



Rationalist Association of NSW Inc.

NEW LIBERATOR

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“For the great majority of Australians secularism isn’t this key motivating moment in their life, but it’s one of their core values. How do you motivate that majority so that their political will is expressed? This is because at the moment we’re seeing a highly motivated [religious] minority skewing the politics for the great majority. That’s the challenge, I’ve got to say, for the National Secular Lobby: how to get the values and the wishes of a majority who live and breathe a secular life, how to make sure their wishes are properly reflected in politics.”

David Shoebridge MLC, *National Secular Lobby Press Conference 29 April 2019*
Parliament of NSW.

Defend the Secular State

“Thomas Jefferson argued in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom of 1786 that ‘no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever ...’

Freedom from compulsion is the ‘religious’ freedom essential to public and private life in a modern democracy. It requires an unequivocal statement of the secular nature of our nation-state, and needs to be followed by some appropriate policies.

The first of these would surely be the repeal of any tax exemptions and other secular privileges for religious organisations, followed by the withdrawal of all public funding from private religious schools.

Instead, what we are likely to get from this authoritarian regime is a regressive protection of Christian religious privileges and prejudices preceded by a completely unnecessary debate in lieu of the myriad policy debates we should be having.”

Adrian D’Ambra
Letter, *The Age*, 4 June 2019.



Rationalist Association of NSW Inc.
www.nswrationalists.com

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PO Box R684 Royal Exchange NSW 1225

Email: nswrationalists@gmail.com

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.

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Ron Williams:

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Changes to chaplaincy in ACT and Victorian public schools.....	2
<i>Rob Boston</i> US Supreme Court case serious threat to church-state separation.....	3
<i>Rodney Croome</i> Privileging prejudice: the threat and opportunity posed by the movement for 'religious freedom'.....	3
<i>Brian Morris</i> 'Religious freedom' not a debate at all.....	7
<i>Pierre Louys</i> How to maintain rationality.....	9
<i>David Rand</i> Anti-Islamism: from Quebec to Christchurch.....	11
To and fro in Samoa.....	13
<i>Rosie Williams</i> The hidden wealth of basic religious charities.....	14
<i>Angelica Divine</i> The Last Word.....	15

CHANGES TO CHAPLAINCY IN ACT AND VICTORIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

No more Chaplains in ACT Public Schools

The Australian Capital Territory's Education Minister, Yvette Berry, said on Friday there would be "no more chaplains in ACT government schools" after a decision to end the National School Chaplaincy Program in public schools after 2019. Currently, the Territory's schools can voluntarily opt into the federal program, which provides up to \$20,000 in funding for chaplains.

However, under the Coalition Government the workers must have a religious affiliation.

Ms Berry said the ACT education act mandated that the territory's public education sector was secular: "All we are doing is taking the religion out of it", she said. Chaplains currently employed in about 20 ACT schools will be allowed to stay on but they will have no authority to teach religion.

"They're employed to continue to do that youth work and social work, which is important," Ms Berry said. "But that is conducted in non-religious way." Ms Berry said religious workers were "incompatible with the Education Act".

The decision comes after the ACT government wrote to the federal government requesting the chaplaincy funding be extended to secular workers. That request was denied. Non-government schools can continue to participate in the national program.

ABC NEWS 23 February 2019.

Secular 'chaplain' in Victoria wins discrimination challenge

The Rationalist Society of Australia has been running a 'Chaplaincy Challenge' in Victoria, to expose and finally end the overtly discriminatory nature of the National School Chaplaincy Program. The case has settled.

In the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal challenge, Juliette Armstrong argued that the government and ACCESS Ministries discriminated against her because of her lack of religion.

Now, as part of a settlement at VCAT, the Victorian Government has agreed 'chaplains' don't have to be religious. The government will change the job description to make it clear suitably qualified but non-religious people can be hired. While this change may not be difficult for the government, the new job description will be a headache for the religious agencies, like ACCESS Ministries. They will have to comply with the government's new job description and if they don't, they'll risk more litigation.

Defence of Government Schools Media Release
28 March 2019.

SUPREME COURT ACCEPTS A CASE THAT COULD UNDERMINE CHURCH-STATE SEPARATION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Rob Boston

The U.S. Supreme Court this morning announced that it will hear a case from Montana that could have potentially devastating consequences for separation of church and state.

The case, *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, concerns a state [tuition tax credit program](#) that allows taxpayers to donate to organizations that grant 'scholarships' for students attending private schools, the majority of which are religious in Montana. Donors would then receive full credit on their tax bills. It's a voucher-like plan that's designed to funnel public money to private schools.

Montana's Supreme Court struck the program down late in 2018, holding that it violated Article X, Section 6 of the Montana Constitution. That provision bars "any direct or indirect appropriation or payment from any public fund or monies ... for

any sectarian purpose or to aid any ... school ... controlled in whole or in part by any church, sect, or denomination."

Americans United had filed a legal brief in the case opposing the tax credit scheme. In [a press statement](#) about the Montana high court ruling, AU President and CEO Rachel Laser said, "Montana taxpayers should never be forced to fund religious education – that's a fundamental violation of religious freedom. The Montana Supreme Court's decision protects both church-state separation and public education. It's a double win."

The fight over vouchers is playing out in state courts these days because the U.S. Supreme Court [ruled in 2002](#) that states may establish voucher plans under certain conditions, asserting that such plans don't violate the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. But many state constitutions have church-state language that is much more explicit and flatly bars the diversion of tax money to religious schools. Americans United and its allies have used those provisions to invalidate voucher plans in several states.

An adverse ruling in the *Espinoza* case could undermine those provisions – or even wipe them out entirely. Inevitably, that would open the floodgates to lots more taxpayer money flowing to religious schools. That's bound to place funding for our public schools in jeopardy.

In short, the fate of public education and church-state separation may hang in the balance in this case. Americans United is going to do all it can to protect both.

