

New Liberator

Journal of the Rationalist Association of NSW Inc.

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FRED'S FIJI FOLLY



In April this year, the leader of the Christian Democratic Party in the NSW parliament, the Reverend Fred Nile, sponsored a talk by Ms Mereoni Kirwin in the Legislative Council chamber of the parliament. The whole event was taped and uploaded on U-tube.

Flags of the 'breakaway' provinces of Ra and Nadroga were unfurled in the chamber as Ms Kirwin outlined to Reverend Nile her bizarre plans to set up two independent states within the Republic of Fiji in the western part of the main island of Viti Levu.

Some four months later more than 50 Fijians have been arrested by the government in Suva and charged with the crime of sedition. Ms Kirwin, who has Australian citizenship, has been banned from entering Fiji.

In the Council chamber, with some of her local

followers looking on, Ms Kirwin railed against the Fijian government that introduced a secular constitution on 6 September 2013 that formally separated church and state in Fiji. She was critical of the disproportionate influence of Muslims in the government (the Attorney-General is a Muslim) and critical of investment in Fiji from India.

Ms Kirwin said her group wanted to completely break away from 'secular' Fiji and said the newly declared 'independent' provinces of Ra and Nadroga, were 'sovereign Christian states'. She was completely opposed to the teaching of comparative religion in schools.

If the consequences for her provincial village followers who have been arrested were not so serious, this would be comical. *(Continued p.3)*

THE NEW LIBERATOR
Vol .7 No 15 Winter 2015

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The Rationalist Association of NSW defines Rationalism as: *the attitude of mind which unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason, and aims at establishing a system of philosophy and ethics independent of all arbitrary assumptions or Authority.*

The **NEW LIBERATOR** is the Journal of The Rationalist Association of New South Wales. Articles published in this journal promote discussion and understanding of cultural and political issues in Australia. It is not connected with any political party or sectarian group. Opinions expressed in **NEW LIBERATOR** are those of the authors.

Editors: Steve Maxwell, Meg Wallace

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; and
- the constitutional separation of Church and State.

We do this by: *publishing a journal; holding public lectures, debates, seminars and discussion groups; lobbying government; sale of freethought books; fostering international solidarity with other freethought groups.*

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SHORT HISTORY OF THE NEW LIBERATOR.

William John Miles was the driving force in establishing The Rationalist Association of NSW in 1912. Miles (1871-1942) founded the Australian branch of the Rationalist Press Association and in 1914 published the Sydney Rationalist Annual. In July 1935 he started the Independent Sydney Secularist. He was also the publisher of the Australian magazine The Publicist. Due to his poor health, he turned over The Publicist to Percy Stephensen on January 1, 1942. Miles died nine days later.

Newsletters were published by the Association, but few of them survive. From 1970s –1990s Ron Marke, Secretary of the Association, began publishing The Rationalist News as the journal of the Association. By 2005, no journal had been published for a number of years. It was then decided to re-establish a journal.

A new name had to be found and the New Liberator was chosen in honour of, Joseph Symes (1841–1906) a British secularist and publicist, who arrived in Melbourne with his wife on 24 February 1884. Within the year he had bought a printing press and begun the weekly Liberator. This publication was the spearhead of radical atheism in Australia. The publication of the New Liberator coincided with 100 years of Symes' death in 1906.

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Fred's Fiji Folly (*continued from p.1*)

Her actions appear to be the last gasp of the simmering Christian resentment against Fiji becoming a secular state. What has happened may give pause for thought to the leaders of the Catholic and Methodist churches who spoke out against the new constitution in December 2013 before the 2014 election.

Catholic archbishop Peter Loy Chong said 'Fiji is too religious to become a secular state'. Methodist minister, the Reverend James Bhagwan, predicted that the secular state could lead to a possible banning of religious education.

Ms Kirwin put these kinds of theocratic considerations into practice and decided to 'become active' and not let 'the nation be taken away'.

At the end of the meeting, the Reverend Nile said a prayer that endorsed the actions of Ms Kirwin and her followers. He thanked God for Ms Kirwin and her followers, 'your servants who love the Lord Jesus' who want to 'have the nation of Fiji under the cross of Christ as it was' and he prayed that Fiji 'will remain a Christian nation'.

Well, it has all come to grief. Maybe the Reverend Nile could pray that those members of the movement in Fiji, a secessionist movement that he supported by inviting local members into the Council, are not given lengthy gaol sentences.

One can only hope that proves to be the case for those indigenous Fijians who got caught up in this, who are really only innocent bystanders.

"Is God willing to prevent evil,
but not able?

Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing?

Then he is malevolent.

