



The Rationalist Association
of NSW Inc.

NEW LIBERATOR

Winter 2018

'PARADISE' FOUND IN THE POKIES ROOM AT THE CATHOLIC CLUB IN CANBERRA!

Luke 23:43

And Jesus said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.'



'[Archbishop of Sydney, George Pell] ... is in a somewhat delicate position as he acts as landlord of several Catholic clubs with large numbers of poker machines'.

Sydney Morning Herald,
2 June 2001

Photos: Southern Cross Catholic Club Canberra 2017



THE NEW LIBERATOR

WINTER 2018

Journal of the Rationalist Association
of NSW Inc.

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The aims and objectives of The Rationalist Association of New South Wales are to promote:

- a philosophical and scientific approach to life free from superstition and dogmatism;
- secular education in government schools; and
- the separation of church and state.

The title *New Liberator* was chosen in honour of Joseph Symes (1841–1906) a British secularist and publicist, who arrived in Melbourne in 1884. He published a weekly, the *Liberator*. The first publication of the *New Liberator* coincided with the centenary of Symes' death in 1906.

Articles published in this journal seek to promote discussion and understanding of cultural and political issues in Australia. It is not connected with any political party or sectarian group.

Articles up to 1,500 words are welcome.
Please send in Word format to:
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Opinions expressed in *NEW LIBERATOR* are those of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the Association.

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IN THIS ISSUE

Paradise Found at the Catholic Club Canberra.....	1
Who are the 'Modern Elites? <i>Meg Wallace</i>	2
Why the Religious Right supports Trump <i>Rob Boston</i>	4
Australia is not Secular <i>Glenn Burns</i>	5
New Zealand MP David Seymour on his <i>End Of Life Choices Bill</i>	8
Chaplains in Schools: Probably Illegal, Certainly Immoral <i>Maurie Mulheron</i>	8
NEWS, UPCOMING MEETINGS.....	10
The Last Word <i>Angelica Divine</i>	12

WHO ARE THE 'MODERN ELITES'?

Meg Wallace

In the inaugural PM Glynn Lecture delivered under the auspices of the Australian Catholic University on 17 Oct, 2017¹, the Honourable Dyson Heydon AC QC discussed 'modern elites'. 'Modern elites' are compared unfavourably with the 'elite of the Federation generation' of which PM Glynn was one. To Glynn is traditionally assigned the authorship of the reference in the preamble of the Australian Constitution to the 'humble reliance on the blessing of Almighty God.'

'Modern elites', however, are nowhere defined in Heydon's lecture. He uses broad, generalised imputations regarding their beliefs and aims, also without citing evidence. Obscurity surrounds whether he includes all or some who are non-religious, anti-religious, secularist or rabid extremists. He is big on accusations, anecdotes, imputations and generalities, but notably lacks actual data. *Modern elites*, it seems,

desire to exclude any role for religion in Australian public discussion – and perhaps any role for religion at all in any sphere, public or private. Any comment or conduct they don't like is instantly made the subject of a demand that there be an apology.

1. <https://www.pmglynn.acu.edu.au/news/the-inaugural-pm-glynn-lecture-by-the-honourable-dyson-heydon-ac-qc>

Isolated instances are attributed to 'modern elites', and likened to Nazism:

Heydon states that *a particular point of view, was publicised with the words: "Burn churches, not gays"*. He gives no indication of where or by whom these words were publicised. He points to

remembrance it summons up surely inevitably and probably intentionally – of Nazism ... and the burning those who attended those synagogues from 1942 onwards – in their millions.

Likewise, he cites graffiti on the walls of a Baptist church the words "Crucify 'No' Voters": a 'deliberate and blasphemous allusion to a central element of Christian belief. Again, he fails to say by whom or where they occurred but attributes the graffiti to 'modern elites'. It does seem that 'modern elites' are not Christians, but we are kept guessing as to why they are called 'elites'. Heydon blames the failure of 'modern elites' to condemn these 'two examples of sub-human behaviour' to indicate acceptance of their propriety and validity.

False association of secularism with evil:

Justice Heydon further criticised a catchcry 'commonly now heard', and 'related' to the above actions, that religious people force their opinions on everyone else. He also associates this to Germany in the 1940s. Still apparently alluding to 'modern elites', he states

It is all right for one element of public opinion to call for the physical destruction of places of worship and the death of those who worship in them ... without comment But, he says that it is not considered [by whom?] all right for people argue for or against particular policy positions on religious, ethical or utilitarian grounds under general debate.

