flourishing of the planet is necessary, even as it is incomplete. Education may be misconstrued as fostering mechanical servitude, aligned with a neo-liberal fixation on profitability and progress. As with secularisation of the Protestant work-ethic, such conceptions readily degenerate into a hollowed out worldly fixation to the exclusion of transcendence. Education is not simply to perform a task; it is to nurture love of God and neighbour that begins as a response to God’s triune and perichoretic love that inspires our


\textsuperscript{562} Bruce Winter, “Learning for Living or Just for Earning a Living?” \textit{Journal of Christian Education} 53, no. 3 (2010), 45-56.

\textsuperscript{563} Ben Witherington, “New Balance,” in his \textit{Work} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), Ch. 7.


\textsuperscript{565} Douglas Schuurman, \textit{Vocation} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 4.

\textsuperscript{566} 1 Cor 12:7; Amy Sherman, \textit{Kingdom Calling} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011); Andy Crouch, \textit{Culture Making} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008).
Interestingly, Wolterstorff’s educational vision deepened over time, resituating educating for “responsible action” within the more expansive frame of “educating for life”. In this, he reflects a shift from active duty to responsive delight with one’s whole being. In his words, “the life for which we educate is one of responsible, worshipful, and appreciative gratitude.”

While education may serve holistic flourishing, knowledge need not be entirely matter-of-fact. The Genesis story corrects this pragmatic tendency, calling us to a vision of education that emerges from edenic enjoyment. Gratitude begets obedience, a reflection of God’s joy and blessing in creation. In this foundational epoch of the Biblical narrative, we are depicted as infants getting our hands dirty in God’s garden, where the task of gardening is no chore. In the image of our divine architect, our cultural work may be an act of wisdom at play. This educational vision celebrates beauty, art, imagination, music and dance, all under the aegis of the singing Creator.

This story claims to represent the ongoing purpose for all people. It also recognises the agency of “students” who have the freedom to resist heavenly tutelage and seemingly thwart God’s curriculum. What, then, of our primary task, as framed inclusively for all humanity? The Christian consensus is that, despite our capacity as image bearers being marred by rebellion, the task has never been revoked. As we shall see in the next leg of the journey, “depravity” is total in extent (every aspect of life is affected), though not in degree (goodness remains, for nothing is as bad as it could be). Adam and Eve represent all people, and thus in their story of creation, fall, and restoration, we discover God’s unwavering commitment to bless the world through his representatives. As the divine pedagogue, God draws all people with universal intent and action, not merely Christians, into this unfolding story of cultivating creation. Through common grace, God has spread gifts abroad and offers light that illumines all people as his image bearers. This facilitates flourishing, even when individuals and societies refuse to recognise God’s sustaining presence.

---

569 Ibid., 13, also 40-41, 80-90.
573 Prv 8:22-31; Zep 3:17.
574 Stackhouse, Making, 91-95.
575 J. I. Packer, Concise Theology (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1993), 79-80, 83-84.
577 Cf. Gn 9:6; Mt 5:45; 7:9-10; Jn 1:1-9; Rom 13:1-6; 1 Cor 11:7; Heb 1:1-3; Richard Mouw, He Shines in All That’s Fair (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001).
Most theologians acknowledge that reflection on the natural order, through creation and conscience, sheds some light on the Creator’s existence.¹⁵⁷ There is debate over whether such “general revelation” has sufficient content to save or only to condemn humanity as falling short of God’s glory.¹⁵⁸ But that all people are responsible for the task of cultivation, and are equipped to make sense (however imperfectly) of our shared secular existence to inform our “gardening”, is a given.¹⁵⁹ If one holds that God is everywhere present, and that his Spirit is the “life-breath of the imago Dei” providentially sustaining and animating citizens and cultures for universal purposes, then one has cause to consider the revelations of other religious communities.¹⁶⁰ We shall return to the question of what we may learn from these texts in the third leg of the Biblical journey. For now, it suffices to contend that diverse Scriptures have an important role to play in a biblical theology of education for shalom.

The narrative logic is thus: all people are called and equipped for the task of cultivating God’s garden. This task is both a duty and a delight, imaging God’s creativity in making shalom. As inherently social creatures, we are invited to work together for holistic flourishing. And yet, how can we do so without understanding something of our neighbour’s landscaping intent? If we dig along different contours, lay the footings in competing lines, and talk at cross-purposes, then what becomes of the world? Through rich symbolism, Scriptures help us imagine both humanity’s identity relative to nature, and the building task before us. This is not to presume that these revelations may be overlaid in forming a composite plan to fulfil the creational mandate. It is, however, to admit that each Scripture poetically represents the common turf of secular existence, and still powerfully shapes our vocations therein. Inasmuch as Christians acknowledge this story, there is solid ground for seeing the study of Scriptures as part of God’s Curriculum. And insofar as ACARA recognises the formative influence of revelation on diverse students, desiring that together we construct and celebrate culture, a meaningful role for Sacred Texts may be found in the Australian Curriculum.

**Breaking Shalom: Repent over the Tower**

The second leg of our transformational journey is commonly called the Fall.¹⁶¹ The story left off with God’s holistic invitation to his icons in Eden: cultivate my garden planet. However, just as

---

¹⁶⁰ Amos Yong, “Discerning the Spirit(s) in the World of Religions,” in *No Other Gods*, 46-48, 61.
love is only real when it is not forced, the true King of the universe gave humanity options. The original humans could choose to reflect God’s image and trust his provision (eating from the tree of life), or they could grasp for what was not theirs (consuming from the tree of knowledge of good and evil). With our forebears, we have each opted for the latter, falling into idolatry: building life around ourselves, something, or someone other than God. In Genesis 3:11 we read how humanity went astray by trying to displace the Creator and build a name for ourselves. In the process everything has been damaged by evil. We have rejected God, abused each other, and vandalized God’s world, which the Bible calls sin. It is nothing short of culpably breaking shalom. We swallowed the serpent’s lies that we could possess power over death, and an omniscient angle on life. Instead, we became a kingdom of slaves held through fear of death for all the rules we have trespassed, fallen from grace and exiled from delight. “Fall” implies an infantile accident. Rather, it was a wilful and childish tantrum growing in intensity across time. Our rebellious journey came to a head at the Tower of Babel. In Genesis 11, the people have constructed a city. And yet, it is the godless city of man, built around a giant edifice to assert human independence. They have abandoned spreading out to cultivate the earth, and have settled for security among artificial confines. Following the confused scripts of progress, control, and fame, the powerful few lord it over the many, driven by a univocal vision to scale the heavens. At this low point, God descends to diversify their language and scatter the nations. Despite this mixed blessing, we are left wondering from whence will come new grace sufficient to address a cosmic catastrophe.

How might this narrative inform a biblical theology of education? This ancient tale of Babel reads like a modern reconstructionist allegory, addressing themes of freedom and autonomy, diversity and oppression, knowledge and power. Nicholas Wolterstorff suggests that this critical perspective has been obscured in conservative Christian circles by an overemphasis upon creation and the cultural mandate (“freedom by mastery”), and an underemphasis upon the fall and the liberation mandate (“freedom by self-determination”). Such terms are, however, readily misconstrued, conflated with the sinful pursuit of “radical freedom or unfettered choice”. Meaning must emerge from the story’s contours. Accordingly, I will argue that at the heart of God’s Curriculum is the deconstruction of human idolatry manifested through techniques of control. We join this educational journey as we repent over the tower of ill-conceived autonomy, and embrace our creaturely limits.

584 Cornelius Plantinga, Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 5, 14, 16.
588 Wolterstorff, Until Justice, ix, 69, 72.
The fall centres on grasping after knowledge. And yet, knowledge itself cannot be the problem. The creational call to name the animals and cultivate the earth speaks of human agency, even autonomy for those created in the *imago Dei*. The fall, in turn, motivates critical inquiry to expose distortion and deception resulting from the noetic effects of sin, mitigating what was lost in Eden. This narrative was a springboard for modern science, by which we may develop tools and techniques to foster flourishing.\(^{590}\) The problem, rather, seems to be denial of our dependence on God’s grace, securing knowledge by way of fragmenting the integrity of existence.\(^{591}\) In the Christian understanding, all that exists for the glory of God: it is created by and for God, and is intimately sustained by His presence.\(^{592}\) Secular accounts of existence suggest that there are aspects of the whole, perhaps the whole itself, to which God is irrelevant.\(^{593}\) We can compartmentalise public and private, religion and education, politics and piety, revelation and philosophy.\(^{594}\) Dualisms of sacred–secular, heaven–earth, faith–reason, spirit–matter, subjective–objective, fact–value, individual–communal, and humanity–environment abound; we leverage gains in the part by jeopardising flourishing of the whole.\(^{595}\) Precise distinctions are necessary for accurate thought. Pulling life’s pieces apart to see how they work is strategic. Neglecting to piece them back together is short-sighted. Refusing to integrate the pieces to preserve power, however, is sinful.

This kind of prideful grasping of knowledge inflates egos and fractures shalom.\(^{596}\) Nevertheless, God deemed his “gracious and terribly risky withdrawal” essential for rightly conceived autonomy and growing up.\(^{597}\) God’s hiddenness (*Deus absconditus*) is in part a prerequisite for an uncompelled response from free creatures to divine love. He allowed exposure to the unsavoury and our subsequent dislocation.\(^{598}\) In an ironic twist on Eden, we were permitted to construct walled-cities that purported to shut out the cosmic architect. Far from a case of divine neglect, however, his Spirit continues to sustain these at times rebellious structures in this “secular age” as a channel for grace to ultimately bring good.\(^{599}\) God offered real choice and freedom within the form of relational intimacy.\(^{600}\) This was a freedom for love of God, neighbour, and world. We, however, desired a freedom from constraint and accountability—a faux-freedom where knowledge


\(^{592}\) Cf. Gn 1; Jn 1; 1 Cor 10:31; 15:28; Eph 1:3-12; Col 1:15-20; 3:17.

\(^{593}\) Asad, *Formations*, 27-33, 191-194.


\(^{596}\) Pazmiño, *Foundational*, 40-40. Cf. 1 Cor 8:1.

\(^{597}\) Crouch, *Culture*, 113; Gn 3:8-9.


\(^{600}\) Groome, *CRE*, 87-88.
served power, and we end up enslaved to our distorted desires.601 As with the misguided optimism of the Enlightenment project, we desired certainty apart from trust, by which we could erect our own educational watchtower. The vertical ascent of reason from below insulated us from revelation from above.602 Our freedom and delight in living *coram Deo* degenerated into an illusory autonomy of functional atheism, living *etsi Deus non dare tur*.603

A postcolonial reading of the text suggests that God—read, the religious establishment, for “Did God really say . . .?” (Genesis 3:1)—was threatened by this declaration of independence. And certainly, the church has wrongly sought to build its own empire in the name of the Lord, to the detriment of all, more than once in recent memory.604 Nevertheless, an orthodox reading of Genesis 11:6-7 suggests that God opposed the fracturing of shalom that would result if his creatures feigned separation from the source of life. Scientia was a creational good perverted by anthropolatry.605 The tower of technique, like all idols, was a projection of human control over nature and fellow image bearers.606 Consequently, God’s intervention was on behalf of the oppressed subjects conscripted to lay the bricks. Far from a “monolingual golden age”, reference to “one language” has hegemonic overtones.607 The subtle narration of the text and lack of moralising allows theologians to acknowledge God’s simultaneous curse and blessing at Babel.608 Smiting the tower was a yes to a multiplicity of languages and perspectives, and a no to “centralised closure” of unity devoid of diversity.609

The educational implications are manifold. As I will explore in Chapter 6, this narrative warns that any pretension of progress through an impersonal and univocal curriculum that bars transcendent perspectives will ultimately result in divided tongues, fragmented lives, and infighting. Secular curriculum is somewhat guilty at this point. And yet, Christians have also foreclosed dialogue. The particularly Protestant drive for a singular “truth” has meant the exclusion of unity born of diversity, and imposition of uniformity through common belief. While the narrative of the fall centralises truth in God’s curriculum—where the failure to trust God’s voice, instead accepting a counterfactual, meant living an un-reality that caused enslavement—it does so by way of truthful

---

601 Ibid., 83-84; Jn 8:31-36.
606 C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2001), Ch. 3.
persons in open conversation. It allows for multiple tellings of the same story from different vantage points. This assertion, however, requires further qualification, lest we err in one of two ways.

In affirming plurality, we must simultaneously resist relativism. Genuinely contradictory accounts cannot be equally valid. Humans are limited and biased, and thus prone to deception. We must deconstruct vain beliefs and philosophies, perhaps even demonic deception, that threatens to subjugate naïve learners. Unthinking obedience is not a Christian virtue. Rather, with a stance akin to critical realism, and in the context of a diverse community—where our distinct perspectives may expose each other’s blind-spots—we are to test everything. This includes testing supposedly revelatory words, clinging to what is good. Critical thinking and prophetic challenge are thus indispensable to expose human error.

Even so, we must resist the opposite extreme of assuming that all interpretive plurality is the result of sinful confusion. The biblical narrative implies that our finitude and even fallibility are a gift from God, a pre-condition for any interpretation that reveals our dependence on each other and allows for free and playful participation in the creational task of meaning-making. Sharing our particular stories through which we make sense of the world draws us into a community that is simultaneously critical and socially constructive. Epistemology and relationality are inseparable, for we were made from and for love. All knowing is (inter)personal and traditioned, and therefore requires trust. As such, this story calls curriculum writers to repent over the tower of illusory autonomy and objectivity. “Re-pentance” (meta-noēō) is the deepest form of re-thinking, turning toward what brings life. It involves the progressive “unlearning” of sin. This journey toward integration requires divine initiative and grace. In short, we require guidance, a revelatory word from above to illumine the nature of our problem and the path to redemption. The Bible has a role to play in this vision of integration. As created beings, entrusted with the stewardship and cultivation of creation to the glory of God, we do well to remain open to the Creator’s gifts and leading in every aspect of life.

610 Cf. the two creation accounts and four Gospels.
611 Cf. Jer 17:9; 2 Cor 10:3-5; Col 2:8; 1 Tm 4:1.
612 Hardy, “Reason,” 78-79.
615 James Smith, The Fall of Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012).
617 Nicholas Wolterstorff, Reason Within the Bounds of Religion (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).
618 Pazmiño, Foundational, 73.
621 Tracy, Analogical, 197, 163, 202.
622 Pazmiño, Foundational, 10-11.
What, though, of other Sacred Texts? Surely Christians must act to guard the curriculum from competing dogma by which the serpent may lead students astray? The reader may have noticed, however, two simple undercurrents in this tale that argue otherwise. Each challenges conservative readings that restrict diversity.

First, we have all fallen. Adam and Eve represent all of humanity. We were all deceived and subsequently shape idols and construct towers.\(^\text{623}\) The harshest words are reserved for religious insiders who squelch freedom and control the masses through impossible rules.\(^\text{624}\) We are blind to our own pursuit of power and prideful autonomy.\(^\text{625}\) Christians access their authoritative revelation through the all-too-human process of fallible interpretation, never immune from general hermeneutical confusion common to all communities as we seek to make sense of the world.\(^\text{626}\) As such, listening to non-Christian and non-biblical voices can actually assist in the task of exposing self-interested error and discerning biblical truth. Acknowledgement of corruption invalidates any form of exclusive Christian canonicalism. Barring other voices is therefore equivalent to building an educational Babel, closing out alternative takes that may offer critique and correction.\(^\text{627}\) Exposure to a competing take on life’s telos—whether found in the sacred stories of religious Scriptures, or the parables of secular iconoclasts like Nietzsche—may awaken us all from complacency and ignorance.\(^\text{628}\)

Second, God extends choice. Even if a person believed that every Scripture beyond the Bible was deceptive, she must still grapple with the options that God gives in the garden. This is not to suggest that every educational safeguard should be removed, exposing children to limitless plurality and perversity before they are developmentally ready. This sacred pre-history does indicate, however, that God allowed competing perspectives and even lying lips to confront his relatively naïve children in this formative epoch. Freedom, rightly construed, accords with shalom as the telos of God’s curriculum.\(^\text{629}\) The imposition of any one any voice and the exclusion of alternatives is fruitless. Genuine faith embraces doubt. The path to true autonomy and godly maturity passes through exposure to the unsavoury, and the opportunity to believe a falsehood. If the divine pedagogue refuses paternalism, then so must God’s followers. Thus, in our common fallenness and the pursuit of freedom, Christians find cause in the centre of their story to incorporate and advocate for a diversity of Sacred Texts in secular education.

\(^{623}\) Rom 3:23; 6:23; 1 Jn 1:8-10.
\(^{624}\) Mt 23:4.
\(^{625}\) Cf. Mk 8:33; 10:35-45; Gal 2:11-16.
\(^{626}\) Garrett Green, *Theology, Hermeneutics, and Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-3. As we shall see, however, the Holy Spirit’s guidance and the Church’s councils and *magisterium* mitigate our fallibility.
Seeking Shalom: Bless from the Tent

The meandering third leg of our transformational journey concerns Israel. From the garden to the tower, the planet’s tenants have risen in rebellion and fallen from grace. The call to cultivate creation remains, but its faithless gardeners are fashioning a wasteland. Humanity’s pilgrimage grinds to a halt. How will the divine pedagogue draw his pupils toward maturity and holistic flourishing? At this point the Teacher risks all on what we may anachronistically identify as “border pedagogy”, working from the margins for the benefit of all. The story focuses in on one middle-eastern man and his barren wife, occupying a humble and portable tent. Genesis 12 through Revelation 22 captures the mission of God to redeem a broken world and set everything right. God does so, however, in paradoxical fashion, moving from the particular to the universal. He “educates” the home-less one to teach the sheltered many, and emancipates the powerless to reform the powerful. Abraham and his descendants were thus chosen to bless, representative of the world God purposed to restore—a vocation balancing radical separation from, and loving identification with, captive humanity. In this economy, the “logic of election” does not exclude the Other. As a royal priesthood, Israel was to mediate YHWH’s grace, so that all nations may play their part in realising our common cultural mandate. God selects this particular family and makes a community of pilgrims the means of dealing with sin. The call to seek communion with one’s neighbours as a “suffering servant” of all deconstructs latent triumphalism. Costly covenants are forged so that they will demonstrate the flourishing that results when we walk the way of the one true God. They must travel light, remaining mobile as a model of seeking shalom.

From the election of Abraham, through liberation from Egypt in exodus under Moses, to subduing the Promised Land as a new Eden awaiting cultivation under Joshua, we see God forming this community of slaves into an exemplar of righteousness and justice. Under King David they receive godly leadership, and it only remains to build the Temple as a symbol of God once again camping with humanity in the cosmic garden. Israel’s narrative arc peaks with the King of Peace welcoming the presence of God into the City of Peace, thus drawing and blessing the nations by the light of divine wisdom embodied in its Torah-keeping citizens. And yet, as with Babel, Solomon

---

630 Cf. Gn 12:1-4; Ex 19:4-6; 20:1-17; Lv 26:11-13; Dt 6; 2 Sm 7:1-16; Pss 67; 105-106; Prv 1:7; 8-9; Is 55:3-5; Jer 3:1-18; 31:31-34; Ez 36:17-38; Mal 1:11; 3:1-2; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:1-11; Gal 3:8-9; Heb 11:8-10.
632 Wright, Mission, 17, 189-190, 195, 213.
633 Cf. 1 Cor 1:18-31; Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 27-54; Wright, Mission, 252-264, 327-329.
634 Wright, Mission, 191-265.
637 Wright, Mission, 204-205, 362-369.
638 Cf. Wright, NTPG, 279.
639 Ibid., 264-265; Wright, Mission, 199-221; Bauckham, Bible and Mission, 34.
prematurely “settles” in Jerusalem, abusing his servants and falling into idolatry.\textsuperscript{640} He abandons fear of YHWH as the beginning of wisdom. He breaks covenant, and thus begins the elect’s descent at the world’s expense.\textsuperscript{641}

Israel was no better than its neighbours.\textsuperscript{642} Torah illuminated the way to life, but they lacked godly leadership and the power to stay the course. They turned inwards and reserved God’s blessing for themselves, hurting and being hurt by the surrounding nations. Prophets arose from the margins to unveil self-interested readings of the Torah, and call them forward to freedom. They sought wisdom to faithfully respond to their predicament. Nevertheless, the Jewish people fractured and fell under the power of other empires. Like Adam and Eve expelled from the garden, the chosen ones were now in exile—a shameful state awaiting divine intervention even after Second Temple Judaism, despite partial resettling in the land.\textsuperscript{643} This was a tragic tale for Abraham’s heirs. Their impotence epitomised and intensified humanity’s captivity, endangering all creation. Israel awaited a new leader, a new heart, and a new exodus.

This compressed version of the drama captures the education of Israel, coming to know the God of the journey.\textsuperscript{644} At the heart of God’s Curriculum is the pursuit of wisdom. As we discern the path to flourishing and walk obediently within its bounds, we may tabernacle with the Teacher. In turn, we may participate in God’s desire to \textit{bless from the tent}, embracing every person and all creation.

This novel assertion may appear naïve and irrelevant to secular schools. Given Israel’s theocentric identity, and the tendency of conservative educators to employ Scriptures for religious socialisation that enshrines the status quo, ACARA may question whether the Torah can be anything but a hegemonic tool.\textsuperscript{645} Before this narrative can profitably be used to enrich contemporary curricular theorising, the biblical canon must be reframed.

Despite the Torah being associated with the first five books of the Tanakh, centred on the giving and keeping of the “law”, it is better understood as “instruction …, the speech that wisdom teaches … showing someone how to live and how to die”.\textsuperscript{646} The Torah was not a set of arbitrary commands; it addressed every aspect of existence, dismantling any sacred–secular divide. Through Torah-keeping that aligned with creational intent, God promised flourishing to those who would trust and obey. Conversely, there was a freedom to walk one’s own way, even as living against the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{1 Kgs 11:33.}
\footnote{Cf. Prv 1:7; Bartholomew and Goheen, \textit{Drama}, 95-100.}
\footnote{Ez 5:5-11.}
\footnote{Wright, \textit{Mission}, 262.}
\footnote{Moran, \textit{Both}, 193-194. Cf. Prv 1:8; 4:1; 7:2.}
\end{footnotes}
grain of the universe ultimately lead to death.\textsuperscript{647} Torah was thus a capacious category; it eventually became for Jews and Christians shorthand for the entirety of Scriptural wisdom illuminating the path to shalom.\textsuperscript{648} Thus, we must pay attention to how YHWH providentially used the canon as a whole to shape Israel’s education.

Following Walter Brueggemann, affirmation and critique both had a place in God’s Curriculum. Conservative and story-bound norms of the past, conveyed through the Torah of the priests to reinforce collective identity, collided with critical and poetry-bound hopes for the future, carried by the word of the prophets to advocate for the oppressed.\textsuperscript{649} The resultant synthesis of backward and forward looking perspectives was the pursuit of wisdom to prosper amidst a troubled present, captured in the counsel of the multitude. The wisdom literature attends to our shared secular existence and offers public advice. These writers sought to make sense of the world, discerning order among chaos, and guiding their community toward ways of being that foster life.\textsuperscript{650} We find great diversity in these dialogical perspectives, Qoholeth and Job’s piercing gaze subverting Proverbial confidence in reward for righteous living.\textsuperscript{651}

Furthermore, we discover the incorporation of wisdom from civilisations beyond Israel’s borders. While wisdom as an “international bridge” may not be redemptive, it does reveal the commonality of human concerns. It also challenges “the elect” to engage with and learn from the Other toward flourishing in this life.\textsuperscript{652} Christians assert that the most complete wisdom for life is to be found in their particular Scripture. Nevertheless, in God’s grace, no community of belief has a corner on insight. All truth is God’s truth, wherever it may be found, as Augustine established.\textsuperscript{653} Consequentially, many Christian educators have called for a curriculum centred on wisdom, in which a diversity of Scriptural and extra-Scriptural perspectives critically cross-pollinate through “problem-posing” to address common concerns.\textsuperscript{654} God’s Curriculum, then, is unconcerned with being “distinctive”, instead prioritising being “faithful” to its particular vision and open to the insight of others so that we may discern a truly common good and grow together.\textsuperscript{655} Whilst the Protestant belief in the “sufficiency of Scripture” does not afford these extra-biblical insights

\textsuperscript{647} Cf. Dt 30:15-20; Mt 5-7.
\textsuperscript{652} Wright, \textit{Mission}, 441-453; Cf. 1 Kgs 4:30-31; Prv 22:17-24:22.
\textsuperscript{653} Ibid., 446; Pazmiño, \textit{Foundational}, 13, 98-101; Augustine, \textit{On Christian Doctrine}, Bk. 2 Ch. 40 §60-61, 397; Ex 3:21-22.
deuterocanonicity, diverse students will nonetheless learn to see their own beliefs with fresh eyes through this interaction with unfamiliar perspectives, whether religious, spiritual or secular. 656 As such, there is an implicit safeguard against biblical wisdom excluding other accounts.

Liberal curriculum writers, however, may question the collective nature of wisdom and the pursuit of a singular “common good”. 657 The emphasis upon communal narratives could silence the stories of individuals, especially those on the margins, curtailing their freedom as power-brokers determine what is best for all citizens under their sway. Attention to Israel’s narrative, however, undermines any such imposition. The Teacher’s explicit curriculum calls Israel to remember that they were once slaves longing for liberation. God heard their shout for help. As such, they must listen to the cries of the oppressed, even individuals, as the locus for his present action in the world. 658 Wisdom is the pursuit of interconnected insights into life in all its complexity, working towards holistic flourishing particularly at the “raw edge of life”. 659 And yet, the journey toward shalom starts “within earshot of the cries of our world that go up to God”. 660 This requires a “wisdom pedagogy” seen in Job’s radical searching and debate with others and even God, eschewing easy answers. 661 At the summit of wisdom we discover God’s preferential option to lift the lowly.

