



## THE GREAT COVER-UP

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A BELIEVER TO RECOGNISE THE UNIQUE ROLE OF THE BIBLE IN SHAPING EUROPE. ARCH-ATHEIST RICHARD DAWKINS FREELY ADMITS THAT 'WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE BIBLE, YOU JUST CAN'T UNDERSTAND EUROPEAN HISTORY'.**

French President Nicolas Sarkozy, in a marked departure from his predecessors, talks openly about 'France's essentially Christian roots'. He conceded to German Chancellor Angela Merkel that denying reference to 'Europe's Christian roots' from the European Constitution had been a mistake.

*Elsevier* magazine, the leading Dutch secular weekly not known for its piety, ran a cover story admonishing subscribers to 'Read the Bible!'. Under a photo of Salvador Dali's *Last Supper*, one could read: *The Book of Books. After the success of The Da Vinci Code, an understanding of the Bible is almost essential for the reading of thrillers. Knowledge of the most influential writings of all time is also useful in grasping world history, Dutch culture and classical art. Read the Bible!*

The article itself then listed five reasons why everybody, including those not convinced of the value and truth of the Christian message, should make themselves familiar with the Bible:

- The Bible was the most important book in history;
- The Bible had strongly influenced the culture of the fatherland
- Much art could not be understood without knowledge of the Bible
- The Bible contained beautiful literature
- Bible study promoted multicultural dialogue.

Surrounded by such a cloud of witnesses, drawn from atheists, politicians and secular journalists, why are we in the Christian community so bashful about 'selling the Bible' to contemporary Europeans, young and old?

Where, for example, are the beautifully-illustrated coffee-table books, telling the story of how the Bible has inspired art, architecture, education, law, language, commerce, agriculture, healthcare, the abolition of slavery, the emancipation of women, laws to protect workers, the development of trade unions, and a host of philanthropic and service organisations the from Red Cross to Alcoholics Anonymous?

Where are the educational materials available for schools at elementary and secondary levels explaining the seminal influence of this unique book to pupils and students of all ages and backgrounds?

Where are the university courses being taught in secular institutions and seminaries giving objective perspectives as sketched by *Elsevier* above?

Where are the museums explaining how Europe's pioneer missionaries—like Patrick and Columba, Willibrord and Boniface—revolutionised the world view of our pagan ancestors, reshaping social life, law and social customs, by giving them the Bible? or how by viewing history to be linear and not cyclical, the Bible taught that history was going somewhere? and that Marxist and humanist views of human progress simply 'borrow' from biblical revelation?

Who is teaching our youth that virtually all European languages were fundamentally shaped by Bible translations into the vernacular? through Wycliffe's English translation, Luther's German translation or the Statenvertaling in Dutch? and how such translations replaced countless local dialects with standard languages, embedding many proverbs and sayings into European cultures?

How many Europeans know that education developed through the ages directly inspired by the Bible? that monastic schools birthed universities with theology as queen of the sciences? that the idea of a universal reality integrating all knowledge lay behind the very name 'university'? that modern science developed after the Reformation freed believing scientists like Bacon, Newton, Pascal and Kepler to explore God's Book of Works—creation—as well as his Book of Words? that Sunday Schools were the first step towards free education for all?

How many of our children are taught that the Bible inspired the vast majority of European art and literature up until modern times, including such artists as Michelangelo, da Vinci, Rembrandt and van Gogh, and a host of writers including Shakespeare, Milton, Donne and Herbert?

Who is aware of how the Bible shaped our modern democratic political forms, inspiring the separation of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government? or that the founding fathers of the European Coal and Steel Community—forerunner of the European Union—worked towards the reconstruction of Europe on biblical foundations? and that even the controversial EU constitution embraced concepts inspired by a biblical understanding of humankind—such as subsidiarity, solidarity and human rights?

And why are the only books I can find on this issue written by Americans? (Please tell me I'm wrong!)

As Bible literacy wanes in Europe, old deities and doctrines are returning in new seductive guises. Witness *The Da Vinci Code*. When we don't know our roots, we are easily robbed of our heritage.

The Bible is the book that made Europe 'Europe' in the first place! It has a unique relationship with European civilisation. No other book comes anywhere close to its influence on the European peoples.

Surely if we don't make this widely known we are guilty of a great cover-up!

This week I am sharing some of these thoughts at a global conference of Bible agencies, here in Holland. Next week, I'll explain how you can join my wife and me on this year's *Heritage Trip* (28.6-11.7) when we meet people and movements that, inspired by the Bible, made Europe 'Europe',

Till then,

Jeff Fountain

