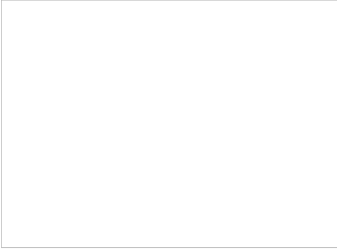


Bibles put out of reach in libraries



The guidance for libraries was produced by a quango overseen by culture secretary Andy Burnham.

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Government-backed guidance has told librarians to store Bibles and other religious texts on the top shelf in order to avoid offending Muslims.

The guidance suggests moving all religious texts to the top shelf because of the Muslim belief that the Koran should not be kept among 'common things'.

But critics argue that Christians do not apply such beliefs to the Bible, which they say should be easily accessible for everyone.

The news emerged as Poet Laureate Andrew Motion said during an interview that children should be taught more about the Bible because it is an "essential piece of cultural luggage".

Mr Motion, an atheist, said too many students now arrive at university to study English Literature with scant knowledge of its deeply biblical foundations.

Commenting on his experience of teaching students, he said: "When I ask them anything about the Bible, they frankly, by and large, don't know. I don't particularly blame them for it.

"But I do think there is a real problem with the education system that has allowed these great stories to disappear, to fade out of the diet everyone gets at school."

The guidance for libraries was published by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, a quango answering to culture secretary Andy Burnham.

The guidance says Muslim groups advised that all religious texts should be kept on the top shelf, so that "no offence is caused, as the scriptures of all the major faiths are given respect in this way, but none is higher than any other".

Robert Whelan of the Civitas think-tank said: "One of the central planks of the Protestant Reformation was that everybody should have access to the Bible."

Earlier this month an education expert hit out at a new GCSE syllabus for Religious Studies, saying it focused on fashionable political ideas like the environment and binge drinking at the expense of religion.

Alan Smithers, Professor of Education at Buckingham University, said: "I think it comes from the desire of politicians to stamp their influence on everything. It looks as if they are turning RE in to a pat qualification for political correctness.

"How is it to benefit the students? It is not going to be a basis for the further study of RE or spirituality to a higher level."

Last year Oxford University Press, the publisher of a children's dictionary, was criticized over the decision to remove a number of words with Christian connotations like 'sin' and 'vicar' and replace them with terms like 'biodegradable' and 'citizenship'.