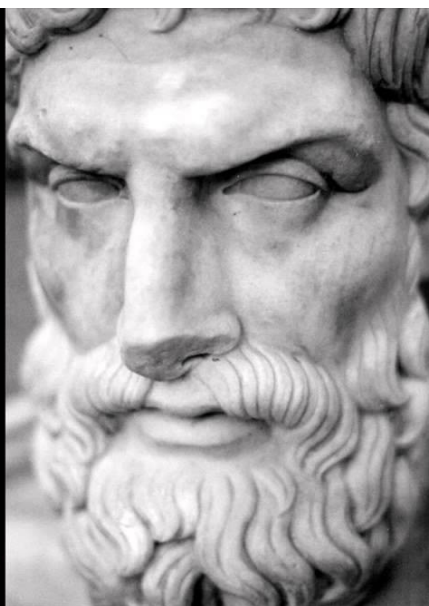
Is he both able and willing?

Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing?

Then why call him God?"

-Epicurus,
Ancient Greek Philosopher



RELIGION: A 'WICKED' PROBLEM?

Stephen Mutch LLB PhD

One of the greatest challenges facing the global community today involves a problematic policy sector that generates considerable controversy and debate. However, when specific policy problems are discussed, the causative factor is sometimes hidden in plain sight.

In my view the elephant in the room is religious belief per se, which too often serves as a catalyst for harmful and anti-social behaviour. Religious belief is a particular form of belief which cannot be comprehended by reason (and is in that sense 'irrational'). By definition, religious groups are set apart from other community groups, philosophical or otherwise.

Because of particular problems associated with the sector (religious terrorism and child sexual abuse in religious institutions loom large, but there are many other issues) I believe it is time to argue for tighter government control of religion. The object would be to promote beneficial behaviour by religious groups (towards those within groups and to the community at large), and to oversee the behaviour of individuals acting from religious motivation, or using religious trappings as a vehicle for nefarious activities.

Despite the continuing evidence of transgressions by religious figures, or hateful and violent behaviour by true believers, people of faith bristle with indignation at the suggestion that religion is a problematic policy area or that it constitutes a sector that warrants specific regulatory oversight - or indeed any regulation at all. Is not 'freedom of religion' a cherished human right under national constitutions and international fundamental laws? Is not religion presumptively a force for good? Doesn't the theory of separation of church and state mean that governments should not interfere with church autonomy?

Despite persistent evidence of abuses, the concept of religious freedom remains a sacred cow, endorsed with motherhood statements by politicians almost everywhere. This is

particularly so in liberal democracies, where politicians aim to please as many interest groups as possible; not least the powerful lobby representing religionists as voters.

It is sobering to note that tens of billions of dollars flow to religious organisations from government in Australia, along with tens of billions more in tax exempt status. But if we honestly acknowledge the enormous political influence of the religious lobby, it is hardly surprising that despite no substantive evidence and a complete lack of proof, questionable rationales are used to justify this largesse. For example, official inquiries report that 'it is clear that a large proportion of the population have a need for spiritual sustenance', to rationalize the charitable status of religious organizations (Charities Definition Inquiry, 2001); or that we need to support the 'spiritual wellbeing of ... students' to rationalize the funding of a national school chaplaincy programme (Department of Education Training Guidelines NSCP, 2006).

Apart from my familiarity with single malt whisky, I am at a loss to explain the concept of 'spirits', but apparently this intangible notion is still important to community wellbeing. Driving through Castle Hill the other day I was struck by a sign in a suburban front yard advertising the services of a 'spiritual therapist' - and wondered where on earth you could go to complain about the services of a spiritual therapist (whatever these may be) - perhaps Ghostbusters Incorporated!

It must be perplexing to a rationalist audience, but the general presumption that religion is beneficial, along with the public respect afforded to religious piety (despite a litany of scandalous behaviour by religious figures), seems to be very persistent. This helps to explain why public figures sometimes go to excruciating lengths to avoid fingering religious belief as the causative factor in re-occurring policy problems. A topical example of this is the spectacle of politicians from both the left and right tip-toeing through the minefield of political correctness with respect to religious

terrorism. So with each new terrorist attack or attempt, we see politicians seeking to exonerate what they consider to be 'authentic' religion from the equation.

We hear various explanations: the perpetrators are common criminals achieving a nefarious purpose under the cloak of religion; religion is not the problem - just a false interpretation of sacred scripture; the perpetrator is a deranged, mentally ill lone wolf, certainly not representative of religion; or that the perpetrators are motivated primarily by economic disadvantage or societal deprivation rather than religion - ignorant people lacking a proper education. We sometimes are told that terrorist attacks are our own fault, an inevitable blowback against first world foreign policy, or a response to community attitudes that marginalise the perpetrators. The fault may be politics, or economics - but not religion!