It is all right for the elite to support a particular point of view, but intolerable for anyone else to oppose it. That is what modern elites call "tolerance".

Further broad allegations are made against 'modern elites'. They fail denounce those evils, Heydon says, and thus associate themselves with them. The case for the elites is also weakened by their *failure to appeal to reason*. Surely, then, those of us who are non-believers and promote the cause of reason cannot be the 'modern elite'?

Misrepresentation:

Heydon has created a vague class of straw men, among whom, one gathers, he includes rationalists and secularists, and whom he severely

misrepresents. These 'modern elites' he calls 'tyrants of tolerance', paying lip-service to freedom of religion as a fundamental human right. "You must listen to what I am going to say" he claims they declare, 'then you must either praise my virtue or shut up'.

Heydon then asserts, again without identification of individuals or facts, that modern elites demand 'unconditional surrender' of opponents. They want

absolute victory for an un-contestable dogma which is unchallengeable... The modern elites call for their creeds to be tolerated. Then they call for them to be compulsory. Then they want them to be exclusive [unlike religionists].

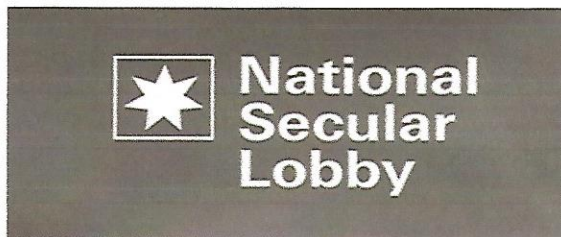
'Modern elites' reject Christianity and replace it with what Heydon claims risks

returning at least in part to what the Christian tradition replaced. That, he says risks rule by patriarchs, or aristocracies, or oligarchical castes, heavily based on slavery, involving the subjugation of women, captives and younger sons and not recognising the status of aliens. It is to drift towards the opposite of Christianity. Above all, the modern elites welcome tyranny.

This is extraordinary news, and hardly represents the majority of society, religious or otherwise, who accept the importance of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. He then confuses the matter further by concluding that 'the elites seek to destroy their inheritance from secular liberalism.' I must be mistaken in thinking that 'secular liberalism' involves the very freedom of (and from) religion, freedom of speech and personal autonomy that Heydon purports to be advocating. One could say the evils he accuses 'modern elites' visiting upon society can also exist in conservative approaches to religion.

Such a wildly general and erroneous representation of those whose views he criticises is extraordinary, coming from a judge with such long experience, who, I suggest, should be more reasoned and factual in his adjudications.

His speech reveals more than he intended.



<https://www.nationalsecularlobby.org/>

WHY THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT SUPPORTS TRUMP

Rob Boston

I've monitored Religious Right groups for more than three decades, and I have to say, I've seen nothing like what's unfolding these days.

Over the years, I've attended meetings of the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council's annual "Values Voter Summit." I once sat through a "Reclaiming America for Christ" conference held by the late TV preacher D. James Kennedy in Florida, and I've been to gatherings sponsored by smaller or regional Religious Right groups.

Without exception, at every one of these meetings, I've heard the same message over and over again: *character* counts. America's political leaders, speakers at these meetings would thunder, must model moral behaviour. They set the standard, so don't follow a leader who comes up short when it comes to "morals" and "values."

Apparently, that's all been tossed out the window. On Sunday night, an adult-entertainment film star named Stormy Daniels was interviewed by Anderson Cooper on "60 Minutes" to discuss her alleged affair with President Donald Trump. She provided salacious details of her time with Trump in 2006 and asserted that she was later threatened and told not to talk about it.

Leaders of the Religious Right have responded to this by making it clear they're sticking with Trump.

Daniels isn't the only one speaking out. Karen McDougal, a former *Playboy* model, has asserted that she too had an affair with Trump in 2006. Summer Zervos, a former contestant on Trump's reality show TV "The Apprentice," is suing Trump for defamation, asserting that he sexually assaulted her in 2007. (A New York court recently ruled that her lawsuit can go forward.)