Were they to incorporate potentially transcendent insights into secular education, ACARA could employ Scripture reading as a communal exercise in amplifying the voices of those disenfranchised in Australian society and across the globe. The cries of the poor and the marginalised may be the locus of God’s wisdom, by which we may together seek shalom. 662 As Paulo Freire insists, and lest our vision of education be perverted to secure “dominion” over other people, we need to listen to the oppressed and avoid creating a “banking system” where students are the “depositories” and educationalists are the “depositors”. 663 ACARA, in particular, must pay attention to the richest sources of wisdom among religious minorities, that their pleas for respect and desire to participate may be heard. Thus, a biblical theology of education can foster a community committed to solidarity in the pursuit of liberation, transformed in the process of multi-

659 Ford, Shaping, xvii, 40, 196; Ford and Stanton, Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom, 2.
660 Ford, Shaping, 65-66, also 4-6, 43-50.
661 Ibid., 90-120.
directional dialogue.\textsuperscript{664} This is “critical pedagogy” in the tradition of the biblical prophets, cultivating justice, kindness and humility.\textsuperscript{665}

For this theological vision to enrich secular curricular theorising, Christians must recognise that they possess neither the justification nor the power to impose their particular vision on pluralistic public schools. Figuratively, the church is located with Israel in exile. There is much to be learned from Jewish exemplars while in captivity.\textsuperscript{666} Prominent educators have pointed to Daniel as a model.\textsuperscript{667} In the hostile context of Babylon, Daniel rose to bless the nation as they saw the wisdom of his ways. He was God’s servant, which obligated him to serve his neighbour. Far from triumphalism, however, we discover Daniel—as with Joseph and Moses in Egypt before him—studying the wisdom of his host culture in a process of critical reappropriation.\textsuperscript{668} Rather than abandon the polis, Jews were to settle down and “seek the shalom of the city …. “\textsuperscript{669} It warrants contemporary collaboration of Christians with other communities of belief in secular education, finding wisdom that all may prosper.

In summary, the biblical narrative suggests a meaningful role for the incorporation of diverse Scriptures in secular education. Israel’s emancipation and election were to serve cosmic restoration. Their journey from slavery to establishment in the land focused on seeking shalom. Obedience to Torah was the path to life. However, the canon was neither controlling nor exclusive. It fused stories of where they had been, with critical commentary upon where they were going, centred on wisdom that responded to their present predicament. This wisdom, in turn, addressed every aspect of worldly existence, and embraced truth wherever it was found. Countering hegemonic discourse and totalisation, their own status as former-slaves demanded sensitivity to the cries of the oppressed and God’s wisdom among the suffering. This humble posture of “blessing from the tent” allowed them to collaborate with other communities of belief, toward the common good of the city even while in exile.\textsuperscript{670}

Sacred Texts in the Australian Curriculum can serve the flourishing of our pluralistic schools without privileging any one lifestance. This requires ACARA to raise common questions, amplify the cries of religious and secular minorities, and facilitate robust dialogue with multiple

\textsuperscript{664} Ibid., 54-64.
\textsuperscript{666} Cf. Ps 137:4; 1 Pt 2:11-12.
\textsuperscript{668} Dn 1:4; Cooling with Greene, \textit{Supporting}, 10.
\textsuperscript{669} Jer 29:4-7.
\textsuperscript{670} Hodgson in \textit{God’s Wisdom}, 111-124, refers to “the pedagogy of wisdom” as \textit{Paideia}, fusing critical thinking, heightened imagination, and liberating practice.
perspectives including the wisdom contained in diverse revelations that similarly grapple with life’s complexities and suggest a path to peace.671

Saving Shalom: Love on the Mountain

The fourth leg of our transformational journey centres on Jesus.672 In the Gospels we learn that God has entered the story through an historic person, the Messianic Prince of Peace, thereby saving shalom.673 He has come as the faithful and representative Israelite to fulfil their vocation.674 Through Jesus, everything is restored for better. In Matthew we see Jesus as the new Moses, reconstituting the twelve tribes through the disciples. He delivers a sermon on the mount to shape his apprentices as people who truly would bless the nations through love rather than retaliation. In Mark we see Jesus as the way to a new exodus from slavery to Satan. He binds and defeats the strong man, claiming the whole planet as our promised land. In Luke we see Jesus as the new David, announcing a kingdom of peace that includes all people and nations—women, children, the oppressed, and Gentiles. And in John we see Jesus unveiled as YHWH in the flesh, the great “I Am” who made a covenant with Abraham that he would keep even if it cost his life. Jesus is the seed of Abraham through whom God would bless the world.675

The climax of the covenant comes when Jesus marches into Jerusalem and confronts the powers. But in a strange twist of events, instead of fighting Rome and restoring Israel, he absorbs evil in love and carries his cross up the mount of crucifixion to die. Isaiah’s suffering servant has brought peace to the world through nail-pierced hands.676 Jesus renewed the covenant through a broken body and spilled blood. Enthroned as king on the cross, the victory of God through death was confirmed by Jesus’ resurrection.677 His sacrifice was sufficient, and for everyone who trusts in him and aligns with his rule, they will be forgiven for their sins and find a new beginning in life.678

What insights might the shape of this story offer a biblical theology of education?

Numerous themes emerge. As for contemporary educational theorists, curriculum and currere, content and pedagogy, fuse in discipleship. As Stanley Hauerwas observes, the rhythm of hearing about the kingdom of God, and then “doing” the kingdom business—of teaching, preaching, healing

---

671 Ibid., 6-9.
677 Wright, HGBK, 208-209.
678 Wright, JVG, 246-258, 268-274; Mk 1:14-15.
and delivering—formed a community of practice that looked and functioned like its Saviour. Likewise, curriculum today must be holistic, integrated, and communal; words and deeds, knowledge and action, must weave together as a sign of “salvation” in our secular existence, starting with concern for the “outcast”. One might also note the centrality of embodiment, the incarnation affirming the physicality of education, beyond simply shaping minds. Similarly, when the divine Logos was birthed in a particular neighbourhood at a particular time in a form of faithful specificity, God implicitly challenged educators to grapple with contextualisation. We must pause before assuming that a national curriculum applied equally to all, irrespective of geographic and cultural differences, will suffice. We shall return to the themes of virtue and embodiment, respectively, as we consider the Church and the New Creation. Presently, however, I contend that at the heart of God’s Curriculum is an invitation to emulate the Christ, learning about reciprocity. We join this educational journey as we love on the mountain. In educational terms, Jesus is both a faithful guide toward, and the ultimate exemplar of, life to the full. The Great Commandments, amplified by Jesus’ vocation as the suffering servant, flesh out ACARA’s ideal of equity and warrant Christian support to incorporate a diversity of Sacred Texts in secular education.

The claim that a “faithful Israelite” and the Christ of Christianity might offer an exemplar for pluralistic education is, however, dubious. The so-called “scandal of particularity” is that God has seemingly revealed himself to only some people in time and space in the perspicuous manner of his Son as the universal means of salvation. This smacks of favouritism for insiders and exclusion of outsiders, further exacerbated in Jesus’ “New Commandment” for his disciples to preferentially “love one another, just as I have loved you”. Whilst we may bracket competing soteriologies as an intramural debate among theologians, it is essential to address how this narrative appears to undermine the secular educational concern for social inclusion amidst cultural plurality. Thus, we must briefly return to an earlier distinction of Creation versus Redemption Commandments.

The Creation Commandments are God’s ongoing purpose for all of humanity. Alongside the cultural mandate, implicit in the Garden of Eden were the Great Commandments as summarised by Jesus, of loving God, and loving one’s neighbour as oneself. The way of Torah is the way of

---

682 As with each leg of the journey, the physical location symbolically draws us into a key educational motif.
683 Jn 10:10.
685 Jn 13:34-35; Stackhouse, Making, 216.
love, representing the Creator’s universal intent stamped on his image bearers and encapsulated in the Golden Rule: “Whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.”688 Not surprisingly, then, we find parallel maxims of “general beneficence” in most Sacred Texts and secular systems of ethics.689 ACARA can thus profitably apply the principle of reciprocity to curricular inclusion as founded upon widely held common ground. If Christians, for instance, desire for their particular revelation to be appropriately incorporated into a secular curriculum, then they must take initiative on behalf of the Other for equitable representation of their Scriptures. One standard applies to all, which ACARA is right to enforce. If we wish to be understood, then we must first seek to understand in a genuine two-way dialogue.690 This is love.691 It is also consonant with Jesus’ expansion of one’s “neighbour” to embrace all people, including those who believe differently and our presumed enemies.692 The loving example of “Samaritans” of all stripes may be required to jolt an insular and privileged community into action.693 Jesus’ general teaching, then, safeguards diversity. Reciprocity affirms the “pluralist principle” that no one Scripture should be privileged, and no one belief system should be imposed upon students.694 What, though, of his emphasis upon love of the insider? Jesus was a “true Israelite”. As we have explored, however, Israel’s special vocation was to deal with sin and thus bless the world. The Redemption Commandments—to love one another particularly as a model of the new humanity, and to disciple all the nations to re-align with God through Christ—are “emergency measures for an emergency situation”.695 Particularity serves universality. What Jesus was for Israel, the church must now be for the world.696 Thus, far from excluding the Other, love of the insider was to exemplify shalom. In this narrative theology, Jesus is revealed as the Saviour of the whole world.697 The Son of Abraham is also the Second Adam, the embodiment of God’s telos for all humanity, sent to undo our collective disobedience.698 In the

688 Mt 7:12 (ESV); Graham Stanton, “The Law of Christ,” in Reading Texts, 181-183, for explication of lex Christi, lex amoris.
696 Stackhouse, Making, 217n44.
697 Jn 3:16-18.
698 Wright, Climax, 18-40. Cf. Lk 3:38; Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:22, 45-49.
stories of Jesus, Christians find the exemplar for human development as we too seek to grow “in wisdom and in stature and in favour with God and all the people”. 699 I shall soon consider the implications of Jesus’ divinity. We must briefly pause to note, however, that every tradition has its human “hero” who is seen to represent the ideal guide to, if not the embodiment of, human flourishing—be it Muhammad, Confucius, the Buddha, Krishna, Nietzsche, Darwin, or Locke. Stories of these lives are functionally sacred to particular communities, informing their vision of the good life. Building upon the principle of reciprocity, then, ACARA and Christians alike do well to admit these Sacred Texts into secular education, to deepen and sharpen our dialogue as to education’s ideal from a learner-centred perspective.

Of course, most Christians contend that Jesus was more than a model first century citizen or a radical Rabbi. 700 In him converged the authority of Torah, the prophetic disturbance of unjust conservatism, and proverbial wisdom which served to “break open the worldly perspectives of readers and hearers, so that the truth of YHWH can be seen, and his call heard”. 701 More than a travelling Jewish sage, the Bible reveals Jesus as the Wisdom of God incarnate who illumines all people and will “guide our feet into the way of peace”. 702 Such claims may be heard by those outside Christianity as totalising, akin to Karl Rahner’s co-opting of all respectable religionists as “anonymous Christians”. 703 Nevertheless, we do well to study the contours of this wisdom. We have already seen that, minimally, the Golden Rule of reciprocal love safeguards equal representation of diverse perspectives. Maximally, then, what are the implications of this crucicentric narrative for God’s Curriculum as applied to the question of Sacred Texts in secular education?

Jesus was explicit in the central lesson his students must learn. Contrary to popular clichés, his parabolic wisdom taught that the first shall be last, dying to self leads to life, and the greatest must be a servant of all. 704 Language of “theocracy” rightly concerns secularists. And yet, Jesus’ rule resisted the allure of power, journeying the way of the cross. 705 Peace-makers are foot-washers. 706 His disciples were to follow in turn. 707 In a properly qualified sense, the community of Christ was called to go beyond reciprocity and embrace sacrificial love as their vocation.

---

699 Lk 2:52 (NLT).
700 Bartholomew and Goheen, Drama, 137. Cf. Moran, Both, 194; Mt 5:11.
701 Wright, JVG, 311-312; Smith and Shortt, Bible, 157.
702 Lk 2:79; Wright, NTPG, 414-417; David Ford, “Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God,” in Reading Texts, 10-11; Ben Witherington, Jesus the Sage (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), Ch. 4.
707 Bartholomew and Goheen, Drama, 153-154, 169; Jn 13:15, 34; Heb 12:2-3; 1 Jn 2:4-6.
ACARA, informed by objections from feminists and secular ethicists, would be justified in resisting this calling for the Australian Curriculum. Under the rubric of “sacrifice” many women have lost their identity and become the doormat to oppressive men. And under the banner of “pacifism” the virtue of courage to resist systemic violence has withered. Without qualification, the absolutising of Jesus’ teaching on the mount to “turn the other cheek” would invite unspeakable abuse. Thankfully, the Christ, as presented in the Gospels, arguably subverts such problematic interpretations. Although he internalised the Isaianic identity of the suffering servant, Jesus was still a strong leader, displaying dominion over nature, demonic powers, and wayward religious leaders. Thus, it is unhelpful to equate agapē with non-assertive and masochistic selflessness. In saving shalom, the Christ appeals to joy found the other side of the cross, and points towards his father’s economy of super-abundance in which ultimately all will benefit through mutual submission born of “other-focused self giving”.

Nevertheless, in this fallen world, sacrifice—as barbaric and illiberal as it sounds—is often necessary. At the heart of the biblical narrative is the problem of sin that further exertions of self-will cannot solve. As conflicting groups powerfully assert their agendas, it requires a mediator who will break the cycle of violence by out-loving evil and absorbing the cost of our collective selfishness. This is grace; it is the core of the gospel announcing forgiveness and restoration for the humble of heart. Exceeding the justice of reciprocity, this love extends God’s riches at Christ’s expense. God’s Curriculum, then, calls humanity to come of age by learning to love on the mountain. Like teenagers, we are capable of seeing the world from another’s perspective. And yet, the journey to maturity is by way of overcoming our “adolescent egocentrism” and choosing to embrace the Other in our circle of concern. Shalom depends on people learning to love their neighbour beyond just deserts, reflecting the God who is love. Thus, it was precisely in Jesus’ kenotic sacrifice—his self-abnegation and receptivity to God’s will—that his divinity and sovereign rule was seen.

---

709 Ibid., 216n41; Wright, JVG, 601-604.
710 Stackhouse, Making, 203-20; Heb 12:2.
714 Cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 15:1-4.
715 See Jn 1:14; 3:16-17; Rom 3:25; 2 Cor 8:9; Eph 2:8-9; Heb 2:17; Packer, Concise, 45-47, 134-136, 164-165.
716 Fowler, Stages, 153.
718 Mt 5:43-48; 1 Jn 4:8-10.
719 Phil 2:5-11; Wright, Climax, 97.
The story of the Christ thus deconstructs any Christian agenda to only promote the Bible in secular education. It is arguable that this canon has the greatest educational warrant of any Sacred Text to be included in the Australian Curriculum. Furthermore, Christians, even in a post-colonial context, have the greatest power to lobby for exclusive incorporation, simultaneously blocking other Scriptures. Nevertheless, it would seem that the toxic melee between evangelicals and secularists has reached an impasse of conflicting agendas, privileging one revelation, or “equally” excluding all. The paradoxical wisdom of Christ demands that evangelicals take the lead in embracing weakness, giving up their grasping for control and clinging to rights. Instead, their vocation is to participate with Christ as the divine pedagogue by listening to and sacrificially serving their neighbour, whatever his or her beliefs. Compassion, not coercion, must characterise a community which claims that a slain lamb occupies the throne of cosmic power. If love involves an unconditional striving for the good of diverse neighbours whose agency must be respected, and a commitment to developing a shared vision for mutual flourishing, then Christians must advocate for a plurality of Scriptures in secular education. Similarly, the principle of reciprocity and the pursuit of equity suggests that ACARA should give due consideration to this incorporation. This is especially so given that each Sacred Text reveals pivotal guides and personas who embody humanity’s telos, which is an apposite educational concern in a cosmopolitan society.

**Embracing Shalom: Reconcile in the House**

The fifth leg of our transformational journey is the Church. We left off with the story’s climax in Jesus. He bore Israel’s curse and forged a new covenant so that all nations may be blessed, in turn cultivating God’s world toward shalom. As Paul argues, God through Christ has “reconciled to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” This blessing, then, was not just for Jews. God’s intentions were universal, embracing all the nations. In Jesus’ death, every division was laid to rest. There was no longer male or female, Jew or Gentile, slave or free. Through faith in Christ, every person was welcomed into God’s renewed community. The remnant of Israel and the incoming nations united as one...

---

726 Wright, *PFG*, 516-537.
727 Col 1:20 (NIV).
family that was to be the harbinger of New Creation.729 The fourth leg of the journey closed as Jesus commissioned his followers to announce the gospel and exhibit fullness of life under the reign of God. First, however, they had to wait for empowerment.

We now journey from the mount of crucifixion to a house. In Acts we read how Jesus promised his followers that they would be his witnesses, spreading the gospel across the whole world. This was an impossible task for a small band of fearful disciples. Jesus, therefore, instructs them to wait in the upper room of a dwelling in Jerusalem for Pentecost. And as they pray, worship, and fellowship—while celebrating the first-fruits of the harvest and remembering Israel’s election to bless the nations—the Holy Spirit blows afresh over the chaotic waters and births the church.730 The Spirit of God falls with amazing power, forming new hearts that desire God’s ways.731 The Tower of Babel is reversed, and they speak freely in every language as though with one tongue.732 The nations hear the good news. And from Jerusalem the message spreads that Jesus is king of the whole world: align with the Christ now and find life to the full, or face judgment when he returns to expel evil once and for all. Even the warnings must be reworked, for the Son of God typically “destroys” opponents through compassionate embrace, inviting them to be his friends.733 In short, through Jesus the church is sent together to heal, commissioned as agents of reconciliation.734

This mission of charity starts at home. Through patient formation in the Spirit’s power, Jesus intended that former enemies would be forged into a community of love. In response to God’s welcome through the cross, they were to learn how to banquet together in the radical eucharistic hospitality of a family meal.735 Christ himself was to become their peace, killing hostility built upon religious markers, and forging them into a temple fit to house the Spirit of shalom.736 Holiness was missional.737 It was both a witness to an onlooking world, and a preview of the responsible and flourishing citizens who will cultivate the New Creation.738 The church was to continue Christ’s mission as his body, clothed in virtue and chiefly characterised by faith, hope, and love.739

How might this narrative inform a biblical theology of education? More particularly, and centred on the church’s mission of embracing shalom, what role does this fifth leg of the travelogue

730 Bartholomew and Goheen, *Drama*, 174-176.
731 Dt 30:6; Ez 11:19; 36:26; Rom 2:29; 2 Cor 3:2-7.
733 Ps 2. Cf. Mt 5:43-48; Lk 23:34; Rom 5:7-10.
734 2 Cor 5:16-21.
739 Cf. 1 Cor 13; Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:2.
suggest for diverse Scriptures in public schools? I contend that God’s Curriculum aims at forming communities of radical hospitality that heal deep divisions. We join this educational journey as we reconcile in the house. If one accepts this interpretation, then the incorporation of Sacred Texts in secular education becomes a means of understanding our neighbours that we may become friends, and finding a way to walk together even with our differences. To this end, the story of Pentecost is most instructive.

The Spirit of God persistently pushes Christ’s followers beyond their boundary markers. As their “teacher in all things”, the Counsellor reminds the church of Jesus’ risk-taking. He overcame divides, especially those of rivalry and fear, to dialogue with prostitutes, Pharisees, Gentiles, Roman centurions, Samaritan women, the mentally ill, the poor and outcast, children and widows.740 If this community is to model cosmic reconciliation, then they cannot remain insulated in any “upper room”, whether that be a Christian School or a mono-Scriptural common curriculum.741 The church, while precious in God’s sight, is not an end in itself. Rather, as Lesslie Newbigin contends, it must be structured around the secular reality for “the church does not exist for itself but for God, and for the world that Jesus came to save”.742

At Pentecost we see a gentle prod in this direction. Those gathered outside the house were faithful Jews. Even so, they were not followers of Jesus’ way. There were significant differences in language, in theology, and in culture. Most likely these travellers could communicate, albeit haltingly, in a trade language, whether Greek or Aramaic. It seems superfluous for the Spirit to teach Galilean simpletons to speak in the dozens of languages represented by the nations gathered in the City of Peace. And yet, as paraphrased by David Smith, it was a powerful lesson for the pilgrims: “Even if you can get by in the common tongue, even if I could require you to master a second language in order to hear what I have to say, I am going to reach out to you on your terms, in your words, in the language that speaks to your heart.”743

Worldviews function much like different language groups; they are interrelatable, but never perfectly translatable. As such, we find a core rationale for Christians to value Sacred Texts in secular education. In a similar vein to loving reciprocity, God desires all people to enter the hospitality of understanding each other and being understood. This is a prerequisite for reconciliation. The process is the antithesis of Babel’s uniformity. As such, rather than imposing onto students a purportedly “universal” frame of thought—whether of Christian theism, or secular humanism, neither of which is neutral—we are to recognise their deepest particularity and empower

743 Smith, Learning, Loc. 1739.
them to speak from their own transcendent and immanent frames of reference. These worldviews are often implicit, even subconscious. They are helpfully brought to the surface through the kind of framing stories found in a diversity of Sacred Texts. Advocating for multiple Scriptures in the secondary curriculum is a way of partnering with God’s Spirit, paving the way for acquaintances and enemies to become friends. This resonates with ACARA’s aim of cultural inclusivity.

There must be no romanticism, as though simply understanding the Other will lead to unity. Studying diverse revelations may illuminate real differences, forming a target at which some students will aim their abuse. Nevertheless, unity is impossible apart from personal knowledge. Personal knowledge is shallow if not connected to communities of belief. And communities of belief are opaque without reference to their sacred stories.⁷⁴⁴ Pentecost, then, marks a radical shift toward genuine dialogue. Within a short while, we see mutual “conversion” as Peter enjoys Pagan hospitality and the church learns from the outsider Cornelius that “God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.”⁷⁴⁵ The Spirit seeks universal reconciliation, starting with alienated image bearers.

Counter to Babel, the triune God was helping humanity reconnect the one and the many, modelled by the church. That which divides—status, money, ethnicity, sex, religion—was to be stripped away as they shared humble bread and wine together around the Lord’s communion table. And yet, genuine diversity was harnessed by the Spirit to build a peace-full family, graced to heal the world.⁷⁴⁶ Difference need not be destructive. Undoubtedly, the story I have told reflects Jesus’ intentions more so than the messy reality and class-divisions of the Jerusalem Council and Corinthian Church, or Paul’s various confrontations with Peter, Barnabas and heretical super-apostles. This is significant, for transformation is an ongoing educational project rather than a magical and instantaneous metamorphosis. Conflict is the pragmatic process through which we recognise our need to converse and convert; it is the path to the telos of graced communion.⁷⁴⁷ The “classroom” for melding this community was the hospitality of family homes, in which entertaining the stranger was a spiritual discipline equivalent to serving Christ and accommodating angels.⁷⁴⁸ Similarly, rather than equip a single leader to replace Jesus, the Spirit infused a diversity of gifts

⁷⁴⁵ Smith, Learning, Loc. 1650; Acts 10:28-35.
into every person as members of his one body, forcing them into interdependence.\textsuperscript{749} Again, the end in view was not an isolated sect. Rather, it was unity in diversity “for the common good”.\textsuperscript{750}

Evangelicals will rightly question whether secular education, apart from the Spirit’s empowerment and a shared identity “in Christ”, can achieve this vision. Regardless, the church’s mission to seek such reconciliation in every facet of life is clear. Furthermore, familiarity with a diversity of religious narratives, rather than exclusively citing secularist accounts or the Christian Scriptures, forms an important safeguard against moral relativism and unbridled self-interest in our institutions such as schools. It reminds an individualistic society of the larger concern for collective flourishing.\textsuperscript{751} Thus, seeking reconciliation accords with advocacy for a plurality of Sacred Texts in public education.

What kind of community, then, is capable of embracing the quest for shalom? If all things will finally be reconciled in Christ, how would God have us school fallen human beings in the meantime? Essentially, the Holy Spirit desires to form a holy community.\textsuperscript{752} Peacemaking is a virtue that takes practice.\textsuperscript{753} “Holiness”, however, requires careful definition. Holiness does connote God’s transcendent separation from fallen humanity, and thus a core characteristic of the church is difference from the world.\textsuperscript{754} This suggests limited grounds for Christians to resist exposure to people, places, and stories that may be deemed a stumbling block to students. Understandably, then, conservatives commonly oppose non-biblical Scriptures in common schools. And yet, as we have explored, this is in tension with the biblical story as a whole, captured in terms of common grace, freedom, wisdom, and reciprocity. “Pleading purity” to justify one’s rejection of another’s revelation is problematic, for it peremptorily identifies what is familiar as godly, and what is foreign as dangerous.\textsuperscript{755} Most important for our purposes here, it forgets that any separation from the world is to serve the greater agenda of reconciliation for the world; maintaining a distinct voice and identity is essential if God is to use the church as a vessel for healing that which divides.\textsuperscript{756}

Instead of isolation from difference, holiness is better characterised as purity from sin.\textsuperscript{757} Concomitantly, if sin is a violation of shalom, then holiness may be equated with wholeness, the integration of a fragmented identity through the Spirit’s re-creation.\textsuperscript{758} Holiness as understood within the Bible’s trajectory is about fullness of life and the embrace of our true selves, not an

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{749} Rom 12; 1 Cor 12-14; Eph 4.
\item \textsuperscript{750} 1 Cor 8:6; 10:31; 12:7; Col 3:17. Cf. Bruce Winter, \textit{Seek the Welfare of the City} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994).
\item \textsuperscript{751} Schuurman, \textit{Vocation}, 29-41, 57-58, 78-81, 173-178.
\item \textsuperscript{752} Stackhouse, \textit{Making}, 178-180; Wright, \textit{PFG}, 384-455, 563, 1473-1520.
\item \textsuperscript{753} 1 Pt 3:8-11.
\item \textsuperscript{754} Cf. 2 Cor 6:14-18.
\item \textsuperscript{755} Smith, \textit{Learning}, Loc. 994.
\item \textsuperscript{756} Cf. Mt 5:13-16; Lk 5:27-32; Col 3:5-15.
\item \textsuperscript{758} Mark Sayers, \textit{The Vertical Self} (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010), 84-90.
\end{itemize}
escape from evil. Holiness was attractive, and thrust the early church into the cause of doing good for all without discrimination. Holiness is the shape of a community that can embrace and sustain holistic flourishing. It requires putting off the old self which harms one’s existence and fractures community. In turn, as we meditate upon Jesus and practice walking the way of love, compassion, freedom and forgiveness, we are transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit into Christ’s likeness as the first-fruit of the new humanity. Virtue is thus a central concern for God’s Curriculum, a requirement for reconciliation.