In an interesting twist to the debate the 'conservative right' often accuse 'liberals' of downplaying the Islamic elephant in the room - by avoiding the use of the word 'Islam' as in 'Islamic terrorist', or the use of Islam as a group title, as in 'Islamic State'. But these critics, although perhaps closer to the mark, suffer from a blind spot (perhaps a form of sectarian glaucoma), in failing to see the essential problem. If we want to place the causative factor in our cross-hairs I think the essence of the problem is the irrational religious impulse which underpins the behaviour of all true believers - perhaps for good, but too often for ill.

In our own lifetime there have been many examples of religious extremism and terrorism, not related to Islam, where governments have failed to deal with emerging, arguably quite predictable and preventable atrocities.

Baby boomers would remember Jonestown in Guyana, where in 1978 US congress man Leo Ryan and his entourage were murdered and where hundreds of followers of the Reverend Jim Jones and his People's Temple were murdered or suicided by drinking Cool-Aid. Or the confrontation near Waco, Texas in 1993, where David Koresh and his Branch Davidian disciples defied the authorities, murdered government agents and where most perished in a conflagration. We should not forget the group suicides between 1994 and 1997 of followers of

Luc Jouret and his Solar Temple movement in Switzerland, Canada and France. Or the sarin gas attacks on Tokyo subway commuters in 1995 and other murders perpetrated by followers of Shoko Asahara and his Aum Shinrikyo (Aum Supreme Truth). Some might recall the collective suicides in 1997 of Marshall Applewaite and followers of his Heaven's Gate movement in California, or the mass suicides and murders in Uganda in 2000 of Joseph Kibweteere and followers of his Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments; to mention but a handful of cultic atrocities.

Although we haven't suffered events of such magnitude in Australia, there have been a number of problematic groups here which might attract the description harmful destructive cult, and many still operate. Because these groups can be highly litigious and respond with fanatical vehemence to any slight, I will refrain from referring to them here.

Apart from representing governmental failure, the thing these events involving non-Islamic groups have in common is an underpinning, fanatical religious belief. However, once again there is a tendency by people of religious faith (and many others as well) to try to separate cults from what they consider to be true religion, those allegedly 'nice' groups or traditions which are subjectively deemed to be authentic. This is yet another example of not wanting to see the elephant in the room - 'religion isn't responsible - it's just a nasty cult'.

If we could agree that the religious sector as a category is a source of continuing policy problems, arising peculiarly from that sector, it seems logical to suggest that governmental policies are needed to address the problems. *Laissez faire* as an operating principle is hardly an adequate response to an entire sector - although a conscious decision not to intervene in a particular case might be a thoughtful policy response! Even if we deem certain problems to be 'wicked problems', issues that cannot be settled and will not go away (Rittel and Webber, 1973 in Bridgman & Davis, *Australian Policy Handbook*, 2000), this is hardly an excuse for governments to ignore the elephant in the room when more effective policies are needed.

As a priority, we need to ascertain the governing philosophy or principle under which our national regulatory frameworks operate. This in turn might suggest some operating guidelines enabling us to become more competent in dealing with problems arising from increasing religious diversity.

I propose that our guiding principle should be a philosophy of secularism - which is often equated with the theory of separation of church and state, but which I believe is qualitatively different if 'separation' is interpreted as endorsing a concept of religious autonomy. I note that the British National Secular Society website defines secularism as:

a principle that involves two basic propositions. The first is the strict separation of state from religious institutions. The second is that people of different religions and beliefs are equal before the law... The separation of religion and state is the foundation of secularism. It ensures that religious groups don't interfere in affairs of state, and makes sure the state doesn't interfere in religious affairs' (NSS website, 19 April 2015).

This definition owes more to 18th century laissez faire liberalism than to contemporary secularism. It seems to me that the British are still besotted with the liberal democratic paradigm rather than formulating a contemporary philosophy of secular democracy. If the non-interference argument is political sophistry aimed at appeasing religionists, it is doomed to fail on that count. In any event, in my view an overblown sense of non-interference is wrong in principle and unfortunate in practice - as seems to be the case in some tortuous decisions made by US courts! Furthermore, I don't think the definition adequately explains the parameters for excluding religious groups from political activity; which might in some instances offend the 'democratic' part of 'liberal democracy'.

Perhaps a better operating principle would be an updated version of that which was adopted by the French from the time of *La Revolution* and revived under the Third Republic, which involves a different perspective on separation which sits side by side with a strongly secular governing ideology. That ideology is known as *laïcité*, which regards religion as 'acceptable in the private sphere although fundamentally incompatible with the

institutions of a secular Republic'. *Laïcité* is said to promote a 'strongly positive commitment ... to inculcate principles of non-religious rationality and morality' (Beckford in Richardson, *Regulating Religion*, 2004: 28). It seems to sit oddly with a parallel commitment for the state to remain 'neutral' in matters of belief - but that depends on what you mean by the term neutrality.