Again, leaders of Religious Right group either ignore or deny these charges – even though the allegations are in no way implausible. In Daniels' case, we know that a lawyer for Trump just before Election Day 2016 gave her \$130,000 to keep quiet. The allegations also track with Trump's behavior. After all, Trump himself was caught on tape boasting about how easy it is to sexually assault women when you're rich and famous.

A progressive president facing this tawdry combination of allegations by porn stars and

centerfold models would be under constant fire from Religious Right groups. In Trump's case, they're simply shrugging their shoulders.

This isn't just simple hypocrisy; something else is afoot.

Writing in *The Washington Post*, three university professors try to make sense of it. Andrew L. Whitehead, Joseph O. Baker and Samuel L. Perry assert that conservative evangelical support for Trump is driven by Christian nationalism, that is, the belief that the United States is, or ought to be, a "Christian nation." (Of course, for the people who believe this, "Christianity" equates with far-right, fundamentalist versions of that faith.)

Analyzing data from a Baylor University survey on religion, the trio wrote, "The more someone believed the United States is – and should be – a Christian nation, the more likely they were to vote for Trump."

Whitehead, Baker and Perry go on to assert, "Many voters believed, and presumably still believe, that regardless of his personal piety (or lack thereof), Trump would defend what they saw as the country's Christian heritage – and would help move the nation toward a distinctly Christian future. Ironically, Christian nationalism is focused on preserving a perceived Christian identity for America irrespective of the means by which such a project would be achieved. Hence, many white Christians believe Trump may be an effective instrument in God's plan for America, even if he is not particularly religious himself."

This line of thinking echoes the mental gymnastics on display in a new book titled, *The Faith of Donald J. Trump: A Spiritual Biography*, by David Brody, a reporter for TV preacher Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network, and Scott Lamb, a vice president at Liberty University. Brody and Lamb assert that Trump is among the "elect," a figure chosen by God to do divine work in the realm of politics.

So it's official: The Religious Right no longer cares about *character*. If the movement's followers must discard principle and twist themselves into knots to appoint Trump a kind of latter-day prophet, they're willing to do it.

How did the moral majoritarians, "values voters" and neo-Puritans of the Religious Right arrive at such a strange place? The armchair psychologist in me attributes it to fear.

America is changing. Far-right Christian fundamentalist supremacists have been forced to cede power and acknowledge the rights of those

who believe differently. They're seeing women, LGBTQ people, non-believers and others assert their rights, and they don't like it. They've watched as Americans rejected their views on issues like marriage equality, and they are frightened. They see a future America that is more diverse than ever. It scares them. In response, they cling to a vision of an officially "Christian America" that never was and never will be – and they'll even latch on to a guy like Trump if they think he can deliver it.

Now, there's a slight possibility that a serial philanderer and petulant Twitter addict who will somehow manage to lead the Religious Right (and drag the rest of us) to the Christian nation of the theocrats' dreams – but it looks like a long shot.

It's not just that the quest for a Christian nation has historically been a fool's errand – though it has been, as many zealots have learned over the years. Rather, what's undermining the new crusade is the irony-rich realization that the Religious Right was correct about one thing after all: *Character* does still count for something.

And when your leader has amply demonstrated time after time that he's utterly devoid of character but you choose to blindly follow him anyway, the odds that he'll eventually lead you over a cliff are very good.

From *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*, 27 March 2018

AUSTRALIA IS NOT SECULAR

Glenn Burns

Australia is often said to be a secular society. Secularism is often described as a polity where *religious offices, institutions, ceremonies, are removed from public life – in education, law-making, administration and government*.

But Australia is not a secular society. There is so much entanglement between Australian public policy and religion that public policy has been compromised in many significant ways.

There is anecdotal evidence that heads of religious organisations have exclusive access to elected parliamentarians and other public policy formation-related people. For example, they appear to have private access to elected members of parliaments, where public policy is legislated; and secretaries of departments of the public service, where legislation is implemented.

Many members of parliament, when they are sworn in, choose to do so on the Bible, as if allegiance to a supernatural being is normal for a secular parliament.

There are regular religious ceremonies in the Australian federal parliament. During her time in parliament, former leader of the Australian Democrats, Lyn Allison, described a cross-party Christian meet-up forum that met regularly. About a third of federal MPs and senators met.