The reader may wonder, however, of what relevance this is to pluralistic education and the place of Sacred Texts. One more link is necessary to connect the chain. Notice how virtue works in the particular Christian community. Virtue was not about keeping a set of abstract moral codes. Nor was it ultimately about finding your authentic self, as though we are fine as we are and simply need to be in touch with our deepest desires. The biblical story suggests that our rules are prone to distortion, serving both self-interest and the status quo. Furthermore, our desires are said to be dis-oriented. Thus, N. T. Wright reframes virtue as “practicing the habits of heart and life that point toward the true goal of human existence”. Morality is ultimately storied and relative to our perceived end. Character transformation toward this end is the engine room for a community called to embrace shalom. Consequently, we are thrust back into the realm of narrative with a journey through tension toward resolution. As Chris Wright delineates the logic of 1 Peter 2:9-12, the larger story framing one’s identity (who am I and where are we going?) in turn generates a system of ethics (how must we live to accord with this story?) and our particular mission in the world (what actions advance our journey from origin to destiny via reconciliation?). As we pursue the telos of flourishing, character represents the essential qualities necessary to reach the destination together.

Education, then, is concerned with moral training to form virtuous habits. Christians contend that the Spirit’s grace is essential to reach the goal, challenging any latent Pelagianism in the schooling process. Nevertheless, the overarching frame of virtues serving a vision is common to many religious and secular ethical systems. Furthermore, the particular virtues we prize are often similar, allowing meaningful dialogue between communities of belief. This should not be surprising

---

760 Wright, After, 24-25.
763 Wright, After, 26.
764 Wright, Mission, 389.
765 Wright, After, 33, 172-173. In simplest form, the “classic structure of virtue [is]: glimpse the goal, work out the path toward it, and develop the habits which you will need to practice if you are going to tread that path” (170).
given that we share the same secular reality, in which the church is called to model God’s intentions for all humanity.\textsuperscript{766}

Which habits should we prioritise, and for what destination are we aiming, though? It is insufficient to compare static commandments (such as “do not murder”) and abstract “universal principles” (such as “do no harm”) upon which to build a peaceful society.\textsuperscript{767} Without deeper understanding resulting in reconciliatory practices, differently believing neighbours cannot even eat together around the same table. Pork, beef, or vegetables? The church grappled with such divisions from the outset. Resolution required sensitive listening to each other, albeit amidst passionately made arguments. Intractable conflicts in ecumenical councils are the exception that proves the rule.\textsuperscript{768} Our moral reasoning is sharpened by discussing the lives and decisions of our most significant forebears, learning from their ways.\textsuperscript{769} Furthermore, these local stories, especially for religious communities, together comprise metanarratives within which particular commands and character attributes find meaning.\textsuperscript{770} Aristotle’s \textit{eudaimonia} is not Hebrew shalom is not secular happiness is not Theravāda Nirvāṇa is not Islamic Paradise.\textsuperscript{771} There is overlap, but the narratives are distinct. Christian educators are right to stress “faith, hope and love” as primary virtues within their worldview, which they desire to form in students that we may embrace shalom.\textsuperscript{772} But this account finds its meaning in a drama centred on trusting the Creator’s good intentions for the world, expressed through the sacrificial love of Christ, thereby grounding optimistic action oriented to the kingdom of God. We must attend to the contours of each culture’s foundational stories—their \textit{telos} and path from here to there—noting similarities and differences, to build in students an ethical intelligence capable of navigating myriad moral quagmires that beset the modern pilgrim.

In summary, God’s curriculum is centred on reconciliation. The Spirit seeks to form communities of radical hospitality, where former enemies may become family members capable of sharing a meal in the intimacy of one’s own house. The goal is not guaranteed. It requires grace to discover unity amidst diversity, and wisdom to journey with neighbours often aiming at different ends for human existence. It also requires the development of new habits that undergird peacemaking, trading fragmentation and that which divides for wholeness of life. In both

\textsuperscript{766} Ibid., 25, 164. Cf. Eccl 3:11.
\textsuperscript{767} Ibid., 46-47, 253.
\textsuperscript{771} Wright, \textit{After}, 36, 91-95.
\textsuperscript{772} Ibid., 63-68, 105-118, 138-139, 178-218; 1 Cor 13:10-13.
reconciliation and character formation, Sacred Texts can play a key educational role. Through foundational stories and moral instruction, these texts have shaped our collective identity. They provide overarching frames in which particular virtues and the vision of reconciliation itself finds meaning. Friendship and social inclusion are premised upon mutual understanding, thus suggesting a core rationale for ACARA and Christians alike to support the incorporation of diverse Scriptures in secular education.\(^{773}\)

Adopting a developmental motif, we once thought as children, requiring simple rules to follow under the tutelage of the law. Through Christ, egocentric teens were invited to discover mature love as the fulfilment of Torah: it is more blessed to give than receive. Now, in this epoch, the Spirit of freedom would have emerging adults internalise the privilege and priority of reconciliation, as co-workers in the *missio Dei*.\(^{774}\) This task invites us to come of age as responsible citizens who welcome diverse neighbours as friends, working together amidst deep differences for the flourishing of all.\(^{775}\) Sacred Texts are an educational asset in this process.

**Entering Shalom: Worship in the City**

The sixth and final leg of our transformational journey is the New Creation.\(^{776}\) Humanity comes of age not with a return to the primal garden of delight; rather, as adults we advance to the consummation of joy in the New Jerusalem, the city of peace.\(^{777}\) Just as Jesus rose from the dead, he has promised to return and resurrect the whole universe and humanity within. Our ultimate hope is not an escape to Heaven, but a New Heavens and a New Earth, where God dwells in the centre of the cosmos.\(^{778}\) This is depicted in the cultivated garden-city, an echo of, yet advance upon, Eden. There is a river running through, lined by trees freely offering eternal life to all who thirst and hunger. This metropolis is adorned by the greatest works of every culture across the ages, and filled with people from every tribe and tongue together enjoying and praising the glory of their Creator. And yet this city is ultimately not a product of human hands; it is a gift from above, for which they are eternally grateful.\(^{779}\) Expressed succinctly, the journey finishes when God sets everything right.

Throughout the Scriptures, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah, we are tantalised by poetic depictions of the pilgrimage’s terminus. There is no more sin or suffering, death and Satan are

---


\(^{774}\) Acts 20:35; 1 Cor 3:9; Gal 3:19-25; Pazmiño, *Foundational*, 95.


\(^{779}\) Heb 1:8; 12:28.
defeated, the curse is removed. Creation is again bountiful, and the redeemed enter shalom to begin once more the duty and delight of cultivating the world. The clearest portrait of the end is unveiled in Revelation, sparking our imagination. We see final judgment, a cause for celebration as justice vanquishes evil.780 God hosts an extravagant banquet where every “student” across history is invited.781 Some exclude themselves from the Teacher’s grace, seeking life on their own terms. Their imperfect record of rebellion is, however, damning. Having rejected the goodness, truth and beauty of the Creator, all that remains is Hell.782 And yet, responsive pupils, regardless of their achievements, are welcome. They are united in love with the divine pedagogue.783 Their stumbling efforts toward flourishing in this life are rewarded with greater responsibility in the age to come.784 And for those who receive the gift of life, a whole new journey begins.785

This imagery is rich in constructing a biblical theology of education. Creativity and wonder abound, suggesting a substantial role for the arts in schools. And as with previous legs of the journey, we see a gathering together in Christ of all things—individual and social, physical and spiritual, unity and diversity—fusing the remembered past and anticipated future in God’s eternal presence.786 Curriculum, thus, cannot be piecemeal. It must seek appropriate integration.

This narrative is also evocative for assessment practices.787 In the final judgment, human responsibility is utmost and thus formatively assessed, even as there is grace for those failing to make the grade. The just deserts, whether deleterious or delightful, are the full flowering of a life’s orientation.788 Thus, far from mercenary, God’s assessment methods reinforce peacemaking as a practice that embodies the end as a good intrinsic to the activity itself.789 Furthermore, rather than considering one’s “classwork” on this earth a temporary endeavour, now abandoned, we see our creativity organically extended into and built upon in the New Creation, albeit refined through fire.790 The narrative arc leads not to destruction of the Earth and our efforts therein, but rather restoration and advancement.791

780 Wright, Surprised, 137-145.
782 Cf. 2 Thes 1:9.
785 Cf. 1 Cor 2:9.
789 MacIntyre, After, 187.
790 Wright, Surprised, 208-209, also 216. Cf. 2 Pt 3:10-13.
The ultimate purpose of God’s Curriculum, however, lies beyond human imagination, integration, assessment and life-long learning. The telos of this journey is the entirety of creation entering shalom, collectively celebrating the glory of God. In turn, we may participate with the Teacher as we worship in the city. This biblical theology thus values Sacred Texts in secular education, for they represent in part the glory of the nations to be refined and brought into the New Creation, and they are a primary source of images and stories that inspire worship and pull us forward to our fitting end.

First, let us consider the surprising artefacts and inhabitants of the city of peace. As I have argued throughout, the centripetal pull of God’s curriculum is for all the nations—and, thus, the religions as inextricable from culture—to unite as one in worshipping their Creator.792 God’s first intent for all people was “priestly”, representing the Creator’s authority, mediating his blessing, and voicing his praise as they stewarded the Earth.793 In response to humanity’s rebellion, however, he elected Abraham as the father of a particular people to be “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation”. They were to call all people back to their original vocation: giving glory to God through wise dominion.794 This call crystallised in Jesus, the singular seed of Abraham, who was worshipped by wise Magi at his birth, and praised by Roman power in the form of a Centurion at his death.795 This inclusive vision permits no favouritism. Jesus warned those who were exclusively concerned for their own salvation that “people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God” with the Jewish patriarchs, even as persistent evildoers among the elect will be cast out.796 The theme of blessing through the Messiah to all the nations, culminating in praise, is thus advanced in the New Testament.797 In short, the Bible depicts former enemies bringing tribute into the New Jerusalem to honour YHWH.798 Worship is both the overflow of gratitude and a universal recognition of the “worth” of the one magnified.

Focusing on Isaiah 60, Richard Mouw unpacks this remarkable end-time image.799 The best works of each nation enter shalom and beautify God’s city, crafted into a righteous and superabundant kingdom. Interpreted through Christ, this Isaianic vision demonstrates God’s redemptive plans for human culture. The extravagant gifts represent the best of every nation, the imago Dei offering back to its source the fruits of the Creator’s magnanimity.800 And yet, Mouw

792 Wright, Mission, 243-252, 478-500.
793 Wright, After, 80-81.
796 Lk 13:22-29 (ESV).
799 Richard Mouw, When the Kings Come Marching In (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002).
asks, “What are the ships of Tarshish doing here?” These impressive vessels were earlier condemned, given their use in attacking nations and imprisoning people, stealing their wealth. A fuller picture is thus revealed, in which the cultural distortions perverting every artefact are rightly judged. The outcome, however, is the purification of “former function” rather than the annihilation of form, “freed for service” toward universal peace. This same dynamic is extended in Revelation 21:22-27 to the people of nations outside the elect: judgment, refining, then glory.

What, then, are the educational implications? As I have demonstrated, Sacred Texts are often considered the glory of their respective religious communities. These cultural artefacts have persisted across time, for they are repositories of wisdom that guide the thinking and doing of millions of people. Granted, we must be careful not to judge before the day God has appointed, when he will separate the wheat from the chaff and remove the impurities of humanity’s efforts. Undeniably, at times these texts have been used as vessels for violence, as with the ships of Tarshish. Nevertheless, education is aimed at God’s glory. God’s glory, in turn, is reflected (albeit imperfectly) in the creativity and wisdom of diverse religious narratives. Accordingly, Christians can worship the Creator as they study these texts, discerning and celebrating God’s gifts as proleptic of life together in the city of shalom.

Second, let us consider the centrality of worship and the concomitant role of Scriptures. In this narrative, it is significant that the physicality of being is continuous in the New Creation. The glory of the resurrection is not the abandonment of flesh, but rather its sanctification and further evolution into a “spirited body” capable of active worship. While Revelation is replete with apocalyptic metaphors, it is clear that vigorous veneration is a hallmark of the city. Inspired by images of abundance they sing, shout, write, genuflect, dance, and banquet. The joy of the Lord elicits a liturgy of praise. While the incarnation affirmed the goodness of embodiment, the resurrection is the greatest validation of physicality. It encourages persistence in the secular “now but not yet”, before the kingdom’s consummation, that one’s worshipful labour is not in vain. The church, as a foretaste of this praise, is to practice multi-sensory rituals such as communion and baptism. This sacramental and aesthetic imagination is educative, emerging from and reinforcing the unfolding story of redemption. Their vision of hope for the future, centred in glorification of

---

801 Ibid., 17.
803 Ibid., 37, 45, 131.
805 Cf. Rom 8:9-11, 19-30; 1 Cor 15:35-58; 2 Cor 5:1-5.
what they deem to be ultimate, directs their acting for truth, justice, beauty, and healing in the present. They are pulled forward in praise.809

God’s Curriculum thus challenges a latent platonic dualism undergirding the Scholar-Academic ideology of education, which posits the accumulation of knowledge and the nurturing of one’s immaterial mind and soul as the final purpose of learning. Such approaches, whether secular or religious, display a tendency toward “ideational reductionism”, as though the inculcating of right ideas will automatically produce educated students who seek shalom.810 Close attention to the nature of embodiment, however, corrects this intellectualism.811

James Smith is critical of all such worldviews which reduce humans to “thinking machines” with an essentially “‘heady’ or cognitive picture of the human person”.812 Drawing on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor,813 Smith suggests that our bodies, far from being merely “containers for our minds … are essential to our identities.”814 Replacing Descartes’ cogito, he commends Homo Liturgicus, “the human person as lover.” Education rests upon anthropology, reliant on a right conception of our essential identity which will be carried forward into the New Creation. Thus, with the move from “thinking things to liturgical animals,” we are invited to reframe education as the training of desire:815

Human persons are intentional creatures whose fundamental way of “intending” the world is love or desire. This love or desire—which is unconscious or noncognitive—is always aimed at some vision of the good life, some particular articulation of the kingdom. What primes us to be so oriented—and act accordingly—is a set of habits or dispositions that are formed in us through affective, bodily means, especially bodily practices, routines, or rituals that grab hold of our hearts through our imagination, which is closely linked to our bodily senses.816

Despite challenging the primacy of rationality, a cherished a priori within Calvin’s hidden curriculum,817 Smith’s central thesis has largely found a positive response among Christian educators.818 The core objection is to a false dichotomising of thinking and doing, by which he caricatures and seemingly dismisses worldview analysis. His subsequent volume nuances these claims, arguing that critical thinking is a crucial practice, even as it is an inadequate vision of

---

809 Wright, Surprised, 249-253, 264-289.
811 Cf. Smith, Imagining, 33n6.
812 Smith, Desiring the Kingdom (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 24, 64-65, 71, 218-219.
814 Smith, Desiring, 32.
815 Ibid., 19, 39-46.
817 Cf. Spears and Loomis, Education, 43-63.
Drawing on the latest research in neuroscience, cognitive narratology, Merleau-Ponty’s exploration of “erotic comprehension”, and Bourdieu’s logic of practice expressed in *habitus*, he makes a strong case for “sanctified perception”. Kinaesthetics and poetics fuse in the recognition that repetitive and everyday micro-practices coalesce into habits. These habits become liturgies, and the liturgies in turn are a form of worship. This holds whether one is contemplating religious art and singing songs in a church service, or ogling images of sexiness and success while fondling through the discount rack in the mall, cultivating a desire for the kingdom of consumerism in this secular liturgy. Supplementing his earlier thesis, Smith’s central claim is that liturgical formation is at the nexus of embodiment and imagination. Our picture of the good life in the future orients our desires and impels our actions in the present.

Smith acknowledges the irony of constructing a complex philosophical argument to establish the primacy of subconscious bodily rituals. Nevertheless, this reworked Augustinian anthropology has launched a pedagogical research agenda of physical practices that cultivate desire in students for God’s reign. Through ancient rituals of sharing meals, hourly calls to prayer, *lectio divina*, labyrinths, meditation and more, teachers have experimented with pedagogies that enhance curriculum content in subjects as diverse as physics, languages, literature and home economics. This research programme is born of a deep conviction that the ultimate end of education is worship. In turn, there is a key role for the Bible as a primary source of images, metaphors and stories that ignite our imagination. By depicting humanity’s *telos*—the “good life” yet to be realised in the New Creation—this Scripture articulates and animates student desire. It elicits embodied worship and faithful action in the present directed toward one’s final hope.

What, then, is the relevance of other Sacred Texts to secular education? While Smith’s focus is upon Christian schools, he constructs a plausible anthropology of human identity as inextricably embodied and oriented by love. Granted, many adolescents, especially secular students focused on immanent goals, do not identify themselves as “religious”. And yet, inasmuch as their lives turn around a central axis—such as success, happiness, pleasure, relationships, or self—and they are propelled forward by this hope of the good life, they are functionally

---


822 Ibid, xii-xiv.


participating in worship. This worship is reinforced in classrooms by repetitive rituals such as praise for competitive attainment, and fuelled by images and stories such as the successful student who “made it”. As Australian cultural anthropologist Hugh Mackay has observed, these visions of a materialistic utopia often borrow from religious imagery, metaphor and story, to absolutise secular progress in a “Brand Me” mentality that traps adolescents in a “neurotic obsession with a life lived for Me and my pleasure”. ACARA has the power to either reinforce or challenge these individualistic and self-serving conceptions of existence.

One need not accept the totality of Smith’s analysis, nor grant Mackay’s dismissal of secular goals, to acknowledge my central point. Education involves the schooling of desire through repetitive bodily practices and the cultivation of hope. The metaphors and images used to fire students’ imaginations may form or deform their identity, inasmuch as the telos toward which they aim satisfies the fundamental longings of the human heart. These depictions of the “good life” draw students forward, thus shaping where they are headed and how they act. This has social implications, for our lives are interwoven. Furthermore, the richest storehouses for these symbols of ultimacy which shape the direction of a student’s life, often subconsciously, are sacred stories. Their language of flourishing, Heaven, Paradise, Swarga, and shalom, are woven into our social imaginary as primal myths that mould our vision of and for life. This is relevant to the Australian Curriculum in light of ACARA’s aims for students to discern and pursue “the common good”.

The narrative I have told supplies Christians with one more rationale—beyond that of glorifying God through refined cultural artefacts, as espoused earlier—for championing the incorporation of Sacred Texts in pluralistic schools. If education is for worship, and worship is the bodily veneration of our supreme hope, then God’s Curriculum would have us create space and practices for students to meditate upon where their lives are headed. What do they consider to be of greatest worth? How do they express gratitude, itself a form of worship, for the gift of life? Where is the point of integration when they critically reflect upon how all they are learning carries them toward or leads them away from what they consider to be ultimate? The explicit use of diverse Scriptures at this point offers adolescents images and metaphors through which to express their hopes. It also sparks their imagination to construct stories of life larger than oneself which can serve our collective flourishing and, perhaps, even give glory to God. By so doing, Scriptures may help students enter shalom, practicing our first and final vocation of worship.

C. HUMAN PARTICIPATION IN DIVINE PEDAGOGY

In this chapter I have argued that education and religion are twin pursuits. Both endeavours are framed within a larger story of who we are, where we came from, what went wrong, and how to lead humanity to flourishing. As such, the sharing of stories, particularly those considered revelatory by contemporary communities of belief, is a powerful process by which these trans-disciplinary perspectives may cross-pollinate. As we dialogue, it helps to distinguish curriculum as the course we follow (what we “learn about”), and currere as the transformative communal journey (which we are “called to”). This accords with my task of constructing a narrative theology of education, considering the place of Sacred Texts therein.

Thus, I re-told the biblical story of our collective journey in six stages. In this travelogue, we considered God’s Curriculum by which humanity comes of age and discovers life abundant, that all of creation may flourish under the dominion of its stewards. We were infants in Eden, making shalom as we learned about the duty and delight of work, called to cultivate God’s garden. And yet, as toddlers throwing a tantrum at Babel, breaking shalom, we learned about the promise and peril of knowledge, called to repent over the tower. The divine pedagogue then focused in on the few as a medium to rescue the many. The children of Abraham, as wanderers seeking shalom, learned about obedience to the way of wisdom, called to bless from the tent. Despite glimpses of the Promised Land, the elect also went awry, retaliating against rather than blessing the nations. Thus, the Teacher embodied our telos. Through Jesus’ exemplar, instruction and sacrifice, God was saving shalom. As adolescents with a real choice to make, we learned about reciprocity, called to love on the mountain. Through the Spirit, then, God invited all people to eat together in harmony at the table of friendship, embracing shalom. As emerging adults in the upper room at Pentecost, we learned about the responsibility of holiness to sustain such a community, called to reconcile in the house. Finally, then, we are invited into full maturity as God’s image bearers, entering shalom in God’s glorious presence. With our feet set toward the destination, we learn about hope, called to worship in the city.

In short, the course of curriculum covers work, knowledge, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness and hope. And as genuine agents in the educative process, we walk with the Creator on this transformative journey as we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile and worship. We may thus affirm John Milton’s vision of education as “repairing the ruins” of humanity’s fall into sin. And yet, contrary to some undercurrents of conservative Christianity, the narrative I have told

---

828 Spears and Loomis, Education, 35-41.
deconstructs elitism, insularity, exclusivism and escapism. God’s Curriculum calls all people to foster holistic flourishing, starting with our shared secular existence in the here and now. As James Smith argues, redemption is “as big as creation, [and as] far as the curse is found.” In broadest terms, the telos of this biblical vision of education may be understood as human participation in divine restoration, that every dimension of creation may find its fullness, to the glory of God.

From the normative perspective, then, what should be the place of Sacred Texts in secular education? Rather than retrace the argument I have made, there is value in returning to the motif of pilgrimage. Six potent metaphors emerge from this story, each potentially enriching ACARA’s vision and practice of curriculum writing.

Imagine a diverse class of secular, spiritual and religious students invited to share the educational trail of God’s Curriculum. Consider the role of revelation at each of the major junctures. In Creation, Sacred Texts are akin to diverse maps. Their rich symbolism helps us imagine both humanity’s identity relative to nature, and the direction we should walk. There is no presuming that maps are identical, or even accurate. And yet, each revelation grapples with and has informed how we understand our work in this world. In the Fall, Scriptures function as signs. They help us stay on the path of peace. Granted, their instructions conflict at significant points, requiring us to stay alert. Nevertheless, these collective warnings check our overconfidence in autonomous knowing. They call us to re-turn when we have lost our way. As with the Torah for Israel, sacred stories represent the path to life. Through the wisdom of those who have walked before us, they each suggest a trail at critical moments in our contemporary trek. Again, there is no single path; occasionally the trails head opposite directions. Nevertheless, thinking along diverse lines—that is, tracing the journey along competing trajectories—illuminates our options and challenges individualism, that we may together flourish. As with Jesus, the Word made flesh, Scriptures function as a guide. At a minimum, the stories they tell of great teachers across history can direct the course we take. At a maximum, Scriptures hold up exemplars such as Muhammad, the Buddha, Krishna, Abraham, and Confucius, who embody the ideal pilgrim who is capable of lifting us up when we are too weak to walk. While students may acknowledge only one guide, if any, the life and teaching of these significant figures provides powerful models against which we may benchmark to discern how we are travelling. At the juncture of the Church, Sacred Texts are our access point to companions for the journey. Beyond our immediate neighbour in the class, we travel as a community of character across time and space, seeking flourishing. Through sacred stories, we learn from the success and failure of our companions, and discover the virtues required for

---

830 Smith, Discipleship in the Present Tense (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin College Press, 2013), 3-10.
832 This parallels how Jesus opens his disciples’ eyes as they dialogue on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24.
difference to enhance, rather than destroy, our collective passage. Finally, in the New Creation, Scriptures unveil our destination. With their diverse pictures of our sumnum bonum, they challenge students to reflect on where they are headed, and what is of greatest worth. These stories supply vivid images to depict our hope, pulling us forward as pilgrims together seeking shalom.

From a broadly Christian perspective, the Bible remains a primary resource by which the divine pedagogue calls humanity to come of age. However, we have discovered in God’s Curriculum a crucial role for diverse voices and other Scriptures. At points this argument appeared to align with ideals held by ACARA, perhaps warranting the incorporation of Sacred Texts in secular education. It remains, however, to bring educational, sociological and theological perspectives together in the spirit of therapeutic mediation, discovering a thoroughgoing fusion of horizons.
Chapter 6
How Sacred Texts Serve the Common Good

Having completed the descriptive-empirical, interpretive and normative movements, we now turn to the correlative phase in our investigation. Again, our central questions are these: what is, and what should be, the place of Sacred Texts within the emerging Australian Curriculum. Cultural interpretations, both educational and sociological, must be brought into mutually critical conversation with theological viewpoints. As delineated in Chapter 2, I will employ a dialectical hermeneutic, comparing and contrasting the Australian Curriculum (AC) with what I have suggestively called “God’s Curriculum” (GC), before considering how we may create a synergy in which Scriptures may be appropriately incorporated into secular education.