It seems to me that governments which remain philosophically neutral might just as well admit to being neutered. I pose the question: what is wrong with a government adopting the principle that it should actively support rational thought? This would be axiomatic if we had a truly secular democracy; rather than a wishy washy liberal democracy.

If we are to grasp the nettle and properly regulate the religious sector, we might define the general parameter of the sector we are dealing with. I don't believe an expansive and expanding parameter is problematic. For policy purposes we have some useful guidance in defining what we mean, legally, by religious belief and religious organisations. The High Court of Australia has pronounced that 'religion' involves supernatural belief and canons of conduct giving effect to that belief. The Indian Supreme Court felt that religion entailed a system of beliefs or doctrines which are regarded by those who profess that religion as conducive to their spiritual well-being. So supernatural and spiritual are key words - to which we might perhaps add mystical.

On these definitions the 'cults' I refer to above would conform to the legal category of religion; as would Wicca, Voodoo and a liquorice allsorts of new fangled cults, sects and new religious movements. A spiritual therapist would be subject to the jurisdiction; as would soothsayers and spiritual healers of all shapes and sizes, including tel-evangelists.

In some jurisdictions courts have occasionally conflated the legal category of religion to include equivalent belief systems; so as to give some sort of parity to those who possess a philosophy of life that is non-religious. However, around the world special protections and financial privileges are doled out essentially to groups that meet the supernatural (or spiritual) requirement to fit the category of religion. Religious groups don't mind being regulated as a category if it involves receiving

benefits! For regulatory purposes the narrower definition focusing on irrational belief (as wide and expansive as it may be) is appropriate. We may not want to regulate non-religious (even allegedly equivalent) organisations in the same way we deal with religious groups.

I support what Talcott Parsons (*Social System*, 1951) called 'social control of religion'. Linder and Guy Peters have noted that 'changing behaviour, whether by individuals or organisations requires two kinds of mechanisms, one setting up the necessary controls and another ensuring compliance' (*Knowledge & Policy*: 4, 1/2, 1991). We need to accept that self-regulation or religious autonomy is not sustainable.

So where does this take us practically? In Australia we have taken some steps along the journey to regulate the religious sector. As treasurer, Peter Costello moved to ensure that religious charities keep financial records - subject to potential audit by the Australian Tax Office. The establishment of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission in December 2012 was potentially a positive step towards more effective regulatory control (something I canvassed in my 2004 doctoral thesis). But a generally benign oversight of third sector organisations does not focus on other groups or individuals that might be for profit; does not require full financial transparency and is not specifically geared to focus on the problems identified in this paper.

To their credit the French have grasped the nettle and have established a specific ministerial office to deal with what they term sectarian abuse. For this effort they have been roundly criticised by cultic organisations, by religious apologists of faith and by liberal apologists of no faith - so they must be doing something right! It is interesting that the closest English translation of the French word '*secte*' is probably 'cult' - and like democratic governments everywhere the French are loath to offend the mainstream religious sector. Hence they too fall into the disingenuous device of separating cults from so-called authentic religion.

So what do we need? First, we need accept that religion represents a problematic policy sector that warrants careful regulatory control. It may not be a wicked problem in itself, but it

certainly gives rise to a number of problems that many policy analysts would describe as 'wicked'. However, I think the mindset that it is all too hard can lead to policy inaction when we haven't really tried to regulate the sector with any degree of vigour.

In 1982 a Victorian parliamentarian, the Honourable Haddon Storey, noted that:

... there is a large file in the Attorney-General's Department of complaints about all sorts of sects or pseudo-sects in the State, and about the harm that can be caused to people who allow themselves to be "sucked in" by them, to their detriment. No country that I know of has been successful in finding a formula for dealing with these sorts of problems (Victoria Legislative Council Hansard, 1982: 1858).

We have come some way since then in identifying some of the psychological and sociological processes used to indoctrinate or radicalise people into extremist behaviour. This can happen in the specific context of cults but is something that is problematic across the whole spectrum of religious organisations, including cults, sects, new religious movements and mainstream faiths. So what we desperately need is a central repository for the receipt of complaints about cultic and religious behaviour, which would serve as a referral body, a research institute and an advisory body (one that might also have a public education function).

Over time such a commission, attached to the office of the PM (or perhaps AG's department), should develop the knowledge base and expertise to flag potential tragedies, but would also contribute substantially to our capacity to deal with the full range of problems presented