ISSUES

- Taxpayers contribute annually \$800 million to religious schools, plus more for capital works. More than 40 per cent of secondary students go to private schools, which are overwhelmingly religious schools. The Australian National School Chaplaincy Programme committed \$243.8 million of taxpayers' funds to 2018 to approximately 2,900 schools. In 2014 the government pushed to keep secular professionals out of this program, so that it is now staffed by mainly evangelicals.
- Nearly 41 per cent of Australian secondary students go to private schools, which are overwhelmingly religious schools. Add to this the tendency for private-school graduates to be more likely to win employment in leadership-type roles in society, including in relation to public policy formation, and we see a tendency for more than half of public policy occupations to be filled by people who have been subject to indoctrination by religion in their formative years.
- The propensity for people to unconsciously internalise religious indoctrination can tend to distort public policy formation, in that people in public policy erroneously deem religion as benign or desirable.
- Taxation facilitates public policy formation. Yet religious organisations pay little or no tax. About 30 per cent of Australians are non-religious yet they are obliged to subsidise religion through their taxes.
- Legalised euthanasia is now supported by about 70 per cent of Australians but the federal parliament overturned euthanasia legalisation in the Northern Territory in 1996, by way of a Catholic member's private bill; voluntary euthanasia is now only legal in Victoria (but only available to those citizens who have been resident for three years.)

- Religious organisations are a dominant force in aged care in Australia. Non-religious doctors readily advise: if a person begins the need for aged care via general hospital admission, they will almost certainly enter a religious organisation, and consequently have no option but subjection to religious agendas.

CONCLUSION

A tendency for most public policy positions in Australia to be filled by people who were indoctrinated in religious schools, combined with the power of political religion, aids in sufficiently large numbers of people including judiciary, politicians and the general public, being to a degree captured by religion. They unconsciously internalise religion as an untouchable public good so that – even in the knowledge of industrial-scale paedophilia and subsequent suicides - public policy formation to rein-in political religion does not happen.

We need ask: what are the opportunity costs to having public policy formation dominated by religion?

Public policy formation in Australia can only extract itself from religion, by eventually making Australia a genuine secular society. Religion should only be a personal choice that Australians can make in relation to their personal lives.

Religious groups can take their proper place alongside other private human endeavour such as groups for: ethics; choirs; mediation; volunteering for the poor; aspects of death and dying for the religiously committed; collecting and retailing clothing and furniture; various other charities with a public purpose; celebration of myths that peoples over millennia have produced; artistic endeavour, and so on. Religion can thus take its proper place as a personal interest in Australia, rather than a publicly resourced policy formation powerhouse.

SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE?

'I would like to see over time an understanding by all people, and cultures, and religions, that there should be a separation of church and state, that there is a sense of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's.'

*Former prime minister, Tony Abbott, ABC radio
15 September 2014.*

'Despite the evidence-based pleas by his Liberal colleague and NSW Education Minister, Adrian Piccoli, Tony Abbott has reaffirmed that secular counsellors will not be funded under the revamped school chaplaincy program. Only those with a belief in a deity and the supernatural are now deemed qualified to give counselling and support to school students, and only such people will receive Commonwealth funding.

Is this the same warrior prime minister who, on ABC radio recently, outlined his grand design for the Middle East? In the interview he said, "I would like to see, over time, an understanding by all people, cultures and religions, that there should be separation of church and state."

The policy, therefore, to withdraw the funding of secular counsellors in our schools is cynical and sectarian, and the antithesis of Abbott's purported ideal of a separation of state and church.'

*Norman Monshall, Allambie Heights, NSW
Letters, Sydney Morning Herald, 13 October 2014.*

Postscript 2018:

The Turnbull federal government plans to extend funding for religious-only chaplains in public schools for another four years.



NEW ZEALAND MP DAVID SEYMOUR, ON *HIS END OF LIFE CHOICES* BILL

David Seymour introduced a Bill allowing assisted dying in the NZ Parliament. The Bill was sent to a Parliamentary Committee for consideration to determine if assisted dying should be the subject of a referendum. The Committee has yet to report.

Our liberal history can be briefly sketched out in two stages. Establishing a bundle of rights and then expanding them to include a wider range of people. In one sense, the right to assisted dying is a continuation of this movement and perhaps its final chapter.