From: Americans United For Separation of Church and State

PRIVILEGING PREJUDICE: THE THREAT AND OPPORTUNITY POSED BY THE MOVEMENT FOR 'RELIGIOUS FREEDOM'

Rodney Croome

I'm old enough to remember when Australians who didn't like LGBTI people were honest enough to say so. I recall it like it was yesterday, then Tasmanian Premier, Robin Gray, declaring homosexuals were not welcome in the state. That comment in 1988 helped galvanise me and other LGBTI Tasmanians into a movement that finally rid Tasmania and the nation of criminal laws against homosexuality.

Thirty years on, in this post-marriage equality Australia, it is no longer respectable to be so overtly homophobic. Instead, anti-LGBTI prejudice has found euphemisms to hide behind like 'religious freedom', 'freedom of speech', 'freedom of conscience' and 'parental rights'.

Should you need these euphemisms translated here's a handy glossary:

'Religious freedom' means punching holes in discrimination law so LGBTI people can be legally denied services in the name of religion.

'Freedom of speech' means overriding hate speech laws so LGBTI people can be denigrated if a deity can be invoked to justify it.

'Freedom of conscience' means discrimination and hate speech against LGBTI people even if you don't believe in God.

'Parental rights' means two things: preventing governments from funding programs that promote inclusion for LGBTI students, and, blocking laws that allow transgender teenagers to have their gender identity recognised.

How religious freedom came to mean legal privilege for anti-gay prejudice

This is a far cry from the original, noble meaning of religious freedom.

In the traditional Enlightenment sense 'religious freedom' meant not being disadvantaged because of one's faith: Think of how Catholics or Jews were once excluded from particular professions or clubs but are no longer. Now 'religious freedom' has come to mean the opposite; the legal right to disadvantage LGBTI people in the name of religion.

Under this new twisted definition of 'religious freedom', the license to discriminate is only available to people who have a religious or conscientious objection to the requirements of anti-discrimination law. The rest of us still have to abide by that law.

There are often no objective tests for what a religious objection might be. The basis for claiming an exemption from anti-discrimination law is defined by the person claiming it, not the state or society and sometimes not even established denominations.

In almost every case, the act of discrimination, the refusal of services, the hate speech, or whatever sin is committed in the name of 'religious freedom', is directed against LGBTI people.

There are some exceptions. In the US, 'religious freedom' has been used to justify denying women termination services; in some states there is a debate about whether religious freedom laws allow discrimination against interracial couples.

But nowhere has a special claim for 'religious freedom' been made by people advocating for refugees, defending the poor, or in any way helping others.

To all intents and purposes, 'religious freedom' is not about religion or freedom. It is about giving special legal privileges to prejudice. The term mocks all those defenders of genuine freedom who believe in democracy rather than theocracy. It particularly mocks those people of faith for whom religion means love for others, not power over them.

Background

The new 'religious freedom' movement arose in the US as a backlash to marriage equality.

Some commentators have compared this new movement to America's former Jim Crow laws, not because anti-gay discrimination is as serious as racism, but because the legal cornerstone of both the racial segregation movement and the new religious freedom movement is the legalised refusal of commercial and government services to members of a stigmatised minority.

The other key parallel is a persecution narrative which makes out the dominant group, be it white people or people of faith, to be innocent victims of an aggressive minority determined to turn the tables on them with the full backing of the state.

This persecution narrative has deep roots in Christianity. The idea that persecution results from, and testifies to, religious rectitude goes back to the time of the Gospels. Scholars like Candida Moss have shown how anti-Christian persecution was greatly exaggerated by ancient Christian writers to bind Christian communities together.

Like the ancient persecution narrative, the contemporary version requires heroes and martyrs. Hence the celebrity status of people like Kim Davis, a Kentucky county clerk who was taken to

court after she invoked religion to justify her refusal to do her job of registering same-sex marriages, and Jack Phillips, a Colorado baker who was subject to an anti-discrimination complaint that was appealed all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court when he refused to serve a same-sex couple.

The ‘religious freedom’ movement establishes itself in Australia

In Australia, the religious freedom movement has been very successful in establishing the same narrative. During the marriage equality postal survey to decide whether there should be gay marriage in Australia, the No campaign was almost entirely about threats to religious freedom, freedom of speech and parental rights.

With the help of sections of the media, the No campaign made Tasmanian Catholic Archbishop, Julian Porteous, a supposed innocent victim of a hate speech complaint. This followed a Anti-Discrimination Commission ruling that there was substance to the complaint about what the Archbishop had said. Much was made of this supposed injury to religious rights despite the Archbishop having to do no more than attend a conciliation session, which he did not have to do, as the complaint was dropped.

The No campaign relentlessly attacked Safe Schools for promoting ‘gender fluidity’ despite clear evidence young transgender people are some of the most vulnerable members of the community, and despite the Safe Schools program improving educational outcomes.

The No campaign relentlessly pushed for ‘religious freedom’ protections in marriage equality legislation allowing same-sex couples to be discriminated against and refused services. This push that was partly successful when parliament agreed to allow civil celebrants with religious beliefs, and commercial services with links to a faith, to refuse services to same-sex couples.

At the time, it was assumed the No case’s postal survey strategy of focusing on religious freedom was about diverting attention from the main issue, which they singularly failed to do.

But if, as it now seems, their main goal was to set up a new religious freedom narrative to roll back LGBTI rights after marriage equality was

achieved. Seen in that way, the postal survey could be seen as a pretext for their homophobic agenda. However, a setback for the ‘religious freedom’ movement came with last year’s release of the report of the religious freedom Inquiry set up by then prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, after the postal survey, to be chaired by former Liberal minister, Philip Ruddock.