Secularists and multiculturalists may together express reservations about this process of mapping from one community’s revelatory vision onto a pluralistic curriculum for diverse citizens. This unifying metanarrative, oriented toward the biblical telos of shalom, may overwhelm competing accounts. As such, the greater part of this chapter is given to three case studies, attending in turn to the seemingly exclusive and yet totalising identity of the children of Abraham, then the seed of Abraham, aimed at worship of God in God’s consummated kingdom. These especially problematic stages of the biblical journey will be overlayed with natural analogues from the Australian Curriculum: Israel with the study of History, informed by Indigenous and Asian cross-curriculum priorities; Jesus with the study of Civics and Citizenship, informed by social capability and notions of equitable education; and the New Creation with ACARA’s emphasis on general capabilities as a whole, focused on an integrated curriculum. In so doing, I will demonstrate how such a composite vision can be open to and inclusive of diverse identities, using sacred stories to enhance secular schools. In Hanan Alexander’s parlance, I will demonstrate that a “robust commitment to a particular inheritance” can ground a “deep respect for difference”, thereby combining religious affiliation and liberal inquiry in democratic education. 833

In this fusion of horizons, I will selectively draw from a range of thinkers to augment the conversation. As introduced in Chapter 5, Dwayne Huebner’s integrative work is considered by many to be exemplary, bridging curricular theorising and theological discourse. 834 As such, he is my primary dialogue partner. His work is reinforced by a diversity of reflective practitioners—Parker Palmer, Alain de Botton, Os Guinness, John Hull and Miroslav Volf—who stand at the

833 Hanan Alexander, Reimagining Liberal Education (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), xii, 1-15, 182. My thesis accords with his quest for “intelligent spirituality” (i.e., “the search for transcendent visions of human flourishing that are open to engagement with alternative views”), built upon a “pedagogy of difference”.

834 See William Pinar, “Introduction,” in Dwayne Huebner, Lure of the Transcendent [hereafter LT], xvi, xxiv.
intersection of education and religion in the public sphere, respected for leading the way toward faithful amalgamation. Each section concludes in a specific statement of education’s end for ACARA’s subjects and the curriculum as a whole, and how Sacred Texts can help lead us there.

I contend that the various goals of God’s Curriculum, discerned in Chapter 5, have natural parallels across the Australian Curriculum. Space, however, does not permit this complete analysis in sufficient depth, such as considering how the aims of History correlate with all six legs of the biblical journey. Nevertheless, the detailed cross-pollination with the narrative of Israel, Jesus, and the New Creation, will pave the way for cursory comments illustrating how the particular stories of Creation, Fall, and the Church may likewise enrich our educational vision for pluralistic schools. The chapter will culminate with the common ground of six purposes which I suggest collectively constitute the core aims of education: education is for responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion, and integration. Infused with an expansively Christian ethos, these ends can focus and deepen ACARA’s curriculum writing practice, guiding them to reimagine each subject as open to diverse and transcendent takes on the world. In turn, we see how shalom as the telos of God’s Curriculum bolsters the common good as arguably the driving force of the Australian Curriculum. I will argue that at this nexus, Sacred Texts in secular education can truly serve holistic flourishing.

Before we begin this task, it is helpful to specify the kind of conversation I seek. As John Sullivan notes, education is inherently cross-disciplinary and thus capacious. It requires us to proffer answers to religiously interested questions about the nature of humanity and the purpose of existence, thus necessitating conversation between disparate ideologies.835 Paul Hirst’s claim in the 1970s that education is an autonomous discipline, following the trajectory of secularisation to become a stand-alone field with no coherent connection to theology, is now widely questioned.836 Indeed, John Hull, perhaps more than any other scholar in the UK, demonstrated that Christian theology was capable of a meaningful and mutually enriching dialogue with secular educational theorising.837 This is important, for as Leslie Francis observes, theology is no longer the heart of the university, nor even common knowledge. Thus, “dethroned theology needs to learn to speak the languages evolved by other disciplines themselves.”838 Its contribution cannot be assumed. It must be demonstrated. Practical theology, then, has a dual mandate. It has a prophetic responsibility to “scrutinise and to evaluate secular educational theory and practice in the light of the Christian

And yet, it must do so in a context where “thus says the Lord” is inadmissible, if not incomprehensible. The only path forward is patient translation and persistent discussion between interlocutors asking similar questions but lacking a shared lexicon. Short of this, educators’ eyes glaze over by the third mention of *imago Dei*, *shalom*, *telos*, or any number of other theologically laden words.

Returning to John Hull, then, we find a model of “interplay”, of ongoing reading, interpretation, and re-reading between different frames of reference, especially a philosophy and theology of education. For Wilna Meijer, this comports with her educational embrace of “open pluralism” in which we accept irreducible plurality in culture and worldview, while still fostering “the nerve to engage in genuine intercultural interaction … as opposed to a closed or insular pluralism or cultural apartheid.” There is a willingness to embrace the conversation and playfully see where it leads. This requires reciprocity wherein theologians listen before they speak—as I sought to do in Chapters 3 and 4—modelling the eucharistic hospitality they desire at the secular curriculum table. For Hull, this takes the form of an admission. Adapted to my context, I admit that the Bible is not an educational textbook; “God’s Curriculum” is neither necessary nor sufficient for Australia’s educational theorising. The most it can offer is one take among many that I must demonstrate to be helpful toward ACARA’s stated curricular aims. Pushing this point further, my biblical perspective is only one angle among numerous Christian views, which in turn sit alongside a plethora of religious, spiritual and secular accounts of education. Hull strikes an important balance. Theology should neither absorb nor abandon education.

Theologians are but one minority among many in this dialogical process. Nonetheless, as with Marxist or feminist perspectives, this does not disqualify their contribution. It does, however, bring a measure of realism as to what can be achieved. At most, through this dialogue, I hope to “take up the basin and towel and be a servant” to ACARA’s agenda of educational equity. In this, there are good grounds to see holistic flourishing as a point of reference and a place of charitable dialogue between formerly divided communities.

With this agenda, I must equally guard against compromise. Serving ACARA may conflict with being a servant of Christ. The most persistent critique of Hull’s efforts to have theology serve

840 Ibid., 359-360.
845 Ibid., 262.
847 Ibid., 18.
education was that his primary inspiration and authority was secular reason rather than religious revelation. While Bates contends that Hull’s theology was orthodox, albeit radical, I have sought to avoid this accusation by treating the biblical narrative on its own terms in Chapter 5 rather than fitting it to predefined liberal categories such as “critical openness”. My challenge in what follows, then, is to faithfully represent ACARA’s philosophy of education and a narrative theology of education, that each may be “mutually reinforcing rather than incompatible, and mutually beneficial rather than hostile to one another”.

In short, my theology seeks reconciliation toward the end of shalom.

To this task we now turn, discovering resonances between a theology of Israel and ACARA’s aims in History. Rather than overburden this investigation with repeated citations and introduction of new material, I will restrict this case study to what has been addressed in former chapters, unpacking where these different perspectives affirm and refuse each other.

A. GOD’S CURRICULUM AND ACARA’S VISION

Wisdom, Blessing and Diverse Cultural Perspectives in History

In Chapter 5, I suggested that the story of Israel’s election positions the content of wisdom and the action of blessing at the core of God’s Curriculum. Even as this vision emerges from a single stage of the biblical journey, it cannot be confined to any one subject. It reflects priorities that commend integration throughout. Nevertheless, it is helpful to consider how this wandering tale of Abraham’s descendants seeking shalom correlates with the Australian Curriculum aims in History, especially as it relates to the integration of diverse cultural perspectives. We must compare and contrast these curricula visions, before creating a third way that appropriately incorporates Sacred Texts in secular education. We begin, then, with two points of affirmation, surrounding stories and insight.

First, both curricula are built upon a storied epistemology. In GC, the children of Israel learn who they are by hearing the story behind communal practices such as Passover. In Brueggemann’s words, “narrative [w]as Israel’s primal mode of knowing.” In AC, the students of this nation learn their identity as individuals, community members, and global citizens as they hear and tell stories of where we have each come from. We access the “truth” of history primarily through the tales people tell. The events that comprise our existence are superabundant in meaning,

---


851 Brueggemann, Creative, 14-15, 22-23.

852 Ibid., 15-16, also 23-26.
funding a plethora of interpretations irreducible to summary propositions. Criteria are employed to discern the veracity of competing views. Nonetheless, both the Bible’s sacred account and ACARA’s secular history implicitly recognise that we each see from somewhere and to somewhere.\textsuperscript{853} Bias is inescapable, and meaning is contested. Thus, we do well to listen to all relevant accounts in making sense of the human story.

Furthermore, both perspectives resist individualism. The way I see the world is embedded within a whole way of life. It is a product of my family, my culture, and—most important for our purposes here—my foundational faith commitment, whether secular, spiritual or religious. Israel’s multiple tellings of its journey across time and space are inseparable from the God they worshipped. Similarly, ACARA’s cross-curricular emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures recognises that these are “living communities” constituted by the “interconnected aspects of country/place, people and culture”.\textsuperscript{854} By emphasising their “deep knowledge traditions and holistic world view … expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing”, ACARA recognises that ATSI peoples are “spiritually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways”. Lest we settle for reductionist and exclusively immanent accounts, retelling their history requires reference to their beliefs about the transcendent. There is a double-standard in that such integration is acknowledged for ATSI and Asian cultures, alongside ancient and medieval people, while it is treated as irrelevant for mainstream religions in contemporary Australia. Regardless, it is clear that stories are the “stuff” of history. Given the primary function of sacred stories in meaning-making, shaping the way we see and act in the world, Scriptures deserve inclusion alongside ATSI oral traditions as useful sources for the study of History.

Second, both curricula seek insight. The study of the past is to inform the present, as we set our course for the future. Israel’s looking back to the Torah for guidance was in a creative tension with prophetic challenge to continue this trajectory of justice for all. Beyond telling interesting stories, they were to seek liberation. As they brought complex questions with ethical import to their history, their eyes were opened to see the best path for journeying together in the here and now. Similarly, ACARA asserts that an appreciation of our past has implications for the future.\textsuperscript{855} Asia literacy that attends to “traditions, cultures, belief systems and religions”, including the study of Confucius’s teaching, fosters “social inclusion and cohesion [which] is vital to the prosperity of Australia”.\textsuperscript{856} Understanding diverse historical perspectives develops empathy and moral

\textsuperscript{855} SACH, §8.
judgement, essential attributes for active and democratic citizens who together seek the common good. AC and GC thus agree that history is not disinterested. Both curricula consider historical significance as related to contemporary relevance, sharing stories to gain insight that serves flourishing.

Despite significant commonality, GC and AC refuse each other over the question of the transcendent, particularly as it pertains to the equity of education. It is questionable whether this subject can achieve its curricular ends apart from reference to overarching frames of meaning found in diverse Scriptures. This is not a naïve attempt to smuggle in the Bible and other supernatural stories as equivalent to modern historical accounts of the world. Rather, returning to the story of Israel, it is significant that their insight to act justly in the present was essentially informed by what they believed to be a transcendent take on history as a whole. A word through the priests illuminated where they had been; a rebuke through the prophets guided where they were going. Obedience to this revelation brought life. Disobedience invited destruction. Based upon widely accepted functional definitions of Sacred Texts, the Scriptures and sacred stories of most cultures play a similar role. They orient a community on what they believe to be the path to collective prosperity.

Two implications emerge. First, including revelatory perspectives is necessary for ACARA to adequately equip students to make sense of the past; such perspectives provide meaning and motivation for key historical agents. Second, ACARA will fail to fairly assess insight for ethical decisions in the present if they silence Scriptures. History is more than recounting former events. Through the study of History, the curriculum calls citizens to discern a better way forward, distinguishing “mistakes” from “inspired decisions” at pivotal moments in pursuit of justice. How should we judge and respond to stories of Australia’s history concerning Aboriginal rights, care or misuse of the land, town planning, militarism, the forming of allies and the treatment of enemies internationally and at home, not to mention political wranglings and power games? To be sure, there are significant overlaps among diverse worldviews that permit meaningful evaluation of the past framed in the language of justice, equity, compassion, inclusion, respect, and tolerance. Nevertheless, the divergent opinions on each issue and at times “conceptual incommensurability” of rival arguments challenge any claim that ethical reasoning may be conducted without reference to communities of belief and particular narratives. Students will necessarily consider conflicting accounts. In this process, it may be considered an inequitable form of ideological closure to exclude

---

857 SAC:H, §2.2; 2.7; 3.1-2; 6.3.4.
860 MacIntyre, After, 8, 216.
sacred stories that have shaped the current state of affairs and can inform our response. In this process, we are wise to permit moral and religious discourse in the classroom as a practice-ground for mature citizenship in a pluralistic democracy.\textsuperscript{861}

Conversely, it is very likely that AC would challenge the incorporation of “biblical history” as potentially dangerous. Beyond questions of historicity, Israel’s “election”—where one people group is singled out as special—appears to threaten educational equity. That their take on the world’s story should speak for others is totalising. The claim that all people will flourish if they submit to “God’s commands”, or otherwise perish, must be deconstructed. In the hands of a Christian majority seeing themselves as Abraham’s heirs through Jesus, this revelatory take could destroy social cohesion and silence secular, spiritual and religious minorities alike. History invites contested perspectives. There is no contest, however, if Abrahamic traditions and their Scriptural accounts secure proportional representation to define our past and direct our future.

Before creating a path forward, we must clear away confusion. The narrative of Israel I told frames “election” as a particular task of one people group to serve and bless all, learning through their failures and thus eschewing triumphalism.\textsuperscript{862} God speaks to and works through people beyond Abraham’s family, especially the marginalised whose cries must be heard. Furthermore, the covenant community’s submission to this transcendent authority was not for imposition on the Other. Rather, their neighbours were invited to study the history of this particular people, and see whether following this path would indeed bring holistic flourishing. Their agency to choose was paramount, ensuring freedom. In Parker Palmer’s exposition, \textit{obedience} implied a “discerning ear”, listening to a situation and “respond[ing] to that reality, whatever it may be.”\textsuperscript{863} In curricular terms, obedience means creating a space in which the “community of truth is practiced”—a truth that is determined by consensus as diverse worldviews are heard and critically engaged in a constructive context.\textsuperscript{864} Provided that educators preserve a plurality of perspectives in “respectful listening and faithful responding”, the introduction of sacred accounts need not be oppressive or exclusive.\textsuperscript{865}

Where, then, may a synergy be found? For AC, Scriptures can serve as primary sources through which students empathically enter the social imaginary of diverse cultures in our past. This helps us make sense of our contested present, and work together for our preferred future. For GC, the study of competing trajectories for life encapsulated in myriad Sacred Texts can raise timely questions that illuminate the path as we set our feet toward flourishing. Both curricula thus value diverse stories that offer insight for today, even as they disagree over how we may equitably include

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{862} Rom 9-11; 1 Cor 10:1-11.
  \item \textsuperscript{863} Parker Palmer, \textit{To Know As We Are Known} (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1983), 43.
  \item \textsuperscript{864} Ibid., xi-xii.
  \item \textsuperscript{865} Ibid., 66-67.
\end{itemize}
supposedly transcendent takes on history. Beginning with Dwayne Huebner’s educational vision, and moving onto Alain de Botton’s secular proposal, I contend that a fusion of horizons between GC and AC is possible, thereby advancing ACARA’s purposes for this subject by centring the subject on wisdom.

Huebner is helpful at this point. In his experience, education err ed in two directions. A content-heavy curriculum fostered a backward looking populace concerned with where compartmentalised disciplines and disparate cultures had been. Simultaneously, a curriculum stressing technical mastery fostered a forward-looking populace concerned with local prosperity, ignoring those outside one’s individual and the State’s political agenda. In frustration, he turned to anthropological, existentialist and ultimately theological perspectives that emphasised a synthesis of past and present concerns through holistic awareness in the present.866

Huebner attempted to overhaul curricular language. Awareness of three facets of our “temporality” would carry his vision forward.867 First, our memory and traditions enable us to access the past, defining who we are and from whence we came. Second, our ability to interpret offers a hermeneutical bridge across time and between the self and the Other, “by which individuals, in community, arrive at mutual understanding in the conduct of their public affairs.”868 Third, our communal nature affords a “caring collectivity” in which we may move from memories and intentions to constructing a meaningful life together. In sum, educators must educe individual, societal, and transcultural insights through which we make sense of the world.869 This multi-perspectival vision of curriculum, through diverse stories of our past and toward the common good, accords with ACARA’s aims for History.

Huebner resists the domination of any one story, regardless of its genealogy or metaphysics. In the context of secular schooling, he merely claims that throughout history, individuals and communities have “experienced transforming and transcending moments and that these moments have been stored within the various traditions of these people” in symbolic stories.870 As layered narratives, these accounts offer possible ways of understanding one’s self, one’s society, and indeed our secular existence. Thus, Sacred Texts cannot override disciplinary knowledge; they play a supporting role, introduced as pertinent to particular discussions. Nonetheless, they must not be downplayed: “to the extent that various modes of knowing are separated from religious traditions they become closed in upon themselves and lose their vitality, their ‘spirit,’ their creativity, and the

866 Huebner, “Curriculum As a Concern for Man’s Temporality,” and “Autobiographical Statement,” in LT, 131-142 and 447-450, respectively. Cf. Palmer, To Know, 88.
867 Huebner, “Toward a Remaking of Curricular Language,” in LT, 184-197.
868 Ibid., 185.
869 Ibid., 188.
possibility of being transcended."

Privatising the reading of Scriptures neutralises the transformative power in the classroom of these signs of transcendence (thus robbing students of potential sources of wisdom), and sends believers back with unchallenged readings of these narratives to their religious enclaves (thus endangering our schools through submerged and balkanising beliefs). Huebner instead calls for a curriculum which mines the riches of diverse religious traditions as "veins of language about the spiritual" which speak symbolically to lived reality in this world.

While Huebner’s proposal may sound liberating to religious minorities lacking recognition, it may disturb seculars who decry the lingering influence of a once powerful church on public institutions. We must remember that Sacred Texts have a history of use and abuse, from ancient crusades to modern wars in the Middle East. Therefore, were ACARA to incorporate Scriptures in this subject, they must guard against marginalising those without a metanarrative or “who sing their spiritual songs in less religious, more secular keys”.

One such melody that warrants hearing is voiced by the philosopher Alain de Botton. I do not presume he speaks for all secularists. However, his influential thought characterises a new wave of atheism which desires to move beyond the dismissal of religion, instead constructing the world afresh and labouring side-by-side for communal wellbeing. Such proponents seek to draw from the best of what was, supporting the freedom of all people to publicly express their views without fear of discrimination, provided they are open to critique. This stance suggests a legitimate educational role for Sacred Texts that resonates with secular perspectives and aligns with ACARA’s aims for History.

According to Alain de Botton, “The differences between secular and religious approaches to education boil down to the question of what learning should be for.” Tired of the stale divide between the religious and secularists like himself, he recognises our shared need for wisdom (phronēsis) to navigate these challenging times. He provocatively asks, “Even if religion isn’t true, can’t we enjoy the best bits?” This involves atheists “gleaning insights which might be of use within secular life.” De Botton argues that Christianity can teach the secular world the

---

871 Ibid., 348.
872 Ibid., 344.
874 Alexander, “Education,” 244.
880 De Botton, Religion, 15-16.
importance of education aimed at a vision more compelling than the immediate horizon of jobs, skills, and economic progress.\textsuperscript{881} He appreciates the goal of shaping students to “love their neighbours and leave the world happier than they found it.” Education’s mission is to “teach us how to make a living \textit{and} to teach us how to live.”\textsuperscript{882} De Botton attributes the secular failure to achieve the latter to the supplanting of Sacred Texts with their lofty visions of life, preferring relatively shallow contemporary cultural works. In response, he proposes a School for Life built upon recovery of ancient Scriptural wisdom in dialogue with the best of modern culture, acknowledging our brokenness and limitations in pursuit of integration of the soul.\textsuperscript{883} There are genuine questions whether reductionistic materialists, who dismiss the soul altogether, would be able to sustain such practices and vision if they did not believe at least in some sense that religious beliefs were “true”.\textsuperscript{884} Nevertheless, de Botton recognises the centrality of wisdom to education and the study of history.

Despite dissonant religious beliefs, Huebner and de Botton’s curricular visions are remarkably consonant. As with GC and AC, education is for “life”. In seeking to understand where we have come from and to where we are going, we must hear diverse stories that claim to chart the path.\textsuperscript{885} Ultimately, the \textit{telos} of studying history is not a precise time-line replete with every “significant” event and prominent persona. Rather, it is to make sense of our world, seeking wisdom that we may together pursue holistic flourishing in the present. Toward this end, Sacred Texts are invaluable.\textsuperscript{886}

What, then, may this look like in the context of History? As with Huebner’s scheme, my suggestion is minimal, even ad hoc. I am not arguing for widespread Scriptural reading, incorporation of sacred history as a primary source on what actually happened in the past, or even substantial changes to the curriculum that include depth units on religious doctrine. Rather, I am suggesting that ACARA evenly apply its criteria of historical significance. They should recognise \textit{religion} as a key concept to form an accurate picture of every period in the past, including modern history. They would do well to centralise empathy and contestability by creating space for revelatory perspectives that numerous adherents believe insightfully interpret the human journey. More radically, perhaps, I am suggesting that the aims of History are best met when teachers employ a pedagogy that bridges past events and future hopes by attending to present concerns and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[881] Ibid., 102.
\item[882] Ibid., 105-106.
\item[883] Ibid., 106-121.
\end{footnotes}
liberative praxis. This must not distort historical reconstructions. And yet, it must encourage students to raise pressing questions about what we can learn from yesteryear that is relevant today. Such an approach must amplify the cries for justice by those on the margins, and seek connections that help diverse students together understand what truly is the common good. If “historical explanation crucially involves teleological reasoning about human agency,” then students must be invited to share their individual and communal stories—whether religious, spiritual or secular—in search of wisdom that leads to peaceful coexistence. ACARA’s desire for social cohesion by equitably including diverse cultural perspectives, even dissonant voices, must extend to incorporate the key narratives that have shaped this world for good or evil.

Reciprocity, Love and Social Capability in Civics and Citizenship

We will now concentrate on the climactic stage of the biblical journey for our second case study. We saw in Chapter 5 that the incarnation of God in Christ represents the saving of shalom. By attending to Jesus as the Teacher who embodied our telos, I argued that God’s Curriculum centres on the content of reciprocity and the action of love. Given that Christian identity is characterised by heralding good news about the Kingdom of God—itself an edict with political overtones—it is fruitful to consider how this educational vision correlates with the Australian Curriculum aims in Civics and Citizenship, especially as it relates to the integration of Social Capability. If, through this subject, students are to develop “social management and awareness”, how might this compare and contrast with my narrative theology, that we may create a new way forward? Two affirmations are apparent, captured by the words “peace” and “plurality”.

Both GC and AC strive for peace. For Christians, the heart of the biblical story is the Prince of Peace conquering evil through sacrificial love, that we may discover peace with our Creator and each other. In turn, we may together cultivate the world toward flourishing. While this is not ACARA’s language, there is significant overlap. The “values, attitudes and dispositions” foundational to Australia’s democracy include commitment to civil behaviour, civic duty and human rights in a modern democracy, including care and compassion, respect for all people, fairness, social justice, freedom of speech, honesty, respecting others’ rights and views, responsibility, inclusiveness, equality, sustainability, peace, giving and contributing to the common good.

---

887 Groome, CRE, 5-25, 207-208, 261-278.
890 Ibid., 167.
892 ACARA, “General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum” [hereafter GCAC], 97-120, at 103.
893 SAC:CC, §25b.
These loaded terms may each be understood as building blocks for peaceful coexistence, albeit exclusively focused on mundane human relationships rather than peace with God. GC and AC thus share a vision for citizenship that extends beyond the absence of conflict and individual flourishing to holistic harmony. As for the substance of this peace, we must draw from the deepest sources informing each social collective that comprise this country. Sacred Texts can make a very significant contribution to this task.

Both GC and AC acknowledge plurality as pivotal in the process of forming peaceful citizens. The language of diversity, Australia as a “secular, pluralist, multicultural society”, and acknowledgement of student membership in “multiple communities”, all suggest that ACARA seeks peace that is inclusive, rather than in spite, of our deepest differences. Religious identification is explicitly recognised. At the level of curricular aims, then, Australian identity cannot be framed as necessarily in competition with one’s foundational beliefs, even when those beliefs are shaped by sacred stories.

Similarly, plurality was seen as key in the biblical story of humanity’s maturation. Diversity was hard-wired into creation, fostered by divine intervention at Babel, and celebrated by Israel in their capacious appetite for wisdom from every nation. The incarnation of Christ required his followers to give full weight to cultural particularity. Furthermore, Jesus modelled grace to embrace as neighbours those deemed beyond a community’s insular concerns. At the heart of the Golden Rule is reciprocity that safeguards difference, extending equal rights and responsibility to every demographic irrespective of allegiance and thereby protecting minorities against majority imposition.

Navigating substantial plurality, however, requires skills. Therefore, both curricula are concerned with “social capability”. Citizens of both realms must learn to work “collaboratively and constructively in groups, developing their communication, decision-making, conflict resolution and leadership skills, and learning to appreciate the insights and perspectives of others”. Toward this end, diverse revelations expose superficial representation, even caricature, of the Other. They may be constructively incorporated in this subject as a way of exposing students to the inner logic undergirding much plurality, thereby stimulating meaningful discussion on how we may live together in peace.