In dark ages past people had few dimensions of freedom and little self-expression. Most people had one option for spiritual thinking with severe penalties for deviance. As for choice in sexuality, the electoral franchise, freedom of speech; unless you fitted in exactly the right box, forget it.

In my maiden speech to parliament, I borrowed heavily from AC Grayling's excellent *Towards the Light of Liberty* where from the Inquisition to the Reformation through the abolition of slavery, the liberation of women and expansion of the franchise, the black civil rights movement and finally the LGBTI movement, the sphere of liberty was expanded and then eventually included all people.

Today we are told that Assisted Dying should not and cannot be legalised: Should not, because the status quo is fine. Cannot, because making any exception to the prohibition on helping a person to die would be open to abuse. It is worth confronting these two arguments head on with the evidence.

The best marshalling of the evidence to date is by the Supreme Court of Canada. In *Carter vs. Canada* the Court ruled that the prohibition on Assisted Dying violated the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and required the Canadian Parliament to change its Criminal Code.

On the first question, it found:

It is a crime in Canada to assist another person in ending her own life. As a result, people who are grievously and irremediably ill cannot seek a physician's assistance in dying and may be condemned to a life of severe and intolerable suffering. A person facing this

prospect has two options: she can take her own life prematurely, often by violent or dangerous means, or she can suffer until she dies from natural causes. The choice is cruel.

On the second question, it found that there are jurisdictions that allow Assisted Dying without endangering those who do not wish to have the choice:

[T]hat a permissive regime with properly designed and administered safeguards was capable of protecting vulnerable people from abuse and error.

Closer to home our own High Court made similar findings in *Seales vs. Attorney General*. The major difference is that we do not have a written constitution that is above Parliament, so no court can force a law change. [Note: The situation is the same in Australian States – ed.] Some might interpret Justice Collins as expressing his frustration with this fact when he said in his ruling on *Seales* that:

The changes to the law sought by Ms Seales can only be made by Parliament. I would be trespassing on the role of Parliament and departing from the constitutional role of Judges in New Zealand if I were to issue the criminal law declarations sought by Ms Seales.

Of course there is a wide ranging debate on this issue but we can take a lot from these judgements by some of the best judges in the world who considered a wide range of evidence (Collins considered 51 affidavits from 36 witnesses, some from inside New Zealand and others from outside the country, including jurisdictions that allow Assisted Dying). If we accept the considered rulings of these judges, then we have to accept the status quo is not acceptable and that it is possible to design a law based on choice.

I am not going to speculate what remaining objections motivate opponents of my bill. However, those who oppose Assisted Dying should pause to consider how they have benefited from 400 years of progress towards liberty and ask themselves what right they really have to deny choice to those suffering.

CHAPLAINS IN SCHOOLS: PROBABLY ILLEGAL, CERTAINLY IMMORAL

Maurie Mulheron

From *Journal of the NSW Teachers' Federation*
May 2018 Vol 99 No.3.

In the recent federal Budget, an additional \$247 million has been allocated to the schools chaplaincy program. This brings the total amount of funding for the scheme, since its introduction in 2006 by the Howard Government, to about \$1 billion.

Think about it: that is \$1 billion of public money handed to religious groups. Not much separating the church and state here.

The origins of the scheme date back to 2004 when the then-prime minister, John Howard, claimed public schools were guilty of not teaching moral values, unlike private schools which were apparently. His comments were met with an outcry by many commentators, teachers, principal groups and parents.

But it laid the foundation for his government to introduce the funding of chaplains in schools, despite the secular nature of Australian society.

Secularism should not be confused with hostility towards religion. Indeed, it is the very opposite.

Secularism allows for the creation of a public common, particularly in relation to our laws and state institutions, in which all faiths and non-faiths can co-exist without fear or favour.

Twice the program has been successfully challenged in the High Court, in 2012 and again in 2014, but the Federal Government has managed to manoeuvre around these decisions.

Associate Professor of constitutional law at Monash University Luke Beck explains the federal government requirement that he believes could result in the program being challenged for a third time in the High Court.

"Getting a job as a chaplain requires a person to be recognised as qualified for the role 'through formal ordination, commissioning, recognised religious qualifications or endorsement by a recognised or accepted religious institution'," he said.