The Inquiry found there is no actual threat to religious freedom in Australia. By highlighting existing anti-discrimination exemptions for faith-linked organisations, the Ruddock report also sparked a push to remove exemptions in national discrimination law that allow faith-linked schools to expel LGBTI students and sack LGBTI teachers.

Outrage at such exemptions should come as no surprise. Successive polls, including one by YouGov in May last year, have shown around 80% of Australians oppose exemptions allowing LGBTI students and teachers to be discriminated against by faith-based schools.

But the strategy of the religious freedom movement, and the broader religious right, is no longer to win over the majority of Australians. It has retreated from its former claim to represent ‘the silent majority’ and now focusses on ‘the silenced minority’.

The ‘religious freedom election’ and a Religious Freedom Act

The recent election was an excellent example of this re-positioning.

The religious right claims the Coalition was re-elected and Labor defeated by a small but critical voter bloc that avidly supports religious freedom, and was later stirred up all the more by sanctions against Israel Folau for comparing homosexuals to liars, thieves and other wrongdoers bound for Hell.

That voter bloc is said to exist chiefly in western Sydney and regional Queensland, areas that voted No in the postal survey. But the argument for 2019 being a ‘religious freedom’ election is pretty weak.

The three to five per cent swings against Labor in those areas were not much different to swings in areas that voted Yes in the postal survey. In Yes-voting seats that swung from Labor to the Coalition, like those in northern Tasmania, there is no evidence that religious freedom or LGBTI

equality had any impact at all.

On top of that, Senate candidates who were the face of the No campaign, like Lyle Shelton and Sophie York, received miniscule personal votes. Prior to the election, the ABC's Vote Compass found only one per cent of voters rated religious freedom as their number one issue, a figure the election result seems to confirm.

Despite the lack of evidence for a significant religious freedom constituency, the leaders of both major parties seem to have accepted the political myth that it exists, laying the foundation for legislation to protect 'religious freedom'.

Attorney-General, Christian Porter, says he will introduce legislation as early as July.

Porter's bill might simply prevent discrimination on the grounds of religion. This type of law already exists in most states and should be enacted nationally. But there's also a strong possibility Porter's bill will go further, entrenching an unfettered right to religious freedom.

This is what religious freedom warriors have spent years campaigning for. It will potentially override state laws that protect LGBTI people from discrimination and vilification. It will be a stepping stone to the High Court for all those zealots who want the Bible to again be a cornerstone of Australian public policy.

Tasmania has most to lose

This is where it gets close to home for me.

Remember what I said about Robin Gray and the movement to decriminalise homosexuality in Tasmania? Since then, Tasmania has adopted the most progressive LGBTI human rights laws in the nation and the world.

Alone in Australia, our Anti-Discrimination Act prevents discrimination against LGBTI people by faith-based organisations including faith-based schools, hospitals and charities. Alone in Australia, our Anti-Discrimination Act prevents hate speech even when it is perpetrated in the name of religion.

We have Australia's strongest laws officially recognising the gender identity of transgender and gender diverse people and protecting them from discrimination and hate speech. Several times the religious right has tried and failed to have these laws watered down by the state parliament. Now it

is pinning its hopes on federal legislation.

Just as the federal government and High Court helped overturn Tasmania's anti-gay laws in the 90s, the 'religious freedom' movement wants Canberra to now step in and overturn the progressive laws Tasmania adopted in the wake of decriminalising homosexuality. Indeed, some advocates for religious freedom have explicitly drawn that parallel.

In a 'Freedom For Faith' submission to the Ruddock review, Professor Patrick Parkinson cites the Keating Government's 1994 sexual privacy law, that was specifically designed to overturn Tasmania's anti-gay laws, as a precedent for a religious freedom law.

I imagine the irony that a quarter of a century later a religious freedom law might now bring LGBTI equality states like Tasmania to heel was not lost on Professor Parkinson or his colleagues. All the states will be losers if a positive, unqualified right to religious freedom is enacted because it will potentially cap their capacity to protect their citizens from discrimination.

But Tasmania has most to lose. Have no doubt that after working hard for three decades to turn Tasmania around, my colleagues and I will not let the Island's landmark LGBTI human rights laws be dismantled by Canberra.

Turning the threat of the 'religious freedom' movement into opportunity for real change

To stop the 'religious freedom' movement steam rolling LGBTI human rights, supporters of LGBTI equality must do two things.

The first is to call out the religious freedom movement for what it really is, one of the 21st century's greatest threats to an inclusive, plural, equal and free society. I was deeply disappointed that the postal survey Yes campaign opted not to challenge the 'religious freedom' narrative during the postal survey. With the resources available to it, the Yes campaign could have alerted Australia to the dangers this movement poses without denting support for marriage equality.

I have been equally disappointed that Labor, the Greens, the Human Rights Commission and the Yes campaign's successor, Equality Australia, continue to talk about 'striking a balance' between 'religious freedom' and LGBTI equality as if it's

possible to reason with a hungry crocodile.

It's time for all supporters of the LGBTI community and of human rights to abandon the pretence that the 'religious freedom' movement is making a genuine claim on justice, and instead campaign against it. But such a campaign must be for something good, not just against something bad.

The second thing supporters of LGBTI equality must do is turn the challenge of the 'religious freedom' movement into an opportunity for transformative legal and social change.

The threat the 'religious freedom' movement poses to Australia's anti-discrimination laws provides an opportunity for those of us who believe in such laws to again explain to the nation why they are important. We should be telling the stories of those people whose lives have been improved by anti-discrimination laws.

We should be talking about how such laws have created a more inclusive and compassionate Australia, freer of prejudice and hate than it was before we enacted anti-discrimination statutes. We should develop a narrative in support of anti-discrimination law that is more compelling than the narrative that seeks to pull it down.

In the fertile soil of a new anti-discrimination and pro-equality narrative we should nurture a new movement to improve our anti-discrimination laws even further. Most of all, we should make the case that it is a backwards step to enshrine one right and protect one group, at the expense of others.

