

**Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Bronze Bow*. NY: Houghton Mifflin, 1961.  
Review by: Dr. Sandra Alfonsi**

Many of the trends in education today are set by textbooks and teaching materials created for 21 states that have their own statewide textbook adoption lists. California, Texas and Florida lead the country in the number of books purchased and therefore are powerhouse states in determining what is included in the educational programs submitted for adoption by publishing houses. Much of the flawed material on Israel as well as the sanitized presentation of Islam results from the influence of the California-based Council on Islamic Education.

Publishing houses are now including works of fiction as required reading material in the programs that they create for state adoption and are thereby linking fiction to the study of history and social studies. In some cases, the novel not only teaches history but violates the Establishment Clause of the Constitution by bringing religion into the classroom for the purpose of proselytizing. *The Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare is such a novel. Set in Roman-occupied Judea and Samaria at the time when Jesus starts to preach across the land, *The Bronze Bow* tells the story of Roman occupation and the failure of the Zealot revolutionary movement to end it and then introduces the messianic message of Jesus as the road to physical freedom and ultimate salvation. As a work of fiction, it is beautifully written and easy to read. The author is historically accurate in her presentation of the Zealot movement and the Jewish pursuit of freedom from Roman oppression. She is equally accurate in her presentation of the rise of Jesus as a religious figure in a land occupied by the Romans.

What then is wrong with the inclusion of *The Bronze Bow* on a required public school reading list for middle school students? No one can challenge the novel's historical accuracy – the Zealot movement did indeed fail to free the Jews from Roman occupation; Jesus did indeed preach across the land and he did attract ardent followers among Jews who doubted that the Romans could be defeated and therefore accepted Jesus' belief in spiritual freedom as the only road to spiritual salvation.

It is the interpretation that Christianity is superior to Judaism because Jewish zealots chose to follow Jesus and abandon the Zealot movement that makes this book dangerous in any classroom and that leads to a subtle violation of the separation of Church and State in the classroom. In the hands of a zealous Christian teacher, *The Bronze Bow* proselytizes rather than educates.