Despite these genuine affirmations, each curriculum challenges the other over the path to peace and the place of plurality therein. We enter this debate, then, by unpacking AC’s likely refusal of GC on the centrality of love, both as a framing concept and as a sacrificial vocation. As a framing concept, ACARA’s content-heavy stress on the mechanics of civil society suggests that

---

894 Ibid., §58.
they may balk at the rhetoric of “love” as nebulous, impractical, and wedded to religious ethics. It is unlikely to gain traction with the various neo-liberal political and economic forces that also have a right to share their story of a futures-oriented curriculum. Talk of “loving one’s neighbour” may be dismissed as a soft concept relative to the hard facts of government structure, legal rights, and civic responsibilities.

Before we continue with AC refusal of sacrifice, a response may help us bracket this first challenge. Love should not be reduced to an emotional impulse. If love is framed as truly knowing and valuing all of reality, and rebuilding the ligaments that bind people to each other and the planet, then it necessarily calls us to “involvement, mutuality, [and] accountability”. As Reinhold Niebuhr argued, love extends beyond individual relationships; it is also required of States and institutions. Love exceeds justice with an unconditional will to seek holistic flourishing for all constituents, issuing in rights, responsibility and respect. And as Miroslav Volf posits, “without love, there is no shalom.” Indeed, love is more demanding than tolerance and critical appreciation of diversity. According to Huebner, the heart of education, as of life itself, is “response-ability” for all creation and love for the Other in mutual understanding and service.

The call to “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is not exclusively Christian. Positive and negative variants of this love-ethic are espoused by diverse theorists, calling us to consider our actions from the Other’s viewpoint and work for their good in a merging of concern. Confucius identified “reciprocity” as the summing up of “a rule of practice for all one’s life”. Many secular ethicists concur. Love was central to the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Informed by Buddhist notions of karuṇā (compassion), contemporary educationalists also argue for an epistemology of love. Indeed, summarising the corpus of his analytical and literary work, Irving Singer—a renowned physicalist philosopher convinced that biological processes are sufficient to explain human nature—suggests that love is the major driver in every culture, intertwined with the creative energy we expend in shaping the world. Love is constituted by the discovery of value in someone (“appraisal”) and creating value in that person through acceptance and appreciation (“bestowal”). Only together does this constitute real love, not merely benefitting

895 Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope and Andrew Harvey, “A Public Curriculum,” in Rethinking Public Education, 33-42.
896 Palmer, To Know, 9.
897 Cf. Stackhouse, Making, 81-114, 211.
900 Lk 6:31.
901 Confucius, Analects XV §24.
oneself but serving to “enhance the value of both participants”. Singer argues that the formation of democracy itself was entangled with notions of romantic love, freeing each person to pursue her own desires, albeit held in check by the desires of others.

This has important implications for the study of Civics and Citizenship, requiring a “harmonization” of scientific and humanistic accounts, drawing upon insights from Scriptures to fully grasp the importance of love in every facet of life including education. Despite ACARA’s anticipated reservations, then, it would seem that our collective journey toward peace requires substantial conversation between students to frame our immanent democratic desires for what is true, good and beautiful within transcendent discourse on what we ultimately love. Sacred stories concretise diverse notions of love in the lives of humanity’s greatest leaders; these accounts are therefore rich sources to raise questions of what our liberal democracy is aiming at. Far from a soft concept, love is at the core of humanity as a whole and thus should find a significant place in this subject. Indeed, it may already be present, albeit signalled by alternative rhetoric. ACARA’s notion of “active citizenship”, quoted above, includes “care and compassion” for people and the planet toward the common good. As Dwayne Huebner and Nel Noddings explore, these terms are functional equivalents for love. It remains to make this theme, and its diverse philosophical and Scriptural underpinnings, explicit.

What, then, of ACARA’s resistance to the tough vocation of sacrifice for secular schools? As described in Year Ten AC:CC, under the organising idea of “citizenship, diversity and identity”, students are called to discern “the challenges to sustaining a civil society, such as the influence of vested interests ….” Against the backdrop of the classic secularisation narrative, deep differences in religious identity may be considered a primary threat to social harmony; subsequently, the incorporation of Sacred Texts represents a fracturing of the common (i.e., national) good. ACARA may question, is religious diversity always good? Is there a limit to what we should tolerate? Should we, for instance, give voice in public education to that which undermines or destabilises the freedoms we share? Enabling student expression of potentially extremist views, supported by contentious Scriptures prone to misinterpretation, is a dangerous path to peace. The disparity between curriculum philosophy and actual content suggests that ACARA prefers to silence such plurality, focusing on what unites rather than distinguishes diverse Australians. The Christian

---

906 Ibid., 51-52.
907 Ibid., 81.
908 Ibid., 59.
909 Ibid., 12-13.
911 AC:CC, Year 10 content elaborator.
vocation to “love on the mountain” and embrace substantial otherness as a way of breaking the cycle of violence is thus dismissed.\textsuperscript{912}

In turn, GC refuses AC in its superficial path to peace. We have already deconstructed ACARA’s mining of religious quarries for supposedly “universal values”. There is much to be gained by framing secular education around widely accepted notions such as justice and compassion. Detaching these values from their originating stories, however, hollows out the particular meaning and coopts communities of belief to serve an immanent political agenda. Consequently, treating these values as building blocks to underpin a “cohesive Australian Society” may unintentionally reflect the uniformity of Babel rather than the deep plurality of Pentecost.\textsuperscript{913}

The AC purports to value diversity even as it silences Sacred Texts and allocates insignificant time to the subject, hindering meaningful dialogue between students. For instance, “multidimensional citizenship” all but disappears in the translation of AC philosophy into curriculum content. That a student may simultaneously be Australian and a citizen of Heaven, or liberal and Hindu, is obscured as students develop the skill of “reflect[ing] on personal identity and commitment to democratic citizenship and what it means for self, for interactions with others and for the community.”\textsuperscript{914} Individual liberty consistently trumps transcultural identity, and the drive to find “common ground” that builds Australia persistently avoids critique of “existing policy issues and problems as a means of improving the system.”\textsuperscript{915}

This superficiality, however, extends to the process of educating for active citizenship. Commendably, ACARA’s curriculum philosophy exceeds knowledge and understanding to form skills and dispositions that enable purposeful engagement in the present.\textsuperscript{916} By middle-school this engagement should be “on the basis of wider community concerns rather than individual interests”.\textsuperscript{917} This necessitates a focus on social capability and working collaboratively in diverse teams. By the end of Year 10, for instance, students should be able to “articulate their personal value system and analyse the effects of actions that repress social power and limit the expression of diverse views”, “plan, implement and evaluate ways of contributing to civil society at local, national regional and global levels”, and “assert their own viewpoint, entertaining divergent views”.\textsuperscript{918} Through Civics and Citizenship, students will thus “generate, apply and evaluate strategies such as active listening, mediation and negotiation to prevent and resolve interpersonal


\textsuperscript{913} AC:CC, Year 7.

\textsuperscript{914} Ibid., content descriptor Years 7-10 under “skills: communication and reflection”.


\textsuperscript{916} SAC:CC, §25c.

\textsuperscript{917} Ibid., §40.

\textsuperscript{918} GCAC, 112-117.
problems and conflicts”. GC affirms these goals. Plurality is constructively engaged, and students together form practices that guide their feet in the path of peace.

Regrettably, then, this inspiring vision—insofar as it relates to interaction with religious thought—essentially vanishes in the translation of curriculum philosophy into AC content. Meaningful engagement with religious difference is absent. Scriptures as the deepest sources shaping many a community’s value system drop out. Real conflict, a necessary ingredient to develop mediation skills, is contained. And instead of centralising shared problem solving, students spend the majority of their time on immanent political machinations largely irrelevant to adolescent existence. Reminiscent of government-driven conservative curricula late last century, the primary driver behind schools studying this field appears to be solving the “civics deficit”—as though knowing about democratic structures, without critically engaging through democratic processes, can develop strong citizens: a highly contested notion at best. This shallow view of citizenship fails to capitalise on local actions students can perform to make a difference right now.

GC refuses AC at this point, for Jesus prioritised the formation of dispositions over the accrual of facts in disciple-making. Talking about citizenship serves the practicing of citizenship. Beyond information, the priority of transformation requires that we reconceive of education as an apprenticeship in the craft of life. As Mike Higton argues, “all learning worthy of the name is part of the task of embodied, virtuous and critical learning from each other how to live well together in wisdom and delight.” Thus, if students are to be peace-makers who love their neighbours amidst their deepest differences, then they must be exposed to real problems and given genuine responsibility to enact change. They also require wise guides to walk with them, sharing stories of how we may “get on together” and “build a flourishing common life”. As I have argued throughout, Sacred Texts are a catalyst for students to consider, critique and create their individual and communal vision of the common good. For students uncomfortable with divulging their foundational beliefs, these texts can provide critical distance to dialogue about issues of common concern, integrating their own identity and lifestance in the presence of a diversity of metanarratives. This is not about addressing every revelation and surveying “world religions”.

---

919 Ibid., 118.
923 DeJaeghere, “Critical,” 83-86.
926 Ibid. See also Higton, Theology, 181-184, 195-196.
Rather, it is about “neighbour religion”, making space to listen to the stories and Scriptures that are important to “what my neighbour in my classroom, in my village or town, and even in the global village believes”. That is, in contrast to an overarching survey of religions as systems of belief—an approach which is prone to reification and mis-representation—GC aligns with Weisse’s emphasis on interpersonal encounter. We must begin with the voice of one’s neighbour, self-representation and genuine conversation, even as each identity is connected to a global community. Through this “dialogue from below”, homogeneity is resisted and diverse students truly learn to work together toward the common good. Anything less is merely playing school.

Where, then, does this leave us? Both AC and GC affirm the end of Civics and Citizenship as peace, and agree that plurality is key in the educational process. And yet, AC avoids our deepest religious differences in the safety of a content-driven curriculum. Conversely, GC would destabilise schools by having them unreservedly love not only their immediate neighbour but also democracy’s enemy. Both curricula acknowledge the need for critical citizenship that forms social capability in students, supporting shared action in our secular existence. Any fusion of horizons must serve these purposes, and emerge from the potential role of Sacred Texts outlined in previous chapters. For AC, Scriptures crystallise the deepest formulations of humanity’s summum bonum which communities pursue, and thus which students in a pluralistic democracy must engage. For GC, diverse revelations function as a guide on our journey of transformation; through the stories about and teaching of human exemplars, we access powerful perspectives that question and direct how we as a society are travelling. As we move toward a creative synergy, the need is pressing for a “dialogical process that seeks justice and resources for all rather than the few.” This curriculum vision must value diverse voices without fracturing the common good through identity politics.

According to Huebner, this requires the curriculum to foster in students respect for multiple sources of wisdom, providing access to the skills and power required to engage alongside avenues for genuine participation to reshape their world, beginning in the local context. If education is conceived of as a “concern for the evolving biography of the person and the evolving history of societies or communities”, then the reshaping of our life together must involve cross-generational “telling and retelling the stories of where they have been and where they seem to be going.” This exchange necessitates the inclusion of diverse Scriptures as symbolic wellsprings for many a community’s unfolding pilgrimage. We need guidance, however, for incorporating Sacred Texts

---

929 Ibid., 193, 205.
930 Huebner, LT, 202.
933 Huebner, LT, 185, 197.
could unleash violence. To this end, we will consider the thought of Os Guinness as a leading advocate for global religious liberty,\textsuperscript{934} closing with the implications for Civics and Citizenship education.

Guinness’s central question is this:

How do we live with our deepest differences, especially when those differences are religious and ideological, and very especially when those differences concern matters of our common public life? In short, how do we create a global public square and make the world safer for diversity?\textsuperscript{935}

Any response must facilitate “diversity and harmony” complementing each other, a radical challenge in the contemporary milieu.\textsuperscript{936} In the context of unprecedented migration, resurgent public religious expression, and “secular settlements” politically under duress, “entire ways of life” held sacred by diverse citizens are colliding.\textsuperscript{937} Misunderstanding is likely, with potentially catastrophic consequences.\textsuperscript{938} Secularists and religionists must cooperate.

Guinness’s solution is \textit{soul freedom} that includes “all ultimate beliefs and worldviews, whether religious or nonreligious, transcendent or naturalistic”.\textsuperscript{939} Freedom of association is built upon freedom of speech. This, in turn, rests on freedom of conscience as a fundamental liberty enabling dialogue in the public sphere about “matters of truth, justice, freedom, human dignity, beauty, social policy and the like”.\textsuperscript{940} Each community of belief has their own intrinsic rationale and variant of the Golden Rule for supporting these freedoms and grounding the “dignity and equality of all human beings”.\textsuperscript{941} Learning to reason together, across convictions, however, is the most pressing need.\textsuperscript{942}

Guinness’s three-prong strategy proposes a charter at the global level, safeguarding the rights and spelling out the responsibilities of all, and politico-legal settlements at the national level, protecting the “smallest minorities and least popular communities”.\textsuperscript{943} Nevertheless, charters and laws alone are empty without a “cosmopolitan and civil public square” comprised of citizens with the “habits of the heart” to sustain democracy.\textsuperscript{944} In an age of thin discourse and technology-driven soundbites, the third and local strategy of education plays a crucial role, forming students from the first in understanding, skills and dispositions to dialogue. Students must practice civil discourse in


\textsuperscript{936} Ibid., 61.


\textsuperscript{938} Guinness, \textit{Case}, 36-37, 62-76.

\textsuperscript{939} Guinness, \textit{GPS}, 13-14, 27-31.

\textsuperscript{940} Ibid., 87-89.

\textsuperscript{941} Ibid., 225 (Article 25 of the “Global Charter”).

\textsuperscript{942} Ibid., 15, 186-187.

\textsuperscript{943} Ibid., 89, 219-220, Articles 9-10.

\textsuperscript{944} Ibid., 146-150, 222, Article 16.
“conversation for the common good”. Education must foster in students an ability to listen, to intelligibly transpose one’s deepest beliefs for those who think differently—without losing touch with your home tradition—seeking to persuade rather than coerce others to one’s position. There is a “dignity of difference” that pushes us to discover common ground even while resisting compromise of our first principles. Reciprocity, then, preserves a distinct voice for each community, simultaneously guarding against the “danger of difference”.

We need not debate the metaphysical “roots” of worldviews, even as the “fruits” of each faith that shape the vision for our life together are a public concern that warrants civil discourse. That is, each citizen must be aware of the sacred stories of the Other and how they are interpreted by her community inasmuch as they impact our secular reality. Peace, then, is not found through rapid tolerance which stresses superficial ethnic differences while suppressing deep plurality emerging from transnational religious identity. Nor is it found through majority imposition that seeks justice for “just us”. Rather, it is a hard won and pragmatic reality “ordered through justice” but oriented toward love.

Guinness’s strategy suggests a fusion of GC and AC in the study of Civics and Citizenship. The three-fold content structure is preserved, addressing “government and democracy”, “laws and citizens”, and “citizenship, diversity and identity”. ACARA’s concerns over violence are addressed through emphasis on reciprocal justice aimed at love, serving the common good. However, our deepest differences informed by a diversity of wisdom traditions are given full voice, starting with what is sacred to one’s neighbour in the classroom. Democratic dispositions are shaped by practicing civility as we reason together about issues relevant to us all. In sum, Sacred Texts serve a curricula synergy in this subject. As we focus upon pressing secular issues, the incorporation of scripturally grounded views can sharpen the questions we must ask, and deepen our understanding of fundamental differences in perspective through recourse to our “first language” of sacred stories. Guarded by the principle of reciprocity, and aimed at care and compassion for all, the incorporation of diverse revelations serve the formation of democratic social capability in students. In so doing, we respect the dignity, even while resisting the danger, of plurality. This is the path to peace.

945 Ibid., 55-56, 222, Article 17.
946 Ibid., 221-223, Article 15 “Differences Irreducible”, also Article 18 “Articles of Peace”.
947 Ibid., 222, Article 14.
949 Guinness, Case for Civility, 114.
951 Guinness, GPS, 141-144.
952 Ibid., 223-224.
This can work within the strictures of ACARA’s curriculum, provided there is a reversal of priority from the primacy of “knowledge” to the process of “knowing”. Civics and Citizenship could become a hub for truly integrated learning where the “knowledge and understanding strand” is selectively incorporated to serve the more primary “civics and citizenship skills”. The generic goal of “social cohesion” is secondary to the aim of “democratic participation” which requires that students face the particularities of each culture as we “learn to live together”. This accords with best international practice in Citizenship and Peace education, working from our framing narratives and big questions surrounding what is Ultimate, to matters of individual identity and shared action in response to local issues.

### Hope, Worship, and ACARA’s Integrated Curriculum

In this final case study, we attend to the story of the New Creation, seeking a critical correlation of curriculum visions toward a better future for pluralistic public education. The consummation of GC is creation entering shalom to the glory of the Creator. As we set our feet toward this end, education must presently centre on the content of hope and the action of worship. In previous sections I have correlated stages in the biblical narrative with a particular subject. The emphasis upon embodiment and practices in this leg of the journey, however, suggests an approach that may enrich pedagogy in every discipline. Thus, in this section we will consider how GC compares and contrasts with ACARA’s emphasis on general capabilities. In turn, we may create a synergy in which the incorporation of Scriptures advances students toward the stated ends of the Australian Curriculum.

We begin then, with the dual affirmation of education that is future-oriented and integrative in practices.

First, both curricula re-imagine education today in light of an intended future. Across the overriding twenty-eight page Shape of the Australian Curriculum 4.0 document, we encounter the rhetoric of a “future” oriented curriculum nine times. This translates into the aims of every subject, especially History and Civics and Citizenship, encouraging contemporary action informed by an understanding of the past and directed toward a determined end. ACARA desires that Australia’s “future citizens … maximise their opportunities for healthy, productive and rewarding

---

953 Huebner, LT, 351, also 204-205.
956 SAC4, 5, 6, 8-9, 18, 20; cf. MD, 4, 8-9, 12.
futures”, amidst an increasingly complex and globalising world (SAC4, 5-6). This requires a pedagogy that nurtures students to harmonise insights across subjects, answering real problems we presently face such as the need for “more sustainable patterns of living” (18). Antecedently, integrated problem solving requires integrated individuals.\footnote{ Cf. John Quicke, \textit{Curriculum for Life} (Buckingham, UK: Open University Press, 1999), 18-19, 68; Gnanakan, \textit{Integrated}, 13-15, 162-172.} Thus, ACARA envisages secular education cultivating in students a holistic “sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing” (8).

The AC vision of fully-developed people who are “successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens” demands the integration of general capabilities across the curriculum (GCAC, 4). Beyond school-based achievement to secure work or facilitate further study after secondary school, ACARA depicts education as a journey for life-long learners. Australian public education is tasked with forming individuals who can manage their own wellbeing, relate well to others, make informed decisions about their lives, become citizens who behave with ethical integrity, relate to and communicate across cultures, work for the common good and act with responsibility at local, regional and global levels. (2)

This future orientation determines the shape of today’s schooling.

In a similar way, the future envisaged by GC orients our educational pilgrimage in the present. Christians believe that God will one day be “all in all”. The sacred and the secular will be integrated through the reconciling work of Christ. Aimed at holistic flourishing in the New Jerusalem, then, our divine Teacher forms the “new humanity”: a community of peacemakers capable of seeking the shalom of this-worldly cities.\footnote{ Cf. John Haughey, \textit{Where Is Knowing Going?} (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009).} This necessitates a curriculum of interconnection, placing the educational parts together in pursuit of a greater whole.\footnote{ Cf. Highton and Muers, \textit{Text in Play}, 116-117; Carr, “Post-Secularism,” 157-168.} This greater whole is the healing of all creation, where every person, community, and cultural artefact glorifies the transcendent wellspring of life. The Bible thus informs a Christian vision of education and pedagogy that will guide us there. This both overlaps with, and is differentiated from, the particular shape of hope envisaged by other communities of belief, a hope that is depicted in their foundational sacred and secular stories.\footnote{ Cf. Highton and Muers, \textit{Text in Play}, 116-117; Carr, “Post-Secularism,” 157-168.}

In the context of secular units of study, teachers could profitably make space for students to consider and reconstruct their personal narrative and reason for living amidst competing accounts of the world and the richest pictures of humanity’s destiny therein.\footnote{ Cf. John Haughey, \textit{Where Is Knowing Going?} (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2009).} This may stimulate students to
reflect upon the significance of their choices and whether the path they are following achieves their goals or abandons their core values. A reflective journal could be used across subjects to record these encounters, exploring what was “puzzling, exciting, uncomfortable, stimulating, difficult and challenging.” Teachers are not to evaluate the ontological reality of any such story. Rather, their role is to help adolescents scaffold between their story and larger communal narratives as they seek a coherent autobiography. As concerns curriculum, any collective vision for education in a pluralistic society must be in dialogue with diverse visions of our summum bonum. No one community’s telos should dictate the ends of education for all.

Second, then, both curricula prioritise reflective practices that facilitate integration. The end of GC, beyond knowledge, is the ability to freely love. One’s whole being is engaged in the process: heart, soul, mind and strength. Every person, irrespective of her beliefs, instinctively desires to celebrate and supplicate the object of her hope. This often impels us to pursue something greater than the self, motivating hopeful action in troubled times. Christians contend that the most worthy object of this desire is God. As such, it does not suffice to simply study the content of belief in a detached manner. Rather, education is about the cultivation of holy desire in a community of worship. In seeking first the reign of God, we are initiated into an action–reflection rhythm. Meditating upon the Christian story and its beatific vision informs how we relate to all of life in the here and now. This calls for particular practices such as prayer and praise that spark and sustain this passion, both individually and communally. In turn, we become people who instinctively pursue a coherent existence, seeing our lives as part of a larger story.

Similarly, AC recognises that knowledge and skill alone are insufficient for integrated education. This curriculum vision stresses that “the encouragement of positive behaviours and dispositions underpins all general capabilities” (GCAC, 4). As with worship and supplication, these habits are not automatic; they must be fostered. This is especially evident in the cultivation of “personal capability” as an aspect of all ACARA subjects (6, 97-98). Across the curriculum, students are to “develop reflective practice”, thereby forming self-awareness in the learning process (102). By Year 10, for instance, students should be able to “assess their strengths and challenges...
and devise personally appropriate strategies to achieve future success” (105). This is further informed by “feedback from peers, teachers and other adults, to analyse personal characteristics and skill sets that contribute to or limit their personal and social capability” (107). These meditations support students setting and achieving goals that carry them toward a preferred future (103).

ACARA recognises that students are shaped by “different worldviews”. As such, these capabilities should be interpreted in a way that fosters the values of students located within particular communities. Integration for ATSI peoples may draw on “responsibilities and relationships within cultural knowledge systems that connect the personal, through kin and community, to land, sky and waterways” (4). For many students, their goals and vision of future success find meaning within a sacred story that embodies a transcendent telos.971 It would seem reasonable, then, that reflective practices might allow for students to consider Scriptures that can fuel their dreams of the future and inform their educational direction toward that end. Students are thereby invited to make sense of their conflicting desires and identity in light of a larger story that shapes their disposition and orients the fragments.972 While there can be no one-to-one essential pairing of a singular Scripture with any people group, Sacred Texts collectively contain many of the metaphors that paint each culture’s most vibrant picture of the good life. As such, Scripture can be a tool in helping adolescents through their most crucial transition of “individuation”, becoming an integrated and interdependent self-in-relation.973 If we value learner-centred pedagogy, then we may see revelation as a key resource in education toward holistic growth. We may even find a place in secular education for prayer and praise.

And yet, at this point our two curricula visions diverge. It is likely that ACARA would refuse GC on the grounds of student equity and diversity. The intentional practice of worship and supplication is exclusively identified with religious communities, confined to extra-curricular expression. Furthermore, while AC rhythms and rituals may appear outwardly similar, such as the exercise of silent meditation, they are arguably directed to different conceptualisations of what is ultimate. These practices only make sense in the context of foundational narratives where hope has a definite shape. Religious particularity is unavoidable. Consequently, if State schools were to frame the content of hope as all of creation aligning with the reign of the triune God, and expect students to participate in worship to Jesus as Lord, then they would be imposing Christianity. This betrays the “plural principle”.974 Additionally, if secular education is concerned with this worldly time and place, then a focus upon the hereafter and pursuit of the transcendent will appear to be a

971 Smith, Desiring, 53-54.
972 Ibid., 194-197.
distraction from the core business of learning. Given the epistemological uncertainty about any future that extends beyond this life, GC is likely to be resisted as at best dubious, and at worst divisive for students within Australia’s pluralistic public schools.

Only two other alternatives are permissible. The curriculum could simply ignore any such consideration of humanity’s telos, ruling out praise and prayer as inappropriate in a secular context. This may be “equitable”, even as it misses the opportunity for students to inclusively learn about and from religious diversity. Or, teachers could allow space in their classes for generalised forms of integrative practice which students may choose to fill with particular content from their tradition. I will pursue this second alternative. It remains to be demonstrated, however, that this is philosophically and theologically coherent rather than a politically correct mish-mash that perverts what devotees hold dear. It must also be demonstrated that such practices are educationally valid, advancing the aims of ACARA.

In turn, GC refuses AC’s closed spin and reduction of education to immanent ends. ACARA claims to be concerned with life-long learning aimed at a preferable future, consideration of diverse worldviews, and the holistic integration of student identity as part of larger communities of belief. Contradictorily, then, ACARA’s explication of practices such as reflection focus entirely back upon the individual learner and the schooling process. Schools provide “information, advice and options to students so that they can make informed choices about their future” (MD, 12). Teachers offer feedback on assessment tasks, “enabling students to reflect on and monitor their own progress to inform their future learning goals” (14; GCAC, 102, 105). At most they consider the future of the planet, reflecting upon how they may practice sustainability (SAC4, 18). At no point are students exposed to diverse visions of the good life that stimulate reflection upon where they are headed. No place is given to critical analysis of the values that orient this journey. No space is made for evaluating one’s “progress” as a human being, integrating identity as a self-in-relation to others who make sense of life within a larger narrative. GC affirms specific learning goals and assessment of one’s progress toward future employment. Restricting reflection to these technocratic ends, however, suggests a shallow and individualistic anthropology closed in upon itself to the exclusion of a transcendent horizon.