We should match the religious right's call for protection of 'religious freedom' with even louder calls for a national charter of rights. We should call the religious freedom movement's bluff. They say they want rights protected. Fine, but let's do it properly.

We should use this small and nasty rights debate as a platform to launch a fuller and more generous debate about genuine human rights and freedoms for all Australians, and why they matter. This is the opportunity the current 'religious freedom' challenge gives us. My hope is that, as a nation, we're up to it.

Rodney Croome is a spokesperson for Equality Tasmania and national advocacy group, just.equal. He was made a Member of the Order of

Australia in 2003 for his LGBTI advocacy.

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THE 'RELIGIOUS FREEDOM' DEBATE IS NOT A DEBATE AT ALL

The religious right are in full cry, but where are the opposing voices? The age-old taboo of not questioning religion has been reasserted.

Brian Morris

Tim Wilson is now the Liberal member for Goldstein, but when he was appointed human rights commissioner in 2014 he launched a program that now seems out of control. There was considerable doubt about why Wilson pushed so hard for his [religious freedom roundtable](#) — primarily for church leaders. It was founded on dubious evidence, and his motivation remains unclear.

Since then, 'freedom of religion' has morphed into a mantra across all media — and, more recently, has become weaponised by militant Christians. One clear example is the Israel Folau imbroglio that now seems [destined for the High Court](#). Some even suggest there's an interesting confluence of events.

At face value, 'religious freedom' is a mere motherhood statement — an innocuous cliché that no one cares to malign. But the temperature has risen markedly since same-sex marriage was legalised. That led to Philip Ruddock's religious freedom review which incited more frequent rants by angry Christians who demanded [even greater sacred privileges](#) — and was further inflamed by [Folau's sacking](#).

With the Coalition's re-election — and bolstered by Scott Morrison's much vaunted [Pentecostal credentials](#) — the religious right are in full cry. Of course, it remains to be seen what Morrison's signature legislation — a [religious discrimination act](#) — will actually deliver. But the PM has made it clear he is on a [crusade](#) for more protection of Christians, to codify exemptions, and push the LNP agenda of more religion in schools.

What's missing here

Alarmingly, an opposing voice is the crucial element that's missing from this one-sided

campaign for religious freedom. Media outlets are mute and seem oblivious to the [78% of citizens](#) who have stated — in a 2016 Ipsos poll — that they want “religion to be removed from the business of government”. Where — during the five years of ramping up this religious freedom mantra — have we heard clear and articulate atheist voices calling into question the excesses of Christian doctrine?

Mainstream print and digital media are indeed culpable. They seem to be phased into acquiescence when Christians [claim](#) “[persecution](#)” by imaginary detractors from the left. The age-old taboo of not questioning religion has been reasserted. There seems to be a predominant view that “being more tolerant of religion” means avoiding even the most basic questions of current Christian motives.

There are very, very few outlets where an *identifiable* atheist or secular voice has been consistently heard — whether through radio, TV or print. The media know who all the pro-secular groups are, but never call. Media releases are ignored, and worryingly, journalists unsubscribe from circulation lists.

Why is that? Do we now have a media problem — similar to that of religiously influenced parliamentarians? Do newspaper editors — or radio and TV producers and presenters — feel it is much safer simply to avoid a possible backlash from Christian militants in their audience?

Why it matters

No one is trying to take away the personal and private faith of those who remain religious — but there is a serious problem here. With arcane dogma, religion holds political sway to block a raft of social issues including abortion and assisted dying, and religious groups push for legalised discrimination and tax breaks that are beyond all reason.

Religious schools can freely discriminate against teachers and staff who are divorced, de facto or gay. Alone, Catholic education run [1750 schools with more than 96,000 teachers and staff](#) — all of whom must subscribe to the school’s faith and ethos. Since when are there such disciplines as Catholic maths, science or technology? Why are secular teachers denied employment, on the basis of religious ethos?

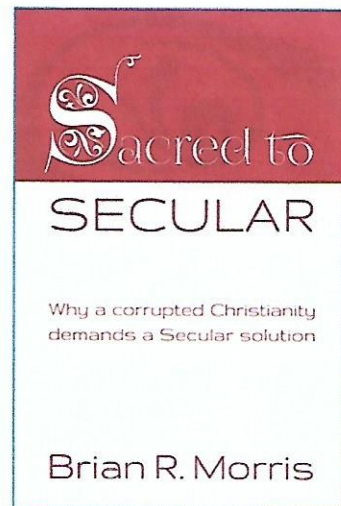
Why are we still teaching kids they’re ‘sinners’, only redeemed by Jesus Christ? Growing up to believe all life’s answers are in one book is divisive. It breeds intractable views that place faith over facts, denies science, and inhibits social progress.

Religion has been given far too much latitude by politicians and media executives too — many of whom are devoutly religious or influenced by their religious education. It is this grounding in faith that perpetuates the centuries-old taboo not to question religion — to maintain a tradition that seeks to malign and condemn those who challenge these fabricated ‘biblical truths’.

In this era of fake news and political spin it is increasingly relevant to examine all religious doctrines that mislead and harm so many, and which continue to divide societies. Where, one may ask, are the clear secular voices to temper these religious excesses? We need rationalists to convey evidence from academics, scientists and historians and atheists to publicly debate and question the foundational myths of Christianity.

This is an urgent call — in a supposedly enlightened era — for equal media access to articulate the case of freedom *from* religion.

Brian Morris is director of the National Secular Lobby.



HOW TO MAINTAIN RATIONALITY

Pierre Louys

The Rationality Challenge

The context of this essay is made of a variety of personal experiences and observations.

Most of us are dismayed by our fellow citizens increasingly relying on bloggers, Artificial Intelligence algorithm, rogue scholars, dubious lawyers, popular politicians, fake-news journalists, and TV commentators to 'know' things.