In other words, a person has to be religious and endorsed by a religious group in order to get a job as a chaplain.

He goes on to argue: "Requiring a chaplain to be a member of a particular religion is inconsistent with the nature of public schools. Public schools are secular and open to all. A typical public school has students from a variety of religious backgrounds and students who are not religious at all. Requiring a chaplain to be a member of a particular religion is also illegal."

Recent media reports have revealed that a group of extremists within the federal Liberal party lobbied for the chaplaincy program to be extended.

These same federal Liberal Party backbenchers voted to rip \$1.9 billion out of public schools over the next two years.

Just imagine how much more effectively the money could be used; on student welfare programs, on students with special needs.

The most recent allocation of \$247 million is about what it would cost to employ more than 2200 professional school counsellors, with teaching and psychology qualifications, one for every public school in NSW.

When I was a principal, just prior to being elected as President of the Federation, I received coloured brochures and a letter from a religious organisation urging me to sign the school up to a chaplaincy program. Once I signed up, of course, they would get the funding.

I wrote a formal letter as principal back to the church:

"You might be well-served to re-read Matthew 21:12. Jesus recognised greed when he saw it, it's just a pity his purported followers are so selective in their reading of the Bible.

The 'chaplaincy program' is an embarrassment. To think ... that as a nation, we have provided more federal money on a program to place religious proselytisers in schools than was allocated for students with disabilities is a perversion.

A truly Christian organisation would recognise this for the obscenity that it is and reject the money. Indeed, the very fact that you seek the funding would indicate that you and your organisation have lost any claim to moral authority.

But the real offence of your letter is the insult to the qualified professional counsellors that are employed in public schools.

We need more of them; qualified, disinterested and professional counsellors, with a teaching

background, who can deal with the myriad of issues that young people face including homophobia; pregnancy; psychological, emotional and physical abuse; homelessness, eating disorders, self-esteem problems; behaviour disorders; sexism; racism; poverty; stress; the pressure of study; workload demands; suicide thoughts; self-harming behaviours; bullying; sexual harassment; peer relationships; and the list goes on.

I believe for me to allow untrained people anywhere near our students would be an abrogation of my duty of care.

Just imagine the number of professionals that governments could have employed with the money to deal with these serious issues.

Your challenge is this: reject the funding and show some genuine moral leadership by demanding of the Federal Government that the money be used to employ professional and qualified counsellors.

Find other ways of raising money for your church. Put simply, show some courage and some compassion."

I might go out on a limb here and offer this thought. If Jesus dropped into Australia today, I'm pretty certain he would applaud the banking Royal Commission (he was never keen on money lenders) and cast out the school chaplains.

After all, he could spot a "den of thieves" from a long way off.'

SPE

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTION ORIGINS AND FUTURE

Luke Beck



Religious Freedom and the Australian Constitution Origins and Future

Luke Beck

This book examines the origins of Australia's constitutional religious freedom provision. It explores the political activities and motives of religious leaders seeking to give the *Australian Constitution* a religious character and the political activities and motives of a religious minority seeking to prevent it having a religious character. It also examines Section 116, dealing with separation of religion and government, and argues that until now scholars and courts have misunderstood it. The book shows how the origins of the provision lead to Section 116 being conceptualised as a safeguard against religious intolerance on the part of the Commonwealth.

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RELIGION AND REPUBLICANISM IN AUSTRALIA

Preliminary report of the results of an IPSOS survey undertaken on behalf of The Rationalist Assn of NSW December 2017.

SURVEY QUESTION:

THINKING ABOUT A REFERENDUM TO CHANGE THE CONSTITUTION. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS DO YOU AGREE WITH?

- 1) I AGREE AUSTRALIA SHOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC WITH AN AUSTRALIAN HEAD OF STATE *AND* A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT TO SEPARATE GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION.
- 2) I DO *NOT* AGREE AUSTRALIA SHOULD BECOME A REPUBLIC WITH AN AUSTRALIAN HEAD OF STATE *BUT* THERE SHOULD BE AN AMENDMENT TO SEPARATE GOVERNMENT AND RELIGION.
- 3) LEAVE IT AS IT IS.
- 4) DON'T KNOW.