As I have argued, GC is not escapist. Pursuit of God orients our secular existence. One’s ultimate hope reframes all of life, including the measure of “success” in study and our desire for work after school. ACARA’s null curriculum, however, suggests that sacred stories and the ultimate questions they raise are irrelevant to education. They desire to form “confident and creative individuals” universally characterised by “optimism about their lives and the future” (MD, 9;

975 Cf. GCAC, 107.
This hope is cultivated through entirely immanent machinations, inculcating in students that their “goal setting” and life path depend on “self-discipline” alone apart from God (GCAC, 102). GC, however, asserts that we must evaluate our lives in relation to revelation from above. Subsequently, any “optimism” that ignores the transcendent and enshrines the self is short-sighted and fleeting wish fulfilment. In Biblical terms, this form of “worldliness” is sin.

Repetitive practices such as goal setting and reflection, especially when embedded within a “midi-narrative” of individual happiness in the here and now, are a type of “secular liturgy.” Far from “neutral”, this ritual cultivates a desire for the kingdom of the self. While this form of worship may be neither conscious nor intentional, it nevertheless forms and reinforces a disposition of egoism. In contrast, sacred stories depict a destiny more expansive than my immediate self-centred existence. The discipline of deep-reading, drawing from a diversity of Scriptures, can function as a stimulus to evaluate immanent goals, discern overall direction in life relative to a wider horizon, and integrate one’s identity as a significant part of a larger whole. Worship is unavoidable. The question is to where it is aimed.

It would seem, then, that Scriptures could play a role in the future-oriented AC. Sacred stories can enrich educational practices. As students reflect upon their progress toward chosen goals, communal visions of our sumnum bonum serve to challenge individualistic orientations and call students to consider a wider horizon of meaning. Learning extends beyond the classroom to seek integration in the school of life. Nonetheless, questions remain over how to appropriately incorporate these texts, opening up ACARA’s immanent frame without “forcing religion” on students. Equity and diversity must both be preserved. GC insists that the end of education is the glory of God. However, in a pluralistic context with no singular telos, “praise” appears incoherent. We must recognise the religious particularity of every philosophy, even as we expand beyond a Christian account to include all people. In order to create a third way, bridging AC and GC, we must rethink how integration relates to worship.

As before, Huebner suggests a path forward. He contends that “education concerns growth through encounter with life in its integrated complexity.” How, though, does this encounter spur growth? We find a hint in his essay on “Religious Metaphors in the Language of Education” where he frames education as “a call from the Other that we may reach out beyond ourselves and enter

---

979 Smith, Desiring, 89-132.
980 Ibid., 84.
Resonating with the thought of Parker Palmer on “the stranger” and Emmanuel Levinas on the “face-to-face” encounter, Huebner positions “Otherness” at the heart of his educational philosophy. Encountering that which is different, seen most clearly in the study of the planet’s “integrated complexity”, provides the impetus to exceed our limited frame of reference and cultural confine. Huebner stressed absolute Otherness, even God, which calls us forward into an open future. This is the essence of learning, sensitising students to hear and respond to the “lure of the transcendent”. Consequently, it falls on both the curriculum and a classroom pedagogy of conversation with the Other to cultivate a disposition in students which embraces this educational journey.

In Huebner’s phraseology, education is the quest for “moreness”, not a hankering for certainty. This is simultaneously the essence of spirituality, an inherent dimension of being human which cannot be exhausted by any worldview, religious or otherwise. We are thus faced with two diverging paths in the school of life. Egoism is desire turned inwards in pursuit of control. It fragments the integrity of existence by abstracting self as a part of the whole and making it absolute. The warping of education to focus in a narrow and limited way on an individual’s goals is akin to false worship: anthropolatry. This is the antithesis of learning. Conversely, the path of “moreness” represents desire turned outwards in pursuit of connection. It integrates existence by locating the individual within a larger story. This, too, is a type of worship: an extension of one’s self to understand and embrace all of life as a gift.

In ACARA’s language, “moreness” may be understood as “wonder”. Unlike detached curiosity, a spirituality of wonderment animates study. It impels us to engage a world greater than any person’s making so that together we may flourish. Sacred Texts can be used to cultivate this disposition, calling us to transcend our individual and limited visions and enlarge our experience. They interrogate what we take for granted, and open our eyes to what lies beyond. These rich stories can form in us a passion for integration: “There are symbols of wholeness and unity: of the body and mind, of self and others, of the human and natural world, of past, present, and future. There are symbols of at-one-ness when the inchoate and disturbing cohere in new meanings”. As such, “talk of the ‘spirit; and the ‘spiritual’ in education need not, then, be God talk … Another

---

982 Huebner, *LT*, 360, also 407-408.
984 Huebner, *LT*, 360-361.
986 Ibid., 343.
987 Ibid., 343-344.
988 Ibid., 344.
sphere of being is not being referred to. The ‘spiritual’ is of this world, not of another world; of this life, not of another life.” Secular education may thus benefit from incorporating diverse Scriptures, for “every mode of knowing is also a mode of waiting—of hoping and expectancy”. Even so, Sacred Texts do not necessarily cultivate worshipful connection. This dynamic process of “knowing” can be reduced to securing definitive “knowledge” for control. A singular story may be privileged such that it defines the content of hope for all people. When this happens, Scriptures quash the desire to discover in life a meaningful whole. Learners close out the Other. The human drive toward wonder has been constrained within a particular religious imaginary.

Following a similar line of thought, John Hull rejected explicitly Christian worship in schools. As with Paul Tillich, Hull argues that “worship is the response to that which is of ultimate concern”. Picture, then, a secular student asked to praise Jesus; or a Christian student asked to adore Allah. This is not only morally problematic. It is incoherent, for “they cannot express the ‘worth-ship’ of that which is not valuable to them.” Less problematically, students may hear or read of the value other adolescents perceive in what to them is divine. And yet, it makes no sense to require reverence of an “unbeliever”. Instead, Hull suggests that we start at “the threshold of worship”. Whatever is presently a student’s ultimate concern—be it pleasure, music, family, fun, the environment, a sporting team, or an ideal such as love—is an object of worship. True worship, from a Christian perspective, is the “joyful affirmation of faith, it is the response of gratitude towards God”. It has particular substance. Nonetheless, by inviting students to pause and reflect on what they value, in turn being thankful for these gifts, they are in a real sense participating in praise, albeit a germinal form. As they are exposed to alternative ultimate concerns worshipped by differently believing students and neighbour religions, their attention may expand from “the trivial and the immediate and the local to the significant, the enduring, and the universal concern”.

This readily ties into the reflective process advocated above. Each day, whether in a form class or as part of a particular subject, students could be encouraged to think about how their learning relates to what they most value. The practice of thankfulness makes room for worship. Reciprocity requires a level playing field in the expression of this gratitude. As such, teachers may

989 Ibid.
990 Ibid., 350.
991 Ibid., 343, 345-348.
994 Hull, Studies, 12.
995 Ibid., 12-13.
996 Ibid., 13.
997 Ibid.
equitably allow some time each day for silent contemplation. A student may find that reading a Sacred Text in this moment helps them better appreciate what others revere, thereby shaping her own vision of the true, good and beautiful. Provided that one’s prayer and praise—that is, one’s hoping and thanksgiving—does not coerce or unduly disturb others, a student is free to respond to her ultimate concern as she sees fit: with prose, poetry, supplication, artistic representation, limited only by one’s imagination and preference. While this may sound novel, it aligns with a growing body of research that supports meditation and mindfulness in education as an integrative practice.998 It reflects what Oren Ergas calls the “contemplative turn” in contemporary pedagogy.999 Such “rituals” are not the property of any one way of life, whether religious, spiritual or secular. Provided students themselves determine the object of worship and have the freedom whether to engage or not, this cannot be considered a breach of Church–State separation even in the most restrictive educational contexts such as America.1000

In this section, then, we have seen that a future-oriented curriculum can coherently and meaningfully incorporate Sacred Texts in secular education. As students encounter myriad visions of humanit’s ultimate hope, they are stimulated to meditate upon what they most value and where their learning is leading. Open-ended reflective practices may foster a disposition of gratitude, itself a nascent expression of worship. In turn, teens are empowered to achieve their immanent goals and understand their lives within a more expansive and integrated narrative. Furthermore, at the intersection of these stories, students may discover common ground to address collective concerns such as division in a multifaith society and despoliation of the environment.1001 This challenges excessive individualism and expands an adolescent’s imagination in service of shared action.1002 Indeed, from a Christian perspective, worship of God is inextricable from seeking justice for one’s neighbour and stewardship of God’s creation. Therefore, the desire for integration and the expression of praise converge in this moment of “courageous participation”.1003 Every unit of study can culminate in a practical outworking of shared responsibility for the shalom of our planet.1004 This is the overflow of gratitude, desiring to preserve and enhance the gifts we have received. Our

secular pursuit of knowledge should foster the disposition to act in this world for good. Standing together and serving alongside the least powerful in our society may then become a foretaste of the hopeful future Christians anticipate through divine grace.

B. SCRIPTURE, SHALOM AND THE COMMON GOOD IN SYNERGY

What is, and what should be, the place of Sacred Texts within the emerging Australian Curriculum. Through three case studies, I have conducted a mutually critical conversation between educational and theological perspectives. Despite genuine differences, there is a deep resonance between God’s Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum. This facilitates the selective incorporation of diverse Scriptures in a fruitful synergy which enriches both of the subjects we have studied and the cross-curricular integration of general capabilities. Through dialogue with Dwayne Huebner and others, I have sought to demonstrate that while “the rupture between theology and curriculum was valid at one point in the history of both curriculum and theological thought …. [to] ignore theological language today is to ignore one of the more exciting and vital language communities.”

In each section I have argued that this fusion of horizons serves the “common good”. In History, Scriptures help us step back from the minutiae of diverse human stories to make sense of our shared existence, discerning the wisest path we may follow that leads to life. This enhances ACARA’s educational end of students understanding the world in which they live. In Civics and Citizenship, Scriptures crystallise particular communal aspirations for the secular realm; they raise questions of contemporary polity and require reciprocity that preserves difference and fosters harmony, both of which are necessary in a pluralistic democracy. This augments ACARA’s educational end of students caring for one another as active citizens. Across each subject, a pedagogy of gratitude preserves the goods we have inherited, inviting commitment to further enrich this legacy for posterity. This supplements ACARA’s educational end of students integrating life’s fragments into a coherent whole. We may now consider, albeit in a cursory fashion, how the other three stages of the biblical journey can likewise enrich ACARA’s curricular vision.

Through the story of Creation, I suggested that GC centres on the content of work and the action of cultivation. While these themes may be constructively explored in dialogue with a subject such as Geography, we discover natural analogues in ACARA’s cross-curricular emphasis on sustainability, and their push for greater productivity and employability as a result of secondary studies. Both History and Civics and Citizenship include units explicitly addressing these themes in order to form students who are capable of balancing competing concerns for economic

1006 Huebner, “Tasks of the Curricular Theorist,” 219-220.
development, social justice, and environmental preservation, working in harmony for “collective wellbeing”. This aligns with the Social Efficiency curricular ideology, building skills toward the end of students taking responsibility for the common good. In this context, Scriptures can unearth orienting stories and cosmogonic myths that shape our interaction with the environment, thus tapping core motivations and a sense of wonder and delight to sustain the commons.1007

Through the story of the Fall, I argued that GC centres on the content of knowledge and the action of repentance. While these themes may be helpfully discussed in conversation with a subject such as Science, we discover natural analogues in ACARA’s cross-curricular emphasis on critical and creative thinking. Both History and Civics and Citizenship stress the storied nature of identity, and the contestability, even fallibility, of competing traditioned accounts of the world. This requires agreed upon criteria to discern the bias and relative warrant of diverse cultural perspectives. Students must become critical citizens who act upon trustworthy information for the benefit of all. This aligns with the Scholar Academic curricular ideology, constructing knowledge along disciplinary lines, upon which we may build for a better future. In this context, Scriptures are a springboard for students to recognise the human dimension and limitations of the knowing project; they encourage teens to piece together fragmented accounts in pursuit of a meaningful narrative, through which we can clearly see and consensually shape our planet.1008

Through the story of the Church, I contended that GC centres on the content of holiness and the action of reconciliation. While these themes may fruitfully be considered alongside a subject such as English, we discover natural analogues in ACARA’s cross-curricular emphasis on intercultural and ethical understanding. Both History and Civics and Citizenship stress the interconnection of all citizens and the need for effective communication built upon “mutual interpersonal perspective taking”.1009 Social cohesion requires that students can enter into and respect another’s frame of reference in a face-to-face dialogue. Cultural and religious awareness, in turn, necessitates “the development of personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience, empathy and respect for others, and the capacity to act with ethical integrity”.1010 This aligns with the Learner-Centred curricular ideology, seeking holistic growth to become a mature self-in-relation who values social inclusion as a cosmopolitan good. In this context, Scriptures foster empathetic

---

1009 Cf. Fowler, Stages, 153.
listening and communication in order to understand this foreign textual world, thereby counteracting our tendency to totalise the Other. By foregrounding moral questions, students are sensitised to the ethical dimension of secular decisions. The superabundance of meaning in diverse sacred stories can draw out adolescent identity, bringing students into dialogue and promoting friendships that may stabilise a divided society. Furthermore, by disclosing the deepest similarities and differences between persons, a pedagogy akin to interreligious dialogue can lay the foundation for discerning and pursuing common action toward the healing of the Earth.

In summary, a theology of education stressing the substance of work, humility, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness, and hope, may fruitfully cross-pollinate with ACARA’s philosophy of education. The result is a re-imagined curriculum aimed at a broader and deeper interpretation of responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion and integration. Skills, critical thinking, and personal growth fuse in a Social Reconstructionist vision of curriculum for transformation as students make sense of the world and work together for the common good. Scriptures can serve this educational journey that leads teens from individualistic insularity toward shalom. That is, students can actively participate in their own transformation, working creatively to sustain our world, evaluating humbly what and how we know, discerning wisely a path to flourishing, caring graciously for one’s neighbour, reconciling virtuously with diverse Others, and integrating holistically through reflective practices that align us with our ultimate hope.

GC persistently challenged ACARA’s ideological closure. AC largely ignores transcendent perspectives on humanity’s telos, thereby illustrating what Charles Taylor describes as the “anthropocentric shift … [of] exclusive humanism … mak[ing] no reference to something higher which humans should reverence or love or acknowledge.” If there must be some agreement about the preconditions and nature of human flourishing for a society to cohere, then ACARA’s silencing of Scriptural wisdom and avoidance of explicit dialogue about our spiritual needs is counterproductive. This is particularly ironic given that notions of the “common good” as the charitable human will toward the flourishing of all in justice, peace and equity, arguably derive

---

1014 Taylor, Secular, 245, also 17-21, 82, 150, 372.
from theological reflection upon Sacred Texts. Consequently, this exclusion is neither neutral nor equitable.

Conversely, AC refused the imposition of any one substantive vision of the true, good and beautiful on secular schools. ACARA rightly guards its educational vision against religious privilege. The Bible may be “sacred” to Christians. This does not, however, grant this supposed revelation any authoritative status over diverse students. It must not compel adherence. Were Scriptures to be incorporated in a pluralistic context, at most each text would represent one source of stimulus among many that students remain free to adopt and adapt as they will, within a constructivist pedagogy, aimed at secular educational ends. Holistic flourishing represents a genuine synthesis of GC oriented toward shalom, and AC aimed at the common good. Scriptures can play a significant role in this curricular vision, for they trade in stories to embody humanity’s summum bonum. And yet, secularists, multiculturalists and religious devotees alike are right to ask, “holistic flourishing, as defined by whom?” Diversity and harmony, traditioned identity and liberal inquiry, must coexist. We require a process that protects against the privileging of either secularist or Christian perspectives in a pluralistic society. As Miroslav Volf avers, we must navigate between the exclusion of religious convictions which are displaced to the private realm, and the saturation of religion where one faith imposes its vision of the common good onto all others. The educational ramifications are far reaching, echoing calls for “equal voice” in civic participation and education that actually serves shalom in public schools.

Volf’s project of “religious political pluralism” suggests a path forward. Every vision of “the good” has a narrative shape, employing mythos to understand contemporary tensions and animate action toward a future resolution. Secularists, for instance, espouse a narrative describing the way to a free, peaceful and prosperous world wherein people should not be coerced concerning

---


1018 Volf, Public, 104-105.


1023 Nicholas Wolterstorff, “Miroslav Volf on Living One’s Faith,” Political Theology 14, iss. 6 (2013), 813-834.
their ultimate allegiance. Volf argues that a shared commitment to the right of every person to hold and debate public convictions that affect our life together is a necessary corrective to any one dogma dominating. “Sharing wisdom”, then, is at the heart of diverse communities coooperating in a divided world.\textsuperscript{1025} This approach can be adapted into a democratic pedagogy which welcomes myriad conceptions of the human telos at the curriculum table. Only then can we seek a non-oppressive and consensual common good for our local context.

Within this frame, it is inconsequential whether or not students directly read a physical text, even as Scriptural engagement is possible in a safe and respectful way through online resources.\textsuperscript{1026} In place of establishing an interreligious canon that contemporary youth must master, the priority is for students and community representatives to exchange stories that for them are functionally sacred and which speak to their vision for our shared secular existence. Through mutual understanding and mapping points of commonality and divergence, students may construct a truly common good and draw from their own tradition to motivate working together toward such a goal. Middle-school can then become a training ground for civil debate in a pluralistic democracy, working through each subject to pursue holistic flourishing in harmony.\textsuperscript{1027} The curriculum remains permeable to the transcendent, even as students participate in an education that is “secular” in the fullest sense of its tri-colour banner.\textsuperscript{1028} This process can equally engage religious, spiritual and secular students.\textsuperscript{1029}

With Volf, I agree that the most pressing need in education today is not a unified vision of social cohesion and civic identity, but rather “new modalities of working toward the common good” that invite a plurality of perspectives, each offering their deepest wisdom for life.\textsuperscript{1030} This narrative approach accords with the biographical shift in curriculum theorising and contemporary pedagogy.\textsuperscript{1031} ACARA would thus do well to prise open its exclusively humanistic curriculum to include a plurality of perspectives so that our shared imagination for human flourishing may be enriched. Scriptures can function as an educational resource for the common good.

Miroslav Volf is under no illusion that this kind of process, particularly in a highly pluralistic educational context, will be easy. It requires that we nurture a “‘culture of respect’ as a resource to resolve concrete problems in an ad hoc manner.”\textsuperscript{1032} And yet, through this chapter I

\textsuperscript{1025} Volf, Public, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{1027} Charles Taylor, “Foreword,” xi-xii.
\textsuperscript{1028} Ibid., xvi.
\textsuperscript{1031} Huebner, LT, 78-84; Esther Reed, Rob Freathy, Susannah Cornwall, and Anna Davis, “Narrative Theology in Religious Education,” British Journal of Religious Education 35, iss. 3 (2013), 297-312.
have constructed safeguards and guidelines sufficient to ensure that the incorporation of Sacred
Texts may serve Australian public education. It is to that strategic task that we now turn.
Suppose that a great commotion arises in the street about something, 
let us say a lamppost, which many influential persons desire to pull down. 
A grey-clad monk, who is the spirit of the Middle Ages, is approached upon the matter, 
and begins to say, in the arid manner of the Schoolmen, 
“Let us first consider, my brethren, the value of Light. If Light be in itself good—” 
At this point he is somewhat excusably knocked down. 
All the people make a rush to the lamppost, the lamppost is down in ten minutes, 
and they go about congratulating each other on their unmedieval practicality. 
But as things go on they do not work out so easily. 
Some people have pulled the lamppost down because they wanted the electric light; 
some because they wanted old iron; some because they wanted darkness, 
because their deeds were evil. Some thought it not enough of a lamppost, some too much; some 
acted because they wanted to smash municipal machinery; 
some because they wanted to smash something. 
And there is war in the night, no man knowing whom he strikes. 
So, gradually and inevitably, today, tomorrow, or the next day, 
there comes back the conviction that the monk was right after all, 
and that all depends on what is the philosophy of Light. 
Only what we might have discussed under the gas lamp, we now must discuss in the dark.

*G. K. Chesterton, Heretics* 

**PART III** 

**CHANGING CURRICULUM:**  
**SCRIPTURES AND FLOURISHING**
Chapter 7

Incorporating Sacred Texts in the Australian Curriculum

Sacred Texts have the potential to make a very significant contribution to advancing the common good in Australian public middle-school education. In Chapter 6, I argued that a fusion of horizons for God’s Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum was plausible and promising. Such a vision cannot be reduced to six words, even words that resonate with ACARA’s own lexicon. And yet, we have discovered that their aims stated in the various Shaping policy documents are enriched by this synergy. The result is a dynamic curriculum which is open to the transcendent and seeks the telos of holistic flourishing. This comprises education for responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion and integration. Resisting compartmentalisation, each principle can helpfully orient every field of study. This capacious philosophy of education embraces diverse religious, spiritual and secular students alike, inviting their perspectives, even as it accords with a biblical emphasis on the substance of work, humility, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness, and hope.

In this chapter, then, we advance from the correlative to the pragmatic movement. Given this common ground, how might we respond? That is, how might we appropriately incorporate Sacred Texts in the Australian Curriculum? Applied to the subjects of Civics and Citizenship and History, my task is to suggest how teachers could enact such a vision in their Year 7 to 10 classes as part of a school-based syllabus. Most scholars agree that teacher strategy, more so than curricular content, is the determinative factor in educational outcomes for students. If the concern of practical theology is to change and not merely explain and understand the world, we must progress from curriculum design to pedagogical practice. My intent is not to detail numerous ways Scriptures could be used, delving into the specifics of a select list of Sacred Texts. Even if a high school student could “master” the content of a classic text—an impossible task by most estimations—this is not my concern. Undoubtedly, knowledge, skills and personal growth must be fostered. The driving force of my proposal, however, most closely aligns with the agenda for Social Reconstructionists of transformation, that we may “learn to live together”. Simply put, I am seeking models of education that permit the sharing of sacred stories and harness supposed revelation in service of the common good. This accords with ACARA’s purposes for a public curriculum.

What, then, is pedagogy, and how might we translate broad curricular principles into classroom practice? Pedagogy is typically equated with the “art, occupation, or practice of teaching.”

Derived from ancient Greek roots, this word originally connoted a temporary and one-directional dissemination of information from adult to child, or teacher to student. It represented what a teacher did to a student, rather than how a guide walked alongside their fellow pilgrims on the course of life. Theologically, such a linear conception of pedagogy is at odds with God’s Curriculum. I have argued that the Divine Teacher draws people into responsibility, so that we may come of age. Humanity possesses genuine agency to make choices that lead to life or death. Far from transmission, illumined educators must surpass teaching about particular subject matter. Instead, as Mark Smith portrays, pedagogy may be helpfully reframed as the thinking and practice of teachers who seek to “accompany learners; care for and about them; and bring learning into life.”

Pedagogy supports educarē, drawing students into holistic flourishing. Thus we see the indissoluble link between curriculum design and rightly conceived pedagogy. We are each called to walk and work with God in transforming ourselves and our world as we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile and worship. Curriculum as content, and currere as the educational process, track together.

We see this fusion in the “What If” approach to learning. Starting with the received curriculum and constructed school-based syllabus for any subject, the binding of curriculum and pedagogy proceeds in a three-step process. First, in “Seeing Anew” teachers note connections between subject matter and the educational vision; for instance, taking an English unit on modern literature, and observing how themes therein move “towards seeking the good of others”.

Second, in “Choosing Engagement”, teachers adopt pedagogies that facilitate this reorientation, such as helping students “to learn from as well as learn about” others. Third, in “Reshaping Practice” we see the indissoluble link between curriculum design and rightly conceived pedagogy. We are each called to walk and work with God in transforming ourselves and our world as we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile and worship.
Practice”, teachers consider classroom dynamics, layout, and routines that cultivate necessary habits that aid students in their formation of virtue as they trek toward shalom, such as using the stories of diverse characters to “provide contrasts and set up dissonances”. While teachers drive this process, the orienting values and telos of education demand that teachers participate with students in constructing a communal learning experience. This accords with educational insights from practical theologians who argue that “human beings become who we are in large part through embodied participation in shared activities sustained by traditioned communities and oriented toward specific goods”.

In an elaboration of the “What If” approach to learning, Trevor and Margaret Cooling stress the importance of including students from a diversity of faiths and none, partnering with community groups beyond the church for the common good. This model is a helpful guide as I translate my curriculum vision into classroom practices. Nevertheless, in contrast to their particularly Christian virtues of “faith, hope and love” and the telos of educating for freedom in the Kingdom of God, my curriculum vision is designed especially for Australian public schools and aims at holistic flourishing in our shared secular existence. The explicit requirement of diverse student representation would seem to resist both Christian and secularist domination. Thus, within this modified frame, I can fairly proceed from seeing subjects in the Australian Curriculum anew to choosing an apt pedagogy that engages students, finally reshaping class practices in pursuit of wisdom for how we live together.