How can we maintain our rationality when the old bearings (institutions) upon which we relied for centuries are now ranked with sophists and liars?

Being rational is not a sterile philosophical hobby or an escape from reality. It is a process which provides a basis for continuous dialogue and action among the 'reasonable'. Being rational is to think and eventually behave in our social context in harmony with reason. Reason then links to consciousness, ethics and action.

Being rational is a conscious effort to use critical thinking as the tool for modelling a personal and social identity of which we can be proud of.

According to the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas, rational behaviour may be 'visible' in three interrelated dimensions: 1) the epistemic dimension (related to the control of the thoughts), 2) the teleological dimension (related to the conscious choice of 'tools' to achieve the goal of an activity or action), and 3) the communicative dimension (related to the conscious choice of suitable means of communication within a given community).

In our ancestral and holistic society reason was forged by tribal culture and direct contact with the harsh reality of surviving in the wilderness and regular tribal wars. Maintaining rationality and demonstrating rational behaviour to the community back then was, for an individual, not only a matter of choosing life over death (by immediate action in the presence of danger) but also actively engaging in a process of 'thinking and becoming' by navigating through the tribal *code of conduct* and performing necessary rituals in order to fully own his/her station in the static cosmic order.

Our beliefs justify our actions and give meaning to

our existence and shape our social identity. In turn, our identity acts as a 'filter' to the constant flow of information coming 'in' through our senses and performs as an algorithm for the transfer of mental power to physical expressions going 'out' to the environment.

It seems that a strong comparison can be established between the identity-rationality coupling and the chicken-egg proposition.

The evolution of identity

The primitive anthropos' personal identity was fixed within the specific holistic society in which he or she lived. It was often a combination of name, age-group, totem, gender and father/mother line linked to the origin of the world. Beliefs and opinions within the group were not expressions of individual identities as these were already established by myths and taboos and were immutable.

With the evolution of human societies from hunter-gatherer groups, individual identities were not only rendered more complicated – as a diversity of cosmogonies, history, rituals and languages were merged and transformed – but also became subjective, since the King's identity, say in Egypt, at the top of the social order, was a cosmic singularity, whilst the slave's remained a social class attribute and a practical political 'tool' in the hand of the powerful for the sake of law and order.

For those less endowed by birth and on the social boundary between the dispensable (slave) and the useful (merchant), identity was mostly derived from their function or trade, however that had to be adjusted to respond to the daily challenges (surviving) and the religious, cultural and political demands made by the wealthy and privileged classes above them. Having a 'fluid' identity under these circumstances meant having the ability to change one's view about the gods, your masters, and the value of human life. By opting for a 'fluid' identity some individuals not only constructed a resilient self (body and soul), drawing from resources around them for physical strength, but also maintain their mental stability by setting personal goals beyond the visible world.

Such is the case of a man named *Kong Qiu* who was born in northeastern China in 551 BC. It was a time when China was being sliced into feudal states by the warlord who raised armies, waged battles, oppressed slave labourers and heavily

taxed subjects. Confucius as he is known to us, was self-educated and raised in a poor family in the state of Lu.

Confucius trained his students to become conscious moral agents or 'gentlemen', who sincerely upheld *the Way*.

What we see with Confucius and his students is rational behaviour, 'visible' in three dimensions described by Habermas. The control of the thoughts by ethics, the conscious choice of 'tools' (compassion and insight) to achieve the objectives of an activity or action, and the communicative dimension (learning and teaching).

We are taught from a young age that we must know who we are. We are also told to make a reasonable decision about who we want to be. Once we have constructed such identity *pathway* we are expected to maintain it. Any deviation from our 'given' identity can be perceived by family, friends, colleagues as unstable mental state or irrational behaviour.

But is this psychology suitable to our dangerous times?

On the one hand, this is a society based on conformity to rules and moral codes, similar to the primitive social structures, a society where 'might is right' and where inequality amongst citizens is the root-cause of the so-called radicalisation of terrorists. A society where we see ordinary people performing extraordinary acts of altruism, including kindness toward other species, or rogue individuals who utterly fail to be 'human' even toward their own children.

On the other hand, this is an evolving society, which expresses creativity, imagination and spirituality via the arts, music, poetry, philosophy and mystical experience.

One of our deepest needs – as humans – is to find and express what the philosopher Henri Bergson calls "élan vital", that vital creative spark that lies somewhere in all of us. We may see ourselves as potentially creative artists of one kind or another; if this is the main component of our identity, then we should spend more time creating beautiful images, writing our own stories, or rediscovering myths. If not, then we must follow the ancient Greeks counsel: *know thyself* and delve in the fundamental substrates of human emotions or the intricacies of welfare economics and critical

theory.

The challenge of giving up on private or egoistic interests to maintain our rationality is much bigger here and now than in Confucius' day and social environment. It would seem that the altruistic element so characteristic of the Chinese traditions is close to impossible to uphold in our multicultural liberal democracies but there is hope.

Due to 'cosmic' and personal circumstances, a large proportion of western societies citizens are from a third-world country or a former colony of the West and have been compelled to travel the world, study in universities and spend time in engaging in intercultural dialogue, interpreting concepts from one culture to another, looking beneath the surface of how things generally appear to be.

Rationality comes in various forms, like Tupperware containers. Our everyday sense of 'rationality' is in finding the most efficient means to certain specified ends, and that produces a social action that is motivated by purely pragmatic and egoistic interests.

Substantive rationality, in contrast, focuses more on ends, on how we define the goals of social action, the common good or indeed the commonwealth. Working from these two definitions it is pretty clear that Confucius was teaching substantive rationality; urging fellow humans to direct their social action in terms of certain 'clusters of values' that they believed would create good personal and social-political outcomes.

But we must combine substantive and instrumental rationality to match our complex socio-cultural environment and be active in transforming a collapsing ideology into a future for our grandchildren.