Thirty seven per cent of Australians agreed with the first statement; fifteen per cent agreed with the second statement. A narrow national majority, irrespective of whether Australia should become a republic, therefore agreed with an amendment to separate government and religion in the constitution. 37 per cent supported that amendment as part of a republic, 15 per cent supported it as a stand-alone amendment.

The breakdown of the support for an amendment to the constitution to separate government and religion, by state and territory, was:

NSW 56.5%; ACT 56%; WA 55%; TAS 55%; NT 53%; SA 50.5%; VIC 50%; QLD 44%

For a referendum to pass in Australia there has to be a national majority of all states and territories in favour, and majorities in four of the six states. The results above show a national majority, three states in favour, and two states, SA 50.5% and Victoria 50%, borderline in favour.

Hypothetically, with the ongoing decline of religious belief in Australia (in the 2016 census 60 per cent were religious of which 52 per cent were Christian/30 per cent no religion) it is likely that a referendum question to separate government and religion would pass, if it were asked, sometime in the future.

A more detailed analysis of this survey will be published later.

FORMER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' PRESENTATION

On 27 April 2018, former members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Lara Kaput and Steven



Steven Unthank

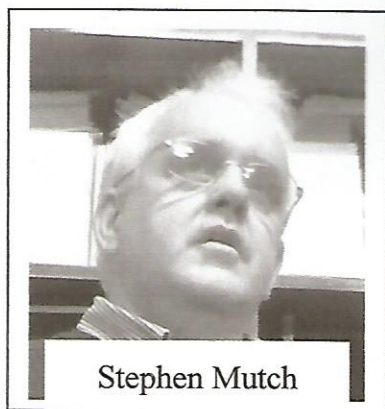
Unthank, gave a presentation at Humanist House in Sydney. It concerned their activism directed at bringing legal action against the JWs, especially

following the results of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The room was packed and an afternoon of good discussion and useful exchanges flowed into the evening. Following on from that initial meeting, Lara and Steven met with our colleagues in Melbourne and received the same friendly reception. There will be a

protest in London, UK, 11, 12, 18, 19 August outside the JW headquarters.

STEPHEN MUTCH PRESENTATION

On 3 June 2018, former member of the federal parliament and NSW Legislative Council, and later



an academic at Macquarie University, Stephen Mutch, gave a presentation entitled 'Cults and public policy: protecting the rights of victims of cultic abuse in

Australia' Again,

the presentation was well attended and a useful Q & A session followed the presentation. Stephen's paper will be published as the first in a series of Occasional Papers produced by our association. They will be mailed out to members and our wider mailing list.

PROTESTERS BANNED FROM OUTSIDE ABORTION CLINICS

If atheists were to congregate outside churches or schools and harass, intimidate, beset, threaten, hinder, obstruct or impede people's access, would they be simply indulging in 'free speech'? Would conservative politician protect their precious right to freedom of speech? Or would they claim they were being persecuted?

Just before midnight, Thursday 7th June, NSW Parliament passed a law to ban protesters from congregating outside abortion clinics. A 'terrific day for women in New South Wales' according to Legislative Council Labor member MP Penny Sharpe, one of the driving forces behind the Bill.

The Bill provides that protesters who intimidate, harass or film people within 150 metres of clinics or hospitals that provide terminations will face punishments including jail time.

Ms Leslie Williams, in her second reading speech said of women attending a reproductive health clinic *Nobody will intimidate them or harass*

them as they walk towards the entrance likely distressed and fragile, nobody will force them to look at photos of dismembered fetuses, nobody will push leaflets of lies at them and nobody will shout 'baby murderer' at them.

The Bill passed with overwhelming support: 61 votes to 18. Premier Gladys Berejiklian and deputy premier John Barilaro were among its supporters.

But Minister for Women, Tanya Davies, and former Minister for Women and now Minister for Community Services Pru Goward were among those who voted against it!!

Ms Davies claimed of pro-life demonstrators *They don't force their views onto these women, they are offering simply another choice to these women — yet this Bill will criminalise that offer.*

Ms Goward said she was a *strong supporter* of a woman's right to an abortion, but she is a *strong and visceral believer in the right to free speech*. She said censorship 'often begins gently and sensitively'.