Such a cross-pollination is productive, for leading secular and religious models are similarly shaped by the hermeneutical and narrative turn in educational philosophy. Reflecting this convergence, Michael Grimmitt helpfully poses three key questions that any pedagogical model addressing religions in education must answer:

1. What kind or kinds of interaction between the pupils and religious content does the model seek to promote?
2. What pedagogical procedures or strategies does the model deploy in order to achieve the kind or kinds of interactions identified above?
3. What pedagogical principles inform the model’s pedagogical procedures and strategies, including its approach to the choice of curriculum content?

---

1046 Objective #23, www.whatiflearning.co.uk/the-approach/strategies-for-reshaping-practice.
1047 In Hattie’s frame, this effective pedagogy is constructive without being ideologically constructivist or relativistic. See his Visible, 243-244. Cf. Denis Phillips, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” Educational Researcher 24, no. 7 (1995), 5-12.
1049 Cooling and Cooling, Distinctively, 9-12, 26-27.
Based on the theological and philosophical framework of pedagogy formed above, I may proffer some initial responses to these questions.

First, I envisage that through encountering Sacred Texts, students will be educated about and through religions, coming to understand, appreciate and respect religious diversity. Even so, the aim of this interaction is not religious literacy per se. Rather, it is that teens may expand their resources to make sense of the world and enlarge their capacities to work together for the common good.

Second, these ends will be achieved through a thick democratic pedagogy built upon the sharing of personal and communal narratives in a critical dialogue.\textsuperscript{1052} Student inquiry in response to secular issues drives the process forward, inviting limit-questions that overflow disciplinary divisions. This requires openness to transcendent takes on life and incorporation of a society’s most formative stories that are functionally sacred. These stories impact our shared this-worldly reality and therefore are pertinent to each subject in a variety of ways.

Third, ACARA’s subject aims and curriculum content are the primary point of reference for my proposal. Based upon the synergy in Chapter 6, however, I will see this curriculum anew through the lenses of responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion, and integration. Subsequently, I have chosen an engagement with Scriptures that satisfies the seven criteria of the plural principle as developed in Chapter 4: relevance to curricular aims, accountability to professional educators, development of robust and active democracy, respect for students to have the final say in matters of belief and practice, veracity in accurately representing and critically evaluating views, encountering a diversity of sacred stories, and integration as students put life together. The fundamental goal of reshaping practices in the following subjects is to enlarge each educator’s imagination, rather than specify the minutiae of learning outcomes and assessment procedures. Ultimately, the pedagogical model must serve the curriculum \textit{telos} of teaching and learning as a shared journey toward holistic flourishing.

ACARA has minimally specified a philosophy of education and the content to cover. This frees teachers to adopt whatever means they deem most appropriate to accomplish this task. Public schools can therefore experiment with incorporating Scriptures in ways appropriate to their local context that serve the good of students and the wider community. In place of institutional imposition, this kind of organic dissemination accords with the diaconal leadership stance adopted by a theologian on the periphery of power. I have employed a question-driven dialogical and dialectical pedagogical process that pursues wisdom.\textsuperscript{1053} This accords with the hermeneutic


undergirding the practical theological cycle—namely, progressively describing and explaining, understanding, and then changing concrete situations.\textsuperscript{1054}

In broad brush strokes, and across both subjects that follow, students progress from encountering diverse stimuli and describing the contemporary context to forming interpretive questions that guide their meaning-making. Through constructively engaging subject matter and sharing functionally sacred stories by way of critical dialogue, students pursue a fusion of horizons. This represents a synthesis of perspectives that crystallises wisdom, thereby informing our response to a secular issue of common concern. A unit finishes with a collaborative process to determine and implement actions that facilitate holistic flourishing, each student reflecting upon her learning and further refining her framing story which orients her way in the world. Simply put, this overarching five-movement pedagogy consists of encounter, questions, stories, synthesis, and response.\textsuperscript{1055} Its form is fluid, able to accommodate ACARA’s pedagogical specifications. We begin, then, with an exploration of Civics and Citizenship as one subject explicitly inviting the study of sacred stories.

\section*{A. PEDAGOGY FOR HOLISTIC FLOURISHING}

\textbf{Civics and Citizenship}

As explored in Chapter 3, the numerous references to diversity, communal identities and specific traditions within the \textit{Shaping} paper and curriculum proper indicate that religions and their revelations may be most appropriately addressed within this subject. Seeing anew this subject in light of the six enriched curricular aims, we discover natural connections between Sacred Texts and the content teachers must cover. This particularly emerges in the areas of Australia’s religious plurality, notions of political secularity, the development and underpinning of our democracy and law, contribution of faith communities to civic matters and social justice, interfaith understanding, and the discovery and safeguarding of “shared values” toward mutual respect. Despite ACARA’s implicit concern that directly addressing Scriptures may endanger Australia’s superficially peaceful existence, we have seen in Chapter 4 that civil unrest, social cohesion, Human Rights, democratic morality, freedom of speech and religion, not to mention the ongoing struggle with terrorism, cannot be adequately understood without reference to our functionally sacred stories. A substantial peace and plurality are served as we critically engage our foundational and competing visions of the common good, charting a new path forward for diverse communities living side-by-side in a divided world. This aligns with ACARA’s aims of developing active citizens, deep democratic


knowledge, responsible civic participation, and commitment to our multicultural and multi-faith society (SAC:CC: §18).

Despite this natural overlap, we must confront two barriers hindering the incorporation of Scriptures in this subject. First, we must dismantle the cross purposes of distinct disciplines. Citizenship education cannot replace or simply absorb religious education.\(^{1056}\) Citizenship is human-centred, addressing particularly national concerns of material and temporal significance. Religions, as understood by devotees, are typically centred on a pursuit of the transcendent, addressing transnational concerns of ultimate significance that embed secular reality within a spiritual and eternal frame. These different priorities must be respected, lest rich traditions be relativised to serve the State’s political agenda.\(^ {1057}\) Failing this, religions cease to be religiously understood, marginalising believers of all persuasions.\(^ {1058}\)

Notwithstanding these legitimate concerns of confusing subject purposes and instrumentalising faiths, citizenship education is defective if divorced from religious perspectives.\(^ {1059}\) By defining that which is ultimate and the telos of human existence, Sacred Texts are pertinent to our shared public life, potentially offering wisdom to order life together.\(^ {1060}\) This overlapping concern between religious and secular accounts of the common good challenges the compartmentalisation of either into separate educational subjects.\(^ {1061}\) It is unhelpful to dissociate the moral and religious dimensions of civic debate. Minimally, then, I am proposing that Sacred Texts may contribute to the dialogue such that ACARA’s aims are served. National interests for flourishing and security can be bolstered as a by-product, without distorting religious self-representation.\(^ {1062}\)

Second, beyond cross purposes, we must also dismantle the barrier of constrained time. The Australian Curriculum already takes up 85 per cent of teaching hours.\(^ {1063}\) Furthermore, we have noted that in Years 7 to 10 teachers are expected to cover 56 content descriptors and 127 content elaborators, all within the space of one hour per week. A specific focus on religion is required, even as it explicitly relates to only 3 content descriptors and 6 content elaborators. Within an overburdened curriculum, can we meaningfully incorporate Scriptures without significant misunderstanding of what many hold to be sacred?\(^ {1064}\)

\(^{1056}\) Robert Jackson, “Citizenship As a Replacement for Religious Education or RE as Complementary to Citizenship Education?” in International Perspectives, 67-92.

\(^{1057}\) Terence Copley, “Young,” 254-265.

\(^{1058}\) Ipgrave, “Conversations,” 41-43.


\(^{1060}\) Huston Smith, “Foreword,” ix-xii.


There are no simple answers to this problem. Note, however, that my proposal does not add further curricular outcomes. It works within the parameters supplied by ACARA. Rather than specifying more content to cover, I have constructed an overarching process within which Scriptures may be considered. They are incorporated only inasmuch as sacred stories are relevant to subject aims. This interactive pedagogy engages students who are tired of top-down didactics, and arguably consolidates disparate outcomes into a coherent unit through its explicit orientation to the common good.

Nonetheless, sharing stories and fusing horizons takes time. One hour of Civics and Citizenship per week is barely adequate to implement this proposal. We must again, therefore, return to the question of educational ends. Every subject and outcome must be judged by how it contributes to equity and excellence, developing successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. Neo-liberal technocratic agendas and traditionalist ideology enshrining the “3 R’s” must not be smuggled in, leaving the core curriculum and timetable as it stands.1065 Brian Hill, for instance, has argued that the compulsory requirements for mathematics “generally proceed a long way beyond what might reasonably be called the ‘basics’ which one needs for life in a democratic society”.1066 My point is not to pit subjects against each other in a “zero sum game”. As a value-laden enterprise, however, there is no formula to assign hours and define a “balanced” curriculum to the satisfaction of all.1067 I have made the case that the time allocated to religions and diverse Scriptures needs to be commensurate with their global significance.1068 They warrant at least some level of inclusion. It comes down to priorities. Given ACARA’s aims, they would do well to double the time given to this subject and the study of religious views therein.

Following Warren Nord’s analysis, religions are less a narrow topic to cover than an all-encompassing perspective on life collectively held by billions of people today and thus impinging on every area of study. Nord offers a completely “secular argument” on the grounds of a truly “liberal education” for a curriculum that is minimally fair (dedicating 5 per cent of subject time and textbook space to considering religious perspectives pertinent to any discipline) and robustly fair (including one course that is focused on helping students engage religious perspectives that impact our shared life).1069

By this standard, the Australian Curriculum is manifestly unfair. Scriptures are ignored altogether, and diverse faiths are superficially considered in an ad hoc and compartmentalised

1065 Johnson and Reid, Contesting, 11.
1067 Kelly, Curriculum, 249-251; Ornstein and Hunkins, Curriculum, 181, 235-237.
1068 Cf. Prothero, Religious, 138-139.
fashion. Cathy Byrne and others rightly push for a new subject such as SecularR&E, or broader availability of a comparative subject such as Studies of Religion (SOR) for middle-school students in State Schools. It is tempting to co-opt Civics and Citizenship as a substitute for General Religious Education, even as this would distort ACARA’s aims. The total absence in this curriculum vision of any systematic consideration of religions and their revelations, alongside the study of non-religious convictions, is anything but “robust”, especially when compared to its rising priority in Europe. We must, however, turn from the ideal to consider what can already be achieved within the Australian Curriculum as delivered. As such, and in line with the curriculum synergy in Chapter 6, we must place the emphasis upon democratic processes and the skills supporting active citizenship, stimulated and served by content that represents our pluralistic context. My primary task is to demonstrate a pedagogy that is open to transcendent perspectives as together we face complex civic concerns.

How, then, may we reshape practices in the delivery of the Australian Curriculum? Space only permits a snapshot of one form this pedagogy could take. Consider the scope and sequence of AC:CC in terms of the skills strand. Teachers could structure every unit around “problem-solving and decision-making”, in particular “us[ing] democratic processes to reach consensus on a course of action relating to a civics or citizenship issue and plan for that action”. Modifying my overarching model to meet ACARA’s goals in this particular subject, I envisage a five-movement engagement that centres on questions, stories, systems, action, and reflection, bridging from student stories and narrative traditions to shared symbols in service of action.

First, through “questioning and research”, students decide together on a secular (i.e., this-worldly) issue of common concern which they will address across the term. For instance, in Year 8

---


1075 AC:CC, Year 7 ACHCS058, Year 8 ACHCS072, Year 9 ACHCS087, and Year 10 ACHCS100; emphasis mine.

1076 Cf. Huebner, LT, 184-197.
they could draw on media reports and school-based encounters that raise the issue of “freedom of speech”, as part of the Government and Democracy organising idea. Beginning with these broader and descriptive encounters, rather than one’s personal beliefs, allows for “distancing” and critical thought. This creates a safe space for minority students who may feel overly vulnerable if implicated in an issue from the outset. In this descriptive phase, teachers welcome autobiographical stories from students about their positive and negative experiences expressing their deep beliefs in public. Out of this, students generate questions they wish to answer across the unit.

Second, we access people from a diversity of traditions (religious and non-religious) to express their views. Equity in representation is crucial even as we must reject the impracticable requirement that on each and every occasion every voice must be heard. Rather, balance must be achieved across the entire course of study, regularly returning to the most common religious and non-religious perspectives, so that students are equipped as global citizens. To guard against the potentially oppressive nature of authoritative Sacred Texts and their propositional dictates for the public sphere, community representatives of various backgrounds are invited to share their richest stories at the heart of their Scriptures or worldview/lifestance that speak to the secular concern. This places oral traditions, immanent spirituality, and secular accounts of existence on an equal footing. They may weave together their own story with a rich poem or parable, closing with how they seek to live within this narrative as part of a local community in the Australian context. Students may ask their questions of the visitors, subsequently gathering and sorting information from a range of sources and texts, as the curriculum directs. Within this movement, students then share their own stories from whatever may be their cultural/faith tradition, thus introducing a greater diversity than represented by the guest speakers. What wisdom might their particular accounts of the world bring to the topic of concern? For instance, a Muslim student may share a story from Muhammad’s life when he met with the Christians of Najran (Qur’an 3:59-61), welcoming them to “reason together” without threat of violence. The preceding intergenerational sharing of stories can elicit memories from students who otherwise may feel pressured to be the official spokesperson, presenting their faith in a positive light.

In this process, students move between their questions and stories, practicing the skill of active listening and empathy to appreciate multiple perspectives and strategies that negotiate and


1078 Cf. Hill, Values, 195-197; Jackson, Signposts, 16.

1079 Cf. González, Moll, and Amanti, Funds of Knowledge. Guests are selected by and under the authority of the professional class teacher, satisfying the principle of accountability.

1080 Jackson, Signposts, 29-30, 67-75.

resolve differences.\textsuperscript{1082} This is not an uncritical process: “analysis, synthesis and interpretation” are woven throughout. Students ask questions of each other and employ the basic hermeneutic of comparing and contrasting views, seeing where there exists both common ground and intractable difference, towards creating a third way. As with subsequent movements, students are encouraged to “develop and present reasoned arguments” based on evidence to support a position.\textsuperscript{1083} Controversy is thus squarely faced. The primary skill required by teachers is that of facilitating a dialogue as a model of democratic morality. Over time, students learn how to both own and ground statements and to respectfully disagree.\textsuperscript{1084} In contrast to a disengaged and purely informational study of Sacred Texts which tends to bore secular students, an issues-based approach that embraces conflict is more relevant to and engaging for adolescents of diverse persuasions who exist within a pluralistic democracy.\textsuperscript{1085}

Third, having considered \textit{questions} and \textit{stories}, we switch to \textit{systems}. In this movement we explicitly incorporate relevant insights from the “knowledge and understanding” strand. How do government and our democratic structures deal with the issue of concern, that being freedom of speech? What laws address the rights and responsibility of citizens as part of Australian society? Having already considered different perspectives on this topic—thus indirectly considering the relationship between individuals and communities, and how this shapes their Australian identity relative to their multiple-citizenships—students are encouraged to interview community leaders, politicians, and lobby groups about present-day forms of active citizenship in the local community.

Fourth, we move to \textit{action}. In small groups of perhaps four students each, aiming for maximal religious and cultural diversity, students plan for action in their local community context. If cultural and religious diversity is limited, technology such as conference calls and emails can serve to link with other students from partner schools.\textsuperscript{1086} Using a democratic process to reach consensus, students bring the many perspectives they have encountered across the term together, synthesising their views as they affirm, refuse, and move beyond individual understanding. As a group, they must construct a practical expression of this multi-source wisdom that makes a difference to fellow students and/or their wider community. They may, for instance, determine to survey students on their freedom to express their beliefs in the school context. They may promote

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1082} AC:CC, Year 8 ACHCS071-072: “[students] appreciate multiple perspectives and use strategies to mediate differences” (content elaborator ACHCS071).
\textsuperscript{1083} AC:CC, Year 8 “Achievement Standard”.
\end{flushright}
Amnesty International and mobilise peers to write letters on behalf of oppressed people groups. Whatever they decide, the school becomes a locus for critical expressions of active citizenship.¹⁰⁸⁷

The fifth and final movement is the skill of reflection. Each group presents to the class a compressed version of their practical project and the democratic reasoning behind this action. Diverse sources of wisdom are also highlighted, and how these stories factored into the final product. Students then keep a journal of how their own understanding and identity has been formed and transformed through the process. They are free to extend these existential reflections to one’s own answers to life’s biggest questions of origin, meaning, morality and destiny in a coherent metanarrative. Their identity as Australian citizens is explored, even as there is an equal emphasis upon transcultural identity in solidarity with humans the world over.

History
No ACARA subject has more explicit references to religions than History. With its storied epistemology and emphasis upon empathetically entering into the motivations and self-understanding of key actors on the world’s stage, there are numerous points of natural alignment with the study of Sacred Texts.¹⁰⁸⁸ Indeed, much of human history is unintelligible apart from reference to the religiously shaped social imaginary of our forebears. This is reflected in the inclusion of religion as a key concept for understanding culture, particularly as it relates to ancient and medieval history which covers Roman mythology and Egyptian symbolism, the emergence of world faiths, Confucius and his teachings, the growth of monasticism, and illuminated manuscripts.¹⁰⁸⁹ And yet, the null curriculum teaches Year 9 and 10 students that religions and their revelations are irrelevant to the modern world, or at worst a dangerous force that sporadically surfaces to divide the populace. Were the curriculum not so content heavy, largely specifying what teachers should cover, the classic secularisation thesis itself would be worthy of historical investigation. As I argued in Chapter 4, the transnational force of “religion” is growing in importance as a determinant of global relations. Secularist Jacques Berlinerblau warns that ignorance of Sacred Texts is irresponsible in a terror-ridden world this side of 9/11.¹⁰⁹⁰ The Australian Curriculum, however, sidesteps Scriptures from 1750 onwards.

ACARA employs a “futures-orientation” in History. They aim to form students who can interpret contested reconstructions of our past to insightfully participate as active citizens in today’s pluralistic debate. As such, it is a high priority to draw out the religious dimensions within any unit

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid., §5.2.
¹⁰⁹⁰ Berlinerblau, Secular, 2-11, 130.
of study that are relevant to contemporary civic issues. \textsuperscript{1091} Sacred stories for many communities represent potent “forms of collective memory … that shape historical consciousness”. \textsuperscript{1092} This challenges ACARA’s implicit evaluation that transcendent takes on the world are historically insignificant. \textsuperscript{1093} As I contended in Chapter 6, the curriculum \textit{telos} would be well-served by seeing anew History as centred on the pursuit of wisdom for life together in the present. This pursuit lies at the intersection of competing narratives about our past and an orientation toward holistic flourishing in our future. In this context, Scriptures advance the common good by illuminating powerful stories of where we have come from and visions of where we desire to go as a society. Beyond a chronology of historical happenings, this curriculum vision asks what the human story means, clarifying the substance of our hope.

How, then, may we bridge between remembering our past and reimagining our future, attending to our contemporary predicament and untold accounts from the underside of history? Any engagement must help students to enter into the stories of a diverse cast of characters—“to see the world through the eyes of others”—forming an accurate representation of yesteryear that makes sense of significant events and why these figures acted as they did. \textsuperscript{1094} Simultaneously, it must resist the reduction of history to a relativistic exchange of narratives. Rather, competing accounts must be critically analysed according to the reliability of source materials and the assembling of evidence, further judged by principles of continuity and change, and cause and effect. \textsuperscript{1095} Students should continue to negotiate between “the familiar and the unfamiliar”, even as the construction of “factual knowledge” progresses by way of “investigation, debate and reasoning about our past”. \textsuperscript{1096}

ACARA’s pedagogical requirements are few, merely specifying that content and process, historical method and historical knowledge, should be held together. \textsuperscript{1097} Narrative is employed to help students experience the story, starting with “modern-day parallels”, and moving toward active citizenship. In three annual “depth studies”, adolescents must analyse, interpret and evaluate diverse historical sources, progressively “building an historical argument using evidence” that answers questions which students themselves have posed and investigated. \textsuperscript{1098} Consequently, I have modified my overarching pedagogy to accommodate the requisite skills of historical inquiry. In ACARA’s language, this four stage journey proceeds via (1) our current context and research questions, (2) analysis and use of sources to discern the stories and visions animating past events,
(3) critically interpreting perspectives in dialogue with one’s own story and vision, and (4) constructing and communicating an explanatory account that may guide contemporary action toward a preferred future. As a handle, contested stories and visions are explored as we attend to the present, past, perspectives, and future.

For these purposes, I have chosen the third Year 10 term-long depth study: “The Globalising World.” In particular, I am focusing on the third elective, “Migration experiences (1945–present).” This enables me to illustrate how religions and their revelations are significant in the study of modern history, a point ignored by ACARA. Nevertheless, I am constrained by the content specified in the curriculum. Through this unit, students are to gain an overview of the various waves of migration to Australia, influenced by “significant world events” and impacted by “changing government policies.” Focusing in, students are to study “at least one world event or development and its significance for Australia”, considering how migration has impacted Australia’s national identity and international relationships. This unit is couched within two of the three key inquiry questions for Year 10: “How did the nature of global conflict change during the twentieth century?; … How was Australian society affected by other significant global events [beyond World War II] and changes in this period?” Rather than confining attention to ethnic migration, I have centred this unit on transcultural religious identities, exploring the controversial intersection of Modern Conflict and Migration. This has great contemporary relevance and thus educational value, wherein students can critically consider the simplistic association of religion and violence. Unearthing and reframing distorted and divisive narratives may thus foster social harmony toward holistic flourishing. While such a unit must be sensitively handled, it aligns with ACARA’s stress on contestability. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to construct a detailed unit. In what follows, I merely intend to reshape practice using the aforementioned four stage pedagogical model, demonstrating how it can serve ACARA’s aims via the selective incorporation of transcendent takes on history and functionally sacred stories.

We begin, then, with the present. What events in our current context may connect students to the migration experience? What issues are we presently facing, for which we need historical insight to wisely respond? Out of this milieu students will generate research questions to investigate. It is crucial, with such a contentious topic, to train students in how to converse when

---

1011 AC:H. ACDSEH144-145.
1012 AC:H. ACDSEH146.
1013 AC:H. ACHHS191.
there is deeply felt disagreement. Respect, tolerance, owning and grounding of beliefs would be explicitly addressed, so that a constructive dialogue may ensue. Having laid this groundwork, as the class teacher, I would begin with student stories. Have they personally, or do they know of people who have, moved to Australia from abroad? Did they relocate as part of a larger community? What story does their family share as to why they moved? What vision for the future brought them here? What risks were taken in coming? And, most importantly for this unit, how has their resettling been both good and bad, perhaps inducing culture shock? For those born and bred in Australia, what contributions do you perceive migrants to have made, and what tensions have arisen as we form a collective identity? Out of these stories, students personalise immigration, and begin with a largely positive association to counteract potential stereotypes that may emerge in this depth study.

Focusing in, I would highlight contemporary concerns for which we need wisdom as active citizens. We may consider recent events such as the Syrian refugee crisis, Man Haron Monis’s siege in Sydney, planned terrorist attacks during the 2015 Anzac Day celebrations, and the return of Syrian adolescent migrants to fight alongside Islamic State. In response, the Prime Minister at the time, Tony Abbott, warned of revoking the citizenship of immigrants who threatened the peace and did not subscribe to broadly held “Australian values”. Some nationals are calling in public forums for a “litmus test” applied to incoming migrants, involving rejection of “jihad” and denouncement of the “caliphate”.

Students will be asked for their opinion. What is going on? Why is this happening? What competing stories in the present are at play, claiming to make sense of this tension and the radicalisation of some citizens at a similar age to these Year 10 students in class? Through listening to diverse voices in the present, distinct narratives begin to emerge, each pointing back to a particular interpretation of the past. As a class, we would begin to list all the historical referents and significant events invoked as relevant and contributing to this present predicament. Pupils may highlight terms like “caliphate”, “jihad” and “Islamic State”, along with events such as the

---

redrawing of borders imposed by the British and French colonialists after World War I. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may be raised, alongside questions of perceived “occupation” and the ongoing tension between Israelis and Palestinians. The Twin Towers attack (9/11) will likely emerge, as will the life and death of Osama bin Laden, and perhaps the plight of those fleeing regimes in countries such as Syria, Indonesia and Iran. Events that are most pertinent to migration and attitudes to Islamic immigrants, such as the 2005/2006 Cronulla riots, are circled for further historical investigation. As this point, students indicate which event most interests them, and form into groups for a collaborative inquiry. They generate their research questions, and outline what key sources of information—personal accounts, news articles, government reports, statistics, maps—to make sense of this event and how it informs our present situation. Students are to keep a reflective journal, recording insights into the event, a personal response to the various narratives they encounter, and wisdom to form a just and harmonious society amidst religious plurality in the present.

In the second stage, we turn to the *past*. Students access and analyse a diversity of sources to determine the various stories and visions impacting the significant event they have chosen. We would begin by placing this event within the larger timeline of Australian immigration and associated government actions such as the White Australia Policy. Common themes may emerge within this chronology, such as the general tenor of confusion and caution directed to that which is foreign, slowly accepting the Other as part of our larger multicultural Australian identity, as has partially happened with Asian immigration comprising many Buddhists and Hindus. Narrowing in, students may note the third wave of immigration to Australia increasingly comprised of Muslims and those from the Middle East, shaped by the removal of the dictation test and greater stress upon how an immigrant could contribute to the common good of the country through professional skills. Significant events worthy of further exploration include the rise of Indonesian immigration with the Jakarta riots in 1998, the 2001 denial of entry for nearly 500 Afghan refugees on the MV Tampa stranded near Christmas Island, and the subsequent “Pacific Solution” involving

---

1111 AC:H, ACHHS184-186.
1112 AC:H, ACDSEH145.
offshore processing of refugees.\textsuperscript{1115} Students may draw from government statistics in recognising the relatively small number of Muslims entering Australia, even with a trend of growing numbers between the 2001 and 2011 census, at odds with the level of public outcry by political parties and lobby groups such as One Nation and Australia First.\textsuperscript{1116} Throughout, implicit values are uncovered and conflicting visions are discussed.

Within this larger context, the class would directly face the “rising tide of terrorism” and a perceived lack of community cohesion since the marker event of the 9/11 Islamist attacks.\textsuperscript{1117} Students would learn to “identify the origin, purpose and context of primary and secondary sources” by interacting with government reports such as the counter-terrorism review. Each “significant terrorism event” in post-World War II Australia parallels government reports, interventions, and legislative developments, each impacting upon Australia’s approach to immigration and “co-operation with at-risk communities” to address the “home grown” element of a “heightened terrorism threat”.\textsuperscript{1118} Most important for our purposes, the government acknowledges that “extremist narratives have increasing appeal in the Australian community”, requiring that any response to violent extremism must involve education that deconstructs propaganda built upon one-sided stories.\textsuperscript{1119} Students are thus primed to consider the contested accounts claiming to interpret the pivotal event they have chosen, evaluating the “reliability and usefulness of primary and secondary sources” selected.\textsuperscript{1120} This will inevitably raise religiously interested questions such as the authority of the State under the perceived sovereignty of Allah, and whether there is any Qur’anic warrant for extremist distinctions between the “house of peace” (\textit{Dar al-Islam}) versus the “house of war” (\textit{Dar al-Harb}).\textsuperscript{1121} The fundamental narratives inflaming such ongoing contestation require understanding for a non-reductionist appreciation of history.\textsuperscript{1122} This need stands, even if the “truth” of transcendent takes cannot finally be judged and the appeal to such Scriptures cannot solve the dispute.\textsuperscript{1123}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{1115} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{1118} Ibid., v, 4.

\textsuperscript{1119} Ibid., iv, vi. Cf. Ling and Bouma, “Religious Diversity,” 677-684.

\textsuperscript{1120} AC:H, ACHHS189.


\end{flushleft}
Students, then, are to work together in delineating and empathetically understanding the different perspectives explaining the same event.\textsuperscript{1124} Before progressing to the evaluation of such accounts, a case study of 9/11 could model this process. Drawing from eyewitness accounts and documentaries that interview diverse secular and religious experts, the class can piece together a range of narratives that are coherent to insiders from a particular vantage point. A virtual museum visit to the 9/11 Memorial would make this more interactive.\textsuperscript{1125} What story of the past does each group tell, trying to make sense of why the Twin Towers attack occurred? What vision of the future motivated this action, and shaped their community’s response?\textsuperscript{1126} The symbolism and inner logic of this event invites exploration of apocalyptic language in Judeo-Christian and Islamic Scriptures.\textsuperscript{1127} Pupils may note in their journals the strengths and weaknesses of each story, beginning to form their own account that guides a response to radicalisation and the challenges of immigration and religious plurality.

Having considered the present and the past, we now hone in on competing perspectives. In dialogue with each student’s story and vision, they are to “identify and analyse different historical interpretations (including their own).”\textsuperscript{1128} Using historical criteria, they must consider the reliability and bias of each source, and the explanatory power of each narrative. Where do these stories affirm and refuse each other? How may the student move beyond these piecemeal accounts to form a powerful historical argument built upon “consistent and specific reference to the evidence available”\textsuperscript{1129} Toward this end, and as a capstone to two years studying ancient and modern history, I would conduct a class debate. Students would be randomly assigned to one of two positions, either arguing for or against the proposition that “religion causes violence”. Students must draw on historical examples, and evidence how diverse sacred stories—as interpreted by insiders—foster or fracture care for the Other, a necessary virtue for immigrants and nationals alike in a multicultural country.\textsuperscript{1130} In preparation for this debate, students could study the 2007 source document, \textit{A Common Word between Us and You}, as an Islamic statement extending peace to Christians based upon a common Scriptural mandate to love God and one’s neighbour.\textsuperscript{1131} This reconciliatory narrative may be contrasted with that of religious totalitarianism as espoused by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1124} AC:H, ACHHS190.
\textsuperscript{1127} Forrester, “Theological and Secular Discourse,” 31-40.
\textsuperscript{1128} AC:H, ACHHS191.
\textsuperscript{1129} AC:H, ACHHS192.
\end{flushright}
militant Islamist Sayyid Qutb, and secular variants which condemn all religion as crusading and conversionist, thus inexorably leading history to a global conflict. Again, class time would be given for students to reflect upon how their own historical consciousness is challenged and potentially transformed through interacting with these contested narratives.

Finally, then, in the fourth stage we turn to the future. Students are to construct and communicate their own narrative that purports to make sense of the past, thereby shaping our present action toward social harmony. In line with the curriculum, students will individually develop a “text” that describes and discusses “one world event or development and its significance for Australia”, as it impacts upon the migration experience and contemporary attitudes to immigration. The final section of this paper would require students to compare and contrast their own stories and visions with those of their forebears, building interconnection with those who believe differently. Additionally, and working in their original group, students would construct a poster, present an oral, or develop an instructional video that models how this historical inquiry could be used to address extremist narratives, propaganda, and divisive attitudes in their local school, toward peaceful coexistence between students of differing religious, spiritual and secular convictions.

The preceding four stage model illustrates pedagogy for holistic flourishing. It is sensitive to minority narratives and the drive for emancipation, even as it rejects the equivalence of every historical reconstruction. Beyond recounting past events, it asks of students what this story means and how they will respond. In so doing, ACARA’s aims for History are advanced. The potential for conflict is real, necessitating training for teachers in creating a safe space amidst a controversial depth study. We must be careful that this unit does not reinforce the stereotype of religious diversity as a “problem” to solve. In any case, exposing, challenging and reforming dangerous underlying beliefs is necessary for a critical dialogue about, and a healthy attitude toward, migration. The incorporation of Sacred Texts in History may thus serve the formation of active citizens who can understand the past and work together in the present toward a liberating vision of the common good.

---

1133 Cf. Harris, End of Faith; Huntington, Clash.
1134 AC:H, ACDSEH146, ACHHS192.
1137 Gearon, “Counter Terrorist Classroom,” 129-147.
In summary, in this chapter we have seen anew the subjects of Civics and Citizenship and History for Years 7 to 10 students through the lenses of responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion, and integration. I have chosen engagement through the application of a narrative pedagogy capable of appropriately incorporating Sacred Texts into the Australian Curriculum. The model I have proposed satisfies the seven criteria of the plural principle, being relevance, accountability, democracy, respect, veracity, diversity and integration. Finally, in demonstrating how this model may be enacted in a Year 8 class studying freedom of speech and a Year 10 class exploring modern migration, I have reshaped practice to serve the curriculum telos of a shared journey toward holistic flourishing, thereby serving ACARA’s educational ends.
Chapter 8
Conclusion

Curriculum theorising is necessarily an interdisciplinary exercise. It is therefore regrettable that distinct angles on education have developed in isolation, rather than cross-pollinating to reimage and rejuvenate this practice in the context of a global village. Our world is characterised by multiple modernities in which people of disparate religious, spiritual and secular perspectives must learn to peacefully coexist. Widely reported religious illiteracy is thus a pressing civic concern with educational ramifications (Chapter 1). As active citizens in formation, adolescent students must apply their emerging cognitive abilities to understand their differently believing neighbours. Furthermore, they must learn to interact in a way that respects and builds upon, rather than undermines and avoids, individual and communal particularity. As Davina Woods, the former Federal Aboriginal Education Officer with the Australian Education Union, contends, we must “let our diversity and our differences be dialectics from which we spark a better Australia”.1139 This diversity, in turn, is shaped by stories that are functionally sacred, feeding our social imaginary and orienting our lives. These public visions of the public good at points compete, and at other points cooperate. We cannot tell which ones interrelate, let alone how and why they do so, apart from a face-to-face encounter. Beyond the mapping of diverse lifeworlds, this interpersonal pedagogy transforms its participants. As David Tracy argues, in a divided age, “dialogue and solidarity [in action] amidst the differences and conflicts which dialogue may demand is our best present hope”.1140

In response, this thesis has sought a mutually critical conversation between philosophical, sociological and theological accounts of curriculum, as concerns the place of Sacred Texts in Australian public middle-school education. We have progressively sought to explain and understand the role of Scriptures in the Australian Curriculum, and how this aligns with the goal of “equity and excellence” in schooling. Finally, we sought to change how sacred stories are incorporated in both curriculum writing and classroom pedagogy toward ACARA’s stated ends of forming “successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens”.1141 Before we touch on persistent questions and trace a path forward for future research and responsible action, it is timely to retrace this cumulative argument across each of the five movements in this practical theological cycle.

1140 Tracy, Dialogue with the Other (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991, 5-6.
1141 SAC4, 7-9.
In the descriptive-empirical movement (Chapter 3) we asked, what is going on? Through content analysis, we discovered that at the philosophical level of the Shaping documents, ACARA desires for their curriculum to form students such that they can understand, appreciate and respect religious diversity. The Australian Curriculum reflects a fusion of curriculum ideologies, valuing knowledge, skills and growth, as pursued by Scholar Academics, Social Efficiency and Learner-Centred advocates respectively. Each approach suggests a place for Sacred Texts: forming religious literacy through exposure to classic literature; raising intercultural awareness for economic ends; and stimulating students in their existential quest for integration and meaning. Even so, the curriculum arguably centralises a Social Reconstructionist agenda that seeks individual and communal transformation necessary to sustain a just and peaceable democratic society in a pluralistic context. The telos of the Australian Curriculum was thus identified as forming active citizens capable of making sense of the world and working together for the common good.

In turn, we considered two subjects for Years 7 to 10 students, considering what place religions and their revelations occupy in curriculum aims and content. In both instances, approximately the same situation ensued. At the Shaping level, the civic aims and rhetoric of religious inclusivity suggested a meaningful role for Sacred Texts: capturing diverse visions of the common good in Civics and Citizenship; and making sense of motivations that propelled significant events in the past and shape contested interpretations in the present in the study of History. As the Shaping documents were translated into the Australian Curriculum proper, however, Scriptures disappeared, moved into the null curriculum. This disparity called for explanation.

In the interpretive movement (Chapter 4) we asked, why is this going on? Employing a sociological perspective, I suggested that ACARA’s treatment of religious revelation is consistent with the perspective of the classic secularisation thesis. The hidden and null curricula were brought into dialogue with explicit statements by a range of prominent educators particularly in the Australian context, to reveal unhelpful presuppositions that have arguably influenced the “unthought” of curriculum writing. According to this narrative, Scriptures are dangerous in Civics and Citizenship and irrelevant in History. Both assertions have merit. Thus, even as these claims were deconstructed in light of the post-secular turn, I crystallised the concerns of secularists and multiculturalists alike into a “plural principle”.

Across any unit of study, the incorporation of Sacred Texts must meet the seven criteria of relevance to curricular aims, accountability to professional educators, diversity in perspective, veracity in re-presenting the Other and critically analysing truth claims, and respect for students to determine their own beliefs and practices; it must ultimately foster the integration of a student’s life toward holistic flourishing, and help form a robust, just, inclusive and peaceful democracy. If “secular” education refuses religion as the primary reference point, yet affirms as worthy of study
whatever has relevance to the common good in this time and this place, then ACARA must re-evaluate their sidelining of diverse Scriptures. Religious revelations remain live options that inform how students make sense of, and work together in, this world.

In the normative movement (Chapter 5), we progressed from explaining the situation to understanding, from a broadly Christian perspective, what ought to be going on. A narrative theology of education was constructed to consider what function Sacred Texts may perform toward the telos of education for shalom. That is, I playfully called “God’s Curriculum” the core teaching and learning under divine tutelage for humanity to come of age; there is an educational vision implicit in the biblical journey from the garden of delight in Eden to the garden-city of unity-in-diversity in the New Jerusalem. According to this story, the transcendent Teacher leads students out from death to life in six legs, via the tower of rebellion at Babel, the portable tent for a pilgrim people in exodus and exile, the mount of crucifixion under foreign occupation, and the house where the Holy Spirit initiated reconciliation as a soon-to-be dispersed people moving into all the world from Jerusalem. This curriculum entails both content and pedagogy. That is, GC encompass curriculum as a noun (something we learn about), and currere as a verb (something we do, in participating with the God of the journey). In this narrative, the Creator chooses the few to bless the many, restoring humanity to right relationship with God, others, self and the planet, in order that all of creation may flourish.

Shalom thus synthesises the four ends of diverse curriculum ideologies, integrating knowledge, skills, growth and transformation. It represents the pursuit of an expansive common good that is open to the transcendent and embraces the physical cosmos, including people and our planet therein. In this communal pilgrimage we learn about work, knowledge, wisdom, reciprocity, holiness and hope. We are formed as active citizens under the liberating reign of God in the way we cultivate, repent, bless, love, reconcile, and worship. In turn, this curriculum vision suggests a meaningful role for the study of diverse Sacred Texts. Across Creation, the Fall, Israel, Jesus, Church, and the New Creation, Scriptures function as landscaping maps to cultivate the world, warning signs directing us away from pride, and pilgrim paths illuminating well-trodden trails of wisdom that may (or may not) lead to life; through diverse sacred stories we discover expert guides who embody ways of journeying through life, companions as a community of character to travel with, and different destinations as the end of our pilgrimage which call us forward and focus our energies.

In the correlative movement (Chapter 6), we asked, where is the common ground? Sensitive to the concerns of secularists and multiculturalists, how do the Australian Curriculum and God’s Curriculum affirm and refuse each other, that we may find a creative synthesis where ACARA’s purposes are enriched by reference to diverse Scriptures? Drawing on a range of leading educational
thinkers and theologians, we re-imagined the curriculum as oriented toward holistic flourishing, comprising education for responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion and integration. In both of the subjects, Sacred Texts could be appropriately incorporated to serve the common good: preserving difference and fostering harmony in Civics and Citizenship; and discerning the wisest path to follow together in the present given our contested past in History. While “shalom” and “the common good” are not identical, ACARA’s curricular ends are unachievable apart from explicit consideration of a range of revelatory stories as communal imaginings of humanity’s _summum bonum_, thereby impacting upon our life together.

Australian education must acknowledge transcendent perspectives on reality if we are to pursue equity, excellence, and an inclusive curriculum. Building solidarity amidst difference is only possible where diverse people are brought together in a face-to-face dialogue; Sacred Texts have a very significant role to play in this dialogue. The pedagogical medium must align with ACARA’s democratic end. There exists a middle way between the exclusion of religious convictions, and the saturation of schools where one take on life—whether religious, spiritual or secular—swamps the rest. It requires the indirect incorporation of Sacred Texts into Australian public education at the intersection of a subject’s and a student’s horizon, located within a narrative pedagogy that is characterised by hermeneutical hospitality. This process-oriented curriculum vision values knowledge, skills and growth, even as it harnesses these toward the end of transformation.

Consequently, I have argued for interpersonal encounter and consensual action for the common good that gives competing traditions a voice, rather than specifying a contemporary canon from which students should draw as they handle hard copies of actual “holy books”. In other words, I have argued for a minimalist incorporation of functionally sacred stories across the Australian Curriculum inasmuch as they clearly serve subject aims; these are to be explored through a non-prescriptive, open-ended and student-centred pedagogical process in place of pre-determining particular passages, content and concepts for teachers to cover.

Finally, in the pragmatic movement (Chapter 7) I asked, how might we respond? Lacking the position or power to rewrite the Australian Curriculum, I sought to exemplify how this curriculum vision may be implemented as part of school-based syllabi for Year 7 to 10 students in both subjects. Having seen anew each subject in the previous chapter as aimed at responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion and integration, I developed an overarching narrative pedagogy built upon a five-movement hermeneutic of encounter, questions, stories, synthesis and response. Adapting this model of engagement to accord with ACARA’s teaching stipulations, I reshaped practice to demonstrate how such an approach would augment the curriculum. In particular, we reimagined Civics and Citizenship through a Year 8 study of freedom of speech, and History through a Year 10 unit on modern conflict and migration within a globalising world.
In each instance, I have exhibited how the seven criteria of the plural principle are supported through a dialogical and dialectical pedagogical process. Teachers may not choose to implement any of these suggestions, deeming them too controversial, even as I have modelled how difference and conflict may be a constructive force in effective teaching and learning that cultivates democratic morality. This is not my concern. Rather, my minimal aim was to demonstrate that Sacred Texts can legitimately and practically be incorporated into the Australian Curriculum so as to serve the stated aims of each subject, toward holistic flourishing.

In short, then, while Sacred Texts are largely silenced in secular education, they have a meaningful role to play. By engaging students in explaining, understanding and changing the world through established subjects, the selective incorporation of Scriptures may sensitise adolescents to the many sacred stories at play, and facilitate meaningful dialogue about our collective good. In so doing, potentially transcendent revelation may enrich our immanent frame as the one thing we must all share. Thus, Scriptures can serve the pursuit of wisdom which illumines just and inclusive action. Such would seem to be the driving force for curriculum writers to incorporate Sacred Texts in Australian public middle-school education.

Persistent Questions
Many questions remain that are related to, and yet beyond, the scope of this thesis. Each suggests directions for further research that complement this philosophical-literary study with empirical and qualitative data. For instance, ACARA’s curriculum writers could be interviewed concerning why they assigned religions and their revelations the place they did in the various subjects. Through discourse analysis, we may discern what influence, if any, the secularisation thesis had upon their practice, thereby assessing my claims in Chapter 4. This study could be extended to analyse every subject in the Australian Curriculum for Years 7 to 10.

Questions persist as to how teachers would perceive this project, given that ultimately they would be responsible for incorporating Sacred Texts in the classroom. Who would support and guide their efforts? What system would hold them accountable for equitable inclusion as outlined in my “plural principle”? Does a Social-Reconstructionist ideology align with their personal curriculum vision and philosophy of education? Do they feel equipped for this task? What implications does this have for teacher training?

Beyond teachers, it is also important to explore the attitudes of pupils, parents and community groups to this proposal. Similar research in Europe through the REDCo Project suggests that parents are cautious, even as students appreciate the chance to learn about and from their
differently believing neighbours, thereby serving social cohesion.\textsuperscript{1142} This, in turn, relates to the hot-button issue of Special Religious Education. How might the incorporation of Scriptures and religious themes across the curriculum complement, or perhaps replace, the focused exploration of one religion in extra-curricular time? What are the attitudes of religious leaders and para-church groups working in schools to the theology of education outlined in Chapter 5? Might this lay the foundation for partnership with diverse groups in supporting a more pluralistic approach to General Religious Education that seeks a common good in and through Australian public schools?

A further set of questions relates to curriculum ideology. I have adopted an explicitly Social-Reconstructionist approach to the incorporation of Sacred Texts, aiming at transformation. This is appropriate to ACARA’s aims. And yet, its curriculum philosophy is a fusion of models, shifting in emphasis depending on the subject. Given that Scriptures have a role to play in each curriculum type, what form might this take in each school-based discipline if we were to centralise knowledge, skills, or personal growth through an existential quest? Chapters 6 and 7 could be re-imagined from Scholar-Academic, Social Efficiency, and Learner-Centred perspectives.

\textbf{A Path Forward}

The practical theological cycle is incomplete without considering future possibilities based upon faithful action in the present. How might we journey forward from this point? If diverse constituencies—particularly religious leaders, secularist and humanist associations and lobby groups, ACARA, and the Minister for Education—were broadly to agree that religions and diverse Scriptures are at least somewhat relevant to the common good of contemporary Australia, then we have a basis for communicative action to explore how this might be approached in public education.\textsuperscript{1143} The seven criteria of the “plural principle” could function as a charter, representing an equitable and inclusive middle way that any subsequent proposal must satisfy. An expert panel may contribute a report making clear for teachers any guidelines concerning the incorporation of Scriptures, and religions more broadly, in secular education. ACARA could then review each subject, highlighting points at which religiously-interested themes emerge, as they have done for intercultural understanding as a general capability.\textsuperscript{1144} There may be cause for the modification or addition of curricular outcomes to invite explicit consideration of sacred stories where they would enrich subject aims. Online resources could be provided through “Scootle” for teachers to access.


\textsuperscript{1143} Cf. Bouma, Cahill, Dellal and Zwartz, \textit{Freedom}, 80.

\textsuperscript{1144} For insight into Islamic integration, see Eqeql Hassim and Jennet Cole-Adams, \textit{Learning from One Another: Bringing Muslim Perspectives into Australian Schools} (Melbourne: National Centre for Excellence for Islamic Studies, 2010).
bolstering understanding and saving them time in preparation.\textsuperscript{1145} Federal and University funding could be dedicated to the training and ongoing support of teachers, establishing a network of religious educators to assist implementation and connect schools with appropriate speakers able to share their story. A database of online interviews and “text bundles” relevant to key civic themes and subject matter may be developed and disseminated.\textsuperscript{1146} Best practice at the school level would then be showcased in ACARA’s bi-annual review. Taking cognisance of these and other similar initiatives, it is clear that there is a practical way forward that supports the goal of advancing the common good. The problem is less how to proceed, and more whether power brokers have the will.

Where, then, does this study leave curriculum writers who have deemed the transcendent irrelevant to secular education? At times the path forward requires us first to go back to where we lost our way.\textsuperscript{1147} Dwayne Huebner would likely judge their omission of religion and revelation alike as a malfunction in ACARA’s “sensitivity function”. They have failed to scan the horizon and see important global developments in religious diversity that shape life today and will do so increasingly in the future.\textsuperscript{1148} Religious perspectives cannot simply be dismissed as irrelevant or dangerous. Education for this brave new world that proceeds by censoring classic sources and transcendent perspectives is no panacea.\textsuperscript{1149} In the contemporary and arguably post-secular task of learning to live together, where we value both difference and harmony, religions have a key role to play. This thesis has demonstrated that a pedagogy of sharing sacred stories is both educationally valid and democratically indispensable for peaceful coexistence.\textsuperscript{1150} Whether these texts are transcendent in origin or simply human achievements, “they are a strange and rich testimony to the spiritual imagination which lies at the heart of our many-cultured human heritage”.\textsuperscript{1151} Their permanent contemporaneity and generative power as artefacts are unsurpassed, and thus they are worthy of study.

As such, I humbly seek for ACARA to correct a significant misstep. The intentional incorporation of Sacred Texts can introduce the voice of the Other and the “strangeness of the world” into secular education, thereby decentring unitary conceptions of curriculum.\textsuperscript{1152} By transcending the status quo in search of a non-reductionist spirituality that integrates one’s existence, students and teachers alike may be enriched and transformed. In turn, we may each learn

\textsuperscript{1147} Cf. C. S. Lewis \textit{Mere Christianity} (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 28-29.
\textsuperscript{1148} Huebner, “Facilitating Change as the Responsibility of the Supervisor,” in \textit{LT}, 118-130.
to care about our shared secular reality. The State is not the arbiter of its citizens’ beliefs. Even so, public education can open up the conversation about our common good to hear from devotees of diverse life-stances. Falling short of this, we must ask, “How can children be taught to take responsibility for the globe unless through school they learn how to take responsibility for their classmates by engaging in dialogue with recognition of the otherness of the Other?”

Curriculum theorising requires reanimating. Scriptures have an significant role to play in this process. This thesis contends that the Australian Curriculum and God’s Curriculum can birth a new vision of holistic flourishing aimed at responsibility, knowledge, understanding, care, inclusion and integration. As we surpass our own personal and collective limitations, we may discover right relationship with self, neighbour, and the planet. Perhaps in the process, we may even participate in “co-creation with the divine”.

***

We began Part III of this thesis with an epigraph quoting G. K. Chesterton. He proffered the tale of a medieval monk who schooled his pragmatic compatriots after they thoughtlessly dismantled the long-standing lamp-post. While we must resist theological triumphalism and the enshrining of conservative perspectives, this parable does raise the right question as our starting point. In our contemporary decision to demolish or rebuild the lamp-post—here symbolising the Australian Curriculum—we must consider the “value of Light”. As agendas collide, we must acknowledge and evaluate our competing philosophies of Light, lest we efficiently act for change and find ourselves instead “discuss[ing] in the dark”. Thus, I concur with Neil Postman that we must broaden the educational conversation from mechanics to metaphysics, and technique to telos. What story does the Australian Curriculum tell? What “god” does this narrative serve? Is this purpose able to sustain public education in this place and time? Essentially, then, the path forward begins by returning to the fundamental question: What is education for? Concomitantly, we must consider, what kind of public does it create? The Australian Curriculum aims to form students who can make sense of the world and work together for the common good. If so, then I contend that ancient Scriptures may yet illuminate secular education.

---

1156 Cf. Forrester, Beliefs, 3-6; Forrester, Truthful, 22-23.
1157 Chesterton, Heretics, 8.
1158 Postman, End, x-xi, 17-18.


Benson, David M. “Curriculum Visions: The Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and Dwayne Huebner Discuss Civics and Citizenship.” International Journal of


Blenkinsop, Adrian, ed. The Bible According to Gen Z. Minto, NSW: Bible Society Australia, 2013.


Gough, Noel, and Annette Gough. “A New Public Curriculum, or Reworking the Languages of Curriculum for New Publics.” In Rethinking Public Education: Towards a Public


______. “Jurassic Class: Schoolkids Taught ‘Man Walked with Dinosaurs’.” The Sunday Mail, August 1, 2010, 1.


Hoepper, Brian. “‘Promises to Keep …’: Potential and Pitfall in the Australian Curriculum: History.” Curriculum Perspectives 31, no. 3 (September 2011): 64-71.


Koshy, K., and Kerry J. Kennedy. 181-195. Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre, the Hong Kong University, 2008.


Myers, P. Z. “Atheism’s Third Wave.” *Free Inquiry* 32, iss. 5 (September 2012): 11.


208


Tambyah, Mallihai. “‘More Tick-the-Box’: The Challenge of Promoting Interdisciplinary Learning in the Middle Years through the Australian History Curriculum.” Curriculum Perspectives 31, no. 3 (September 2011): 72-77.