How to maintain rationality?

In a recent book, Margaret Wheatley offers some answers to this question. I quote:

This book is born of my desire to summon us to be leaders for this time as things fall apart, to reclaim leadership as a noble profession that creates possibility and humaneness in the midst of increasing fear and turmoil.

The author draws our attention first to the pattern of collapse of complex civilisations (collapse is the

sudden simplification of complexity) and then to the vital force of 'emergence' which has been discovered by scientists observing living systems. What are the values and intentions driving our collective (rational) behaviour, what comes in our process of 'thinking and becoming'?

This is again where Confucius is useful. The collapse of social structure forces most people to retreat into their tribal instinct (following the herd); however, a small band of leaders step forward acting like Confucius with compassion and insight. Someone with the identity of a 'Shambhala Warrior' as described in an ancient Tibetan prophecy or what Margaret Wheatley calls a 'Warrior for the Human Spirit'. As Philip Kitcher concludes in one of his articles on ethics:

We have inherited a complex ethical practice from those who came before us, and we take it to be authoritative except where we can find ways of improving it. Understanding where we have come from may help us to go on better, to search for new knowledge that will bear on the issues that perplex us, and, above all, to expand the range of our sympathies. For the reinforcement and extension of sympathy is, after all, where the human ethical project began, when our ancestors became, for the first time, human.

The idea conveyed by this essay is not avoiding a sense of personal identity or self-worth, but to keep it in a fluid state and not to be afraid to challenge those images of 'who' and 'what' we are. Maintaining our rationality is having the freedom to adapt to new situations and reliable information (past and present) while retaining a sense of wholeness and reaching our substantive and instrumental goals.

Pierre Louys is a member of the Rationalist Assn of NSW.

ANTI-ISLAMISM: FROM QUEBEC TO CHRISTCHURCH

David Rand

We are still reeling from the shock of that horrible terrorist attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, on Friday March 15th, which resulted in 51 deaths and a similar number of wounded. Although the mourning period is far from over, it is crucial that we do some serious thinking about how to prevent such attacks in future.

Similarities with the mosque massacre in Quebec City on January 29th 2017 have been raised. Apart from the fact that the number of victims is much higher, there are nevertheless important differences.

The Christchurch killer obviously had ideological motives. I have not had the occasion to read his long manifesto, but apparently, he expresses a desire for revenge for Islamist attacks as well as a pronounced racism of the white supremacist variety.

Two observations immediately spring to mind. Firstly, he foolishly classes all Muslims together, associating them all with the most violent and extremist fringe. Secondly, he considers the category 'Muslim' to be distinct from so-called 'whites', as if religious affiliation were a race. Where could he have gotten such a ridiculous idea? Maybe from multiculturalists, i.e. communitarians, who are so gleefully ready to ally themselves with religions and so ferociously defend religious privileges.

But the Quebec City killer, on the other hand, did not have racist motives and was driven mainly by fear. He was not motivated by white supremacism, regardless of the specious allegations made by certain 'leftists' who racialize everything and see racism everywhere. The perpetrator was a young man, psychologically unstable, who had been the target of bullying throughout his short life and who feared Islamist terrorism.

Having made those distinctions, the two attacks nevertheless have several aspects in common. Both killings were anti-Muslim. Both obliterated many lives and left many others wounded and traumatized. And each of the two attacks was, unfortunately but obviously, a huge gift for political Islam, a movement which is leading a tireless campaign against secularism, against Enlightenment values and against any criticism of the religion which that extreme-right movement exploits for its purposes.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the anti-Muslim nature of the attacks, this movement, supported by the complacency of communitarians, took full advantage of the situation to play the victim. If the Islamists themselves had secretly planned these two attacks, they could not have done a better job of furthering their campaign.

We saw this happening in Canada in 2017. Among

other events, motion M-103 was adopted by federal Parliament, following closely on the heels of the Quebec City attack. The purpose of motion M-103 was to stifle any criticism of Islam by condemning so-called 'Islamophobia,' whereas the real problem is anti-Muslim violence.

And we see it again today, in the aftermath of Christchurch. There is a campaign for New Zealand women to wear the hijab on Friday March 22nd; this foolish idea is extremely irresponsible, showing solidarity with *Islamism*, not with Muslims. The Islamists' strategy is the same: (1) conflate criticism of religion with violence against believers, and (2) sow confusion between race and religion, both with the intent to smear any opposition to their program.

Religious Anti-Religious Violence

The idea that criticizing the tenets of a religion could be the cause of violence towards the adherents of that religion simply does not hold water.

Criticism of Christianity is not the cause of terrorist attacks against Christians and their churches such as those which have occurred in the Middle East and in Nigeria. On the contrary, these anti-Christian actions were mainly motivated by political Islam. Criticism of Judaism is not one the major causes of anti-Jewish attacks.

On the contrary, the principal causes are instead classical anti-Semitism of the Nazi variety, largely inspired by the Christianity of Martin Luther, to which must be added the anti-Jewish dogma of Islam as well as the confusion between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, which are often conflated by some on the political left.

It is obvious that a major cause of violence against religious communities, perhaps the principal cause, is religion itself, that is, religious competition. This competition does not operate at the level of beliefs, but rather of identity; that is, it is persons of a particular religious affiliation who are targeted, not their beliefs. Right-wing Christians do not like Muslims and Jews, fundamentalist Jews dislike Muslims and Christians, Islamists are hostile to Jews and Christians—and, while we are at it, all three hate non-believers who, for their part, remain silent and do nothing.