However, Labor member Jenny Aitchison described protesters' actions as 'appalling': *We need to call it out for what it is... we are not acting to curtail free speech or political communication. We are not stopping people from praying or holding their faith and we are not imposing overly harsh penalties on people who do not want to harm others.'*

It is noted that Labor Party members were obliged to vote in favour of the Bill. Four of the 'no' votes came from women. Those who voted against the Bill were

Liberal Party: Mr S Ayres, Mr K Conolly, Mr M Coure, Mr A Crouch, Mrs T Davies, Mr D Elliott, Ms P Goward, Mr A Henskens, Mr J O'Dea, Mr D Perrottet, Ms E Petinos, Mr A. Roberts, Mr R Stokes, Mr M Taylor, Mr D Tudehope, Ms G Upton (attorney-general), Mr R Williams.

National Party: Mr T Grant (Minister for Police).

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next committee meeting will be on 27 July 2018 at Humanist House, 10 Shepherd St, Chippendale, at 3pm. Time is set aside for any non-committee members who wish to attend and raise matters. The Annual General Meeting will be on a date to be decided in September this year.

The Last Word

ANGELICA DIVINE



Well, it has been a tumultuous and revealing few months in my role as Cory Bernardi's personal assistant, but not in the ways I expected.

I was so looking forward to the visit of the bishops. An appointment had been made for them to see Cory to discuss how western civilization can be saved with God's help.

When they arrived, I told the bishops that God had contacted me while I was praying in church to tell me that Jesus is saving sinners on other planets, *that* was the reason for the long delay in his return, *and* that I had written to the Pope to pass on this important information. They were, to my complete surprise, stony-faced.

As they entered Cory's office, a row soon erupted. They were very critical of me, saying it was improper of me to write to the Holy Father with outlandish claims. They said they had seen this kind of problem before, of people having 'too much religion.' They said Cory should refer me to the Church's psychiatrist who handled these cases.

I was shocked. To his credit, Cory stood up for me. He said that while he agreed with the bishops that there could never be too many Catholics, he did not agree that someone could have 'too much religion'. He stood by me, and they left in a huff.

But I was shattered. It is not every day that Catholic bishops say you're crazy. When I got home later, I went straight to my emergency bottle of Cointreau. I was so distressed I finished the bottle.

I fell on the bed in a swoon and then it all happened.

Mary McKillop appeared to me again in a dream. I explained to her the day's events and she said this was par for the course. Something similar had happened to her. She explained that in the process of becoming a Saint you have to be outside the square.

In her case, she revealed kiddy-fiddling, which, in the 19thC, was a big no-no. Another case was St Francis of Assisi. His back to nature poverty stuff embarrassed the hierarchy in Rome, so they made

him a Saint. So, I was on the right track, and I should hang in there.

But what she said next was stunning. She said that St Francis is still out of his tree in Heaven. God has his security unit, Angel Watch, keeping an eye on him, as he constantly tries to do something disgusting to Jesus' pet donkey, which apparently ascended with Jesus to Heaven.

Also revealing was that God has a mole in Hell, a notorious paedophile pope from the fifth century. As a pope he has a back channel to God as all popes do (the infallibility principle). He has cut a deal with God who says he can return to Heaven after a 10,000 year penance in Hell, but he must keep God informed as to what is going on down there.

The big news was the arrival of former Scientology leader, L. Ron Hubbard. Satan threw a massive reception for him. In front of the Top Table, before the assembled throng, Satan praised Hubbard saying that he had devised the greatest satire on religion of all time.

As he detailed Hubbard's 'accomplishments', such as the 'auditing' with the 'E-Meter', floating around oceans in his own 'navy', bankrupting converts who had to pay for the 'religion', Satan couldn't stop laughing.

As he went on, everyone was laughing. The audience roared when Satan said to Hubbard 'and they send you down here for me to punish you! Why would I do that? You're one of us!'

He invited Hubbard to the Top Table. Then other Top Table members, Attila the Hun, Genghis Khan, Caligula, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Chairman Mao, Pol Pot, Augusto Pinochet, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, Ayotalla Khomeini, with Hubbard and Satan, all had a group hug.

I woke up in a deep sweat. Apparently, all that bad press about Hell has not been revised since the Middle Ages. I was taken aback. Not that it sounds like my kind of scene.

Mary McKillop said that they play 500-year Scrabble tournaments in Heaven to help pass the time. That is not what I was expecting either, but the alternative is unspeakable. Prayers are off until I regroup.

