

Academic freedom is of vital importance to the maintenance of democracy in Australia and therefore needs to be protected at all times. I have heard of a number of examples of political bias, especially those from the left of the political spectrum, in our universities, but this problem of bias infects our secondary schooling system as well. Examples of political bias amongst teachers is now commonplace, but most teachers inform their classes that these are their own beliefs and not fact, but unfortunately, this is not true for a minority of teachers. Although political bias is a negative aspect of schooling life, especially now that it has become so common, it isn't the worst form of bias that exists in the schooling system. Religious bias is also evident and Religious Education classes have become a propaganda machine and are used as a technique for indoctrinating the minds of the youth of society. Examples of bias and teachers influencing their students, both in the political and religious sense, have become almost commonplace in Australia's education system and something needs to be done to ensure the continuation of academic freedom and the survival of democracy in Australia.

Now while I attend a private and Catholic school and I respect the schools right to teach religion, Religious Education classes are filled with monotonous propaganda where we, the students, are indoctrinated into the way of the Church. The view of the Church is seen as the only correct one and any challenging of this status quo results in sometimes harsh attacks. The Church's stance on abortion, pre-marital sex and protection has been propagated to us for years. We have not been told about the potentially life saving effects of condoms and other forms of protection, merely that if you use them you are wrong and in need of forgiveness. Bias in Religious Education has become so bad that in a recent test on Love and Relationships I was asked the question:

*"The Church teaches that we must not do evil so that good may come of it.
Discuss this statement with regard to reproductive technologies such as IVF
and surrogacy."*

This question is extremely biased and is based upon the implied assumption that reproductive technology is evil. The question doesn't even acknowledge that there are other opinions on this matter, but instead asks the students to only consider the Churches view, thus excluding the others. This is representative of the whole problem of bias in Religious Education and typifies what Religious Education classes are like; extraordinarily biased and exceptionally one sided. Differing opinions are not even recognised, the only view that is recognised is that of the Church and all other opinions are considered wrong or inferior; if you question the view given to you, the state of your soul is sometimes even inquired into! Bias in religion classrooms, in my experience, has gone way beyond acceptable levels. When students, when people are told what to think they forget how to think and by being indoctrinating the youth of society through bigoted religious teachings, this is exactly what we are doing. Students must be able to think independently and instead of being told what to think, they need to make their own decisions and formulate their own opinions, for without this stagnation will ultimately occur.

The protection of academic freedom and the protection of the minds of the younger generation from indoctrination are two very important functions of not only the government, but society in general. Political bias is bad enough, but when teaches start to apply this same bias, but in the area of religion, the problem gets worse. The continual assurance of academic freedom, in its entirety, is a necessary precursor to the continuation of democracy for without it, society would stagnate and even forget how to think.