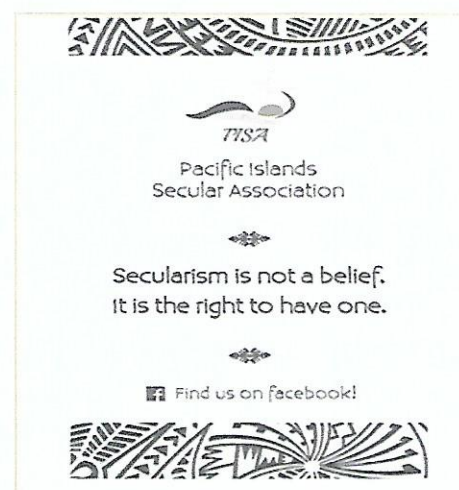
For several years now and for various reasons, most of our politicians and mainstream media have

been obsessively pushing a single, exclusive opinion with respect to Islam: anyone who dares to express the tiniest anxiety concerning that religion or who dares to suggest that there might be links between Islam and its political variant, Islamism, is immediately the target of intimidation and a flood of slanderous accusations of racism, 'Islamophobia,' intolerance, xenophobia, far-right political tendencies and a plethora of other sins.

When a people is forbidden from expressing their legitimate concerns openly, without violence, when all hope of any healthy debate of their concerns is stifled, then those anxieties will sooner or later flare up in an explosive manner with an increased risk of violence perpetrated by the more unstable or radical elements among them. It is no accident that the Quebec City killer took action during the regime of the Liberal Party of Quebec, the party which so ruthlessly opposed the Charter of Secularism by vilifying all those who supported it. This is what the charter says:

(1) proclamation of the state's neutrality in the matter of religion and other beliefs (2) inscription of the religious neutrality principle in the Quebec's Charter of Rights (3) establishment of criteria for assessing requests of religion-based derogations in government and other workplaces (4) ban of on-the-job proselytism and other forms of religious propaganda by civil servants (5) ban of on-the-job display by civil servants of ostentatious religious signs or garments (6) and ban of mask-wearing or face-covering by both civil servants and users of government's services.

David Rand is the president of Atheist Freethinkers, Montreal



TO AND FRO IN SAMOAN GOVERNMENT'S ATTEMPT TO TAX MINISTERS OF RELIGION

Background

"If ministers of religion do not want to pay tax, perhaps they should stop accepting money [from parishioners] altogether on Sundays. Then we will see whether they are in the job for the right reasons.

Congregational Christian Church ministers of religion get their food provided for them; they get their power and water bills paid; many of them get cars gifted to them by the church which many are allowed to take with them once they retire; they have houses provided for them by the church parish.

When they retire, many ministers of religion leave with huge gift payments which many Samoans can only dream of. Some of the most expensive cars in the country are owned by ministers of religion.

So why the need to accept money [from parishioners] every week?
Running up lists of property assets and trust funds for your kids is not the reason for Jesus' calling.

In fact, I would say all those earthly riches corrupt the mission of the church, with many ministers of religion picking and choosing which church they go and serve, depending on how many members are in it. The higher the number, the more money they make."

Petelo Suanui

Samoa Observer Letters 5 July 2018

Samoa Attorney-General's office takes over church prosecution

Samoa's largest church is refusing to comply with a law that requires pastors to pay income tax.

The church's general secretary, Vavatau Taufao, said none of the *faiife'au* have been punished for breaking rank and paying tax.

But Mr Taufao said they probably would be, if the church knew who they were.

"There is a committee that deals with that, but you know, ministers have been punished by stripping their ministerial role, they've been punished by

having it stripped for a couple of months and so forth."

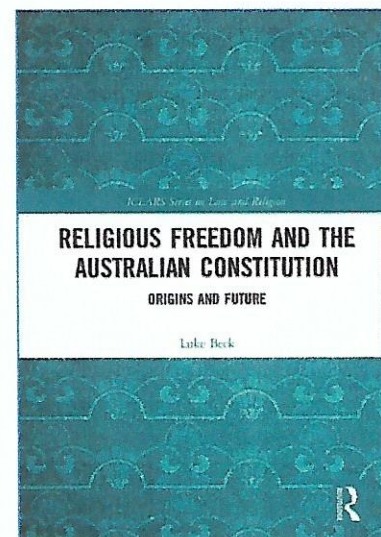
Criminal lawyers from Samoa's Attorney-General's office have taken over the prosecution of Congregational Christian Church ministers alleged to have evaded tax.

This follows the first case against an initial 20 *faiife'au* being thrown out on Thursday for a lack of evidence. Lawyers for the Ministry for Revenue had prosecuted that case and prime minister Tuila'epa Sa'ilele Malielegaoi described them as "lawyers for the lagoon". Tuila'epa said "lawyers for the deep waters" are required for the prosecution of the second group of church ministers.

The trial is scheduled for next month.

Meanwhile, the general secretary for the Congregational Christian Church has denied a claim that pastors who've paid income tax have been stripped of their duties. The Ministry for Revenue reportedly made the claim this week during the court hearing for the first 20 *faiife'au* charged with tax evasion.

Radio New Zealand 5 July 2019.



Available at
<https://www.crcpress.com/Religious-Freedom-and-the-Australian-Constitution-Origins-and-Future/Beck/p/book/9780815367260>

THE HIDDEN WEALTH OF BASIC RELIGIOUS CHARITIES

Rosie Williams

The Catholic Church is considered notoriously secretive about their finances. *The Age* reported that information sought by the [Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious organisations](#) in 2013 was never supplied to the Inquiry. So what information is available for public scrutiny and how can so much wealth be hidden from public view?

As there is [no flag](#) to divide reporting charities into their religious denominations, the closest available searches (courtesy of [AusGov.info](#)) can only total charity financial information by keyword present in their legal name. This kind of search only picks up charities (which includes [private schools, hospitals and nursing homes](#)) which have the word 'Catholic' in their name. This most basic search shows an aggregate [total assets](#) for matching charities being nearly \$8 billion dollars.

Yet the investigations carried out by [The Age](#) and reported a year ago suggest this is a vast under-estimation of the wealth of the Catholic Church. What is the point of a charity regulator if they can't answer basic questions pertinent to establishing the parameters for holding Australian charities to account?

