



From Strength to Strength
1956 - 2006

September 13, 2006

Becky Rosales, Assistant Superintendent
Chair, Curriculum Advisory Committee
San Rafael Unified School District
310 Nova Albion Way
San Rafael, CA 94903

Dear Ms. Rosales and Members of the Curriculum Advisory Committee,

I am writing to express my concern about The Bronze Bow and its place in the curriculum of Davidson Middle School. Having recently read the book, I strongly object to its presence in our public school system as the book is neither an historical account of events nor is it an unbiased look at the religious movement of the time. On the contrary, The Bronze Bow presents a particular point of view reinforced in the book through Daniel's internal struggle to find the truth. Daniel continually weighs two paths, that of Jesus, and that of Judaism, the religion of his childhood. Ultimately Daniel chooses the path of Jesus.

What is most problematic for me, however, is that while Judaism is portrayed as antiquated, and overly concerned with laws, Jesus, and by extension his path, is filled with light and compassion. What then is the educational lesson for the students here? How can they not deduce that Jesus is goodness and light while Judaism is not? How can they not be swayed by Daniel's struggle and influence in their own thinking?

Below, I have outlined a few of my main objections of the book.

1. The more Daniel accepts Jesus' teachings, the more Jewish traditions are diminished and ultimately devalued. For example, the first time Daniel sees Jesus speak, it is in the synagogue, which he remarks, has never been as full. They were there to see Jesus, "the readings of the long passage of Law failed to capture his attention." (p. 46-47). Then, when Jesus appears, we read, "all at once nothing in the room was distinct to him but this man's face. A vital, radiant face, lighted from within by a burning intensity of spirit." This is not the only time that Jesus is portrayed in light. On page 251, we read of Daniel, "he saw only a luminous figure, Jesus had come."
2. My next objection is the devaluation of Jewish sacred law throughout the book. Daniel begins to question Jewish sacred law viewing the rituals of his childhood as tedious and "finicky". The author too assumes a position which is oppositional to Jewish law as well. For example, on page 63 we read, "through the prolonged hand washing Daniel fidgeted, affronted by the silver pitcher." In the Jewish tradition, hand washing is a sacred and spiritual ritual before one eats, but no mention of the beauty and holiness of this or other Jewish rituals is mentioned. Moreover, on page 88, we read "the law was for the wealthy, for the scholar, not for the poor. By now he (Joel) had broken so many points of the law that he was beyond all redemption." For students to learn the disregard for Jewish law in such a way, is damaging to so many.

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3. For centuries, the accusation that the Jews killed Jesus has caused the Jewish people extensive pain, damage and even death. But here, that damaging notion is only reinforced - speaking of the rabbis and scribes who "can't possibly understand him," we read, "some of them hate him so much - I think they would kill him if they could." This statement is inflammatory and reinforces a dangerous notion that has fueled anti-Semitism for centuries.

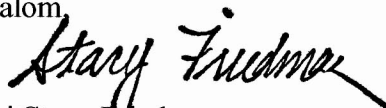
Ultimately though, what is most distressing to me is the 'conversion' of Daniel wherein (pg. 23) the darkness of his Jewish faith is replaced with the 'light of Jesus'. "Just when the hope of Jesus began to work in him he did not know. It began as a small flicker in the darkness of his mind". While in a Christian context of a church or parochial school this would be fitting, in a public school it is unacceptable and inappropriate. Promoting a specific religion's path while discounting another is potentially damaging to our young people, whether they are Christians, Jews, or of any other faith. And finally, on page 252, Daniel abandons himself to Jesus fully: we read, "he wanted to stop fighting against this man. He knew that he would give everything he possessed in life to follow Jesus... to know Jesus would be enough." Where does this leave the child whose belief system does not include Jesus?

How many students have felt confused about their own faith after reading this book? How many students have felt defensive or exposed or even embarrassed during discussions of this book? How many students have felt supreme and justified after reading this book? I do not think that these are our educational objectives in public schools today.

I urge you to remove this book from the curriculum of Davidson Middle School. I am concerned about the religious freedom of our youth and this book's infringement upon it. I am concerned that the classroom is being used to promote a specific religious point of view and to denigrate another, and I am concerned that this book can only serve to marginalize and isolate students who already find themselves in the minority or on the periphery of American religious life.

Thank you for your attention to this crucial matter.

B'shalom,



Rabbi Stacy Friedman

cc: Laura Alvarenga, Superintendent