It was under the last Labor government that the ACNC Act was introduced and Labor provided a [dissenting report](#) to the Liberal's attempt to [repeal the Act](#) following the Liberals winning government in 2013.

They moved to repeal the ACNC Act, throwing the newly established regulator into chaos. The inaugural ACNC Commissioner, Susan Pascoe, said

It was impossible to ignore the contested political backdrop. As Commissioner, I was responsible for a start-up venture that was threatened with immediate abolition should the government change. During the caretaker period in August 2013 I sought advice from the Australian Government Solicitor. The advice

was unambiguous: as a statutory office holder, I was legally required to implement the ACNC Act until Parliament repealed or modified the legislation. As an independent officer of the Parliament, not an appointee of the government of the day, I could only be removed with parliamentary approval.

A senior source with expertise in the ACNC Act believes the legislation only got through by virtue of providing the *exception* in the Act relieving Basic Religious Charities from the requirement of reporting their finances to the ACNC. Basic Religious Charities do nothing beyond 'advancing religion.' Furthermore, it is believed that it is in these Basic Religious Charities that much of the Catholic Church's wealth is concealed.

Not only would removal of the exception bring to light assets that are currently hidden from view, it would also bring church officials under ACNC governance principles. Given the significance of the governance challenges facing Australia's religious sector it is imperative that these organisations be brought under proper scrutiny and be held to account for their behaviour past, present and future.

Rosie Williams is an independent journalist.

THEY CALL IT
FAITH
BECAUSE IT ISN'T
FACT

THE LAST WORD

ANGELICA DIVINE



For all the skeptics, doubters, secularists and atheists, the federal election was a smack in the face. *It proved the power of prayer!*

I joined our colleagues in the Australian Christian Lobby in their extended campaign to have Scott Morrison elected. All of our

many weeks of praying worked – God was listening!

Sure, Satan had his moment when the ACL's Lyle Shelton's vote was quite small, and those seats in Western Sydney which voted heavily against same-sex marriage still returned a Labor member. Nevertheless, the election result was, as Scott so rightly said, a Miracle.

Of course, the parliamentary year opened with a religious service in the Catholic Cathedral at Manuka in Canberra where Scott Morrison and Anthony Albanese read a lesson.

This occurs after every federal election and it demonstrates that both sides of politics understand that whatever minor hassles our Catholic Church has been through with the Royal Commission and the ghastly situation our wonderful George Pell is in – a cell to be precise – the Catholic Church is still, in effect, a branch of government.

We tell them what we want and they give it to us.

May I ram home the point? Our judges (not the one who sentenced George obviously) attend Catholic Cathedrals at the start of the legal year for the 'Red Mass' to ask for God's blessings for their decisions in the year ahead. They are very intelligent people who understand that God created secular law and they need His approval.

On other matters, Australia needs a Religious Freedom Act not a Religious Discrimination Act! Discrimination is a knife that cuts both ways. We could find atheists and others claiming, preposterously, that their lack of belief has equal rights with religion!

That is happening right now. Because more than

half of Australia's defence forces are not religious, a humanist opportunist has a case before the Human Rights Commission arguing that he is being discriminated against because the only chaplains in the defence forces are religious.

How preposterous! After experiencing stressful events in war zones, what could be better for a wounded or psychologically affected soldier, than comforting words about how Jesus will alleviate his trauma once he gives himself to Him?

In this respect, the idea for Religious Freedom Commissioner is good. We need to appoint a considerate, reasonably-minded Catholic to stop this humanistic nonsense. If Tony Abbott is not going to the Vatican as Ambassador, this could be a perfect role for him.

Then, with Tony there, we could look towards abolishing the Commission altogether.

Finally, it is with some regret I have to announce that I will no longer be Cory Bernardi's PA. Cory is closing down The Conservatives, understandably, as all his clothes have been stolen by Scott Morrison.

The Liberal party no longer needs a reminder that it had drifted too far to the centre, even toying with old traditional liberal ideas about fairness. I have to say, I was somewhat disappointed with Cory. He certainly did not pray enough. The only prayers said in his office were mine. If you don't pray, you won't be heard, as we proved with the election.

The word has got around about this and I have been besieged with offers of employment in the offices of various government members. I even got a call from Rupert in New York, asking did I want my old job back at News Rather Ltd?

We had a chat and in typical fashion, he just talked about himself. He blubbed about his latest wife Jerry wandering around the mansion singing *I Can't Get No Satisfaction*. He asked what do women want when they have got everything? Some attention, Rupert, I replied, some attention.



**APPLICATION/RENEWAL OF MEMBERSHIP
RATIONALIST ASSN OF NSW
PO BOX R684 ROYAL EXCHANGE NSW 1225
2019-2020**

MEMBERSHIP: \$20 PER ANNUM/ \$10 CONCESSION/\$5 STUDENT

NAME:

ADDRESS.....

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POSTCODE.....

PHONE NO. AND/OR MOBILE NO.

.....

EMAIL ADDRESS:.....

I HEREBY APPLY TO BECOME A MEMBER/RENEW MY MEMBERSHIP OF
THE RATIONALIST ASSN OF NSW
AS A MEMBER, I AGREE TO BE BOUND BY THE RULES OF THE
ASSOCIATION.

SIGNATURE:

.....

DATE.....

I ELECT TO DIRECT DEPOSIT TO COMMONWEALTH BANK ACCOUNT 06
2003 0080 0555 USING MY SURNAME AS A REFERENCE

OR

I PREFER TO SEND CHEQUE/MONEY ORDER

PLEASE SCAN AND EMAIL THIS FORM BACK TO THE SECRETARY AS
BELOW **OR** POST TO THE ADDRESS ABOVE.

Members attending the AGM can renew their membership on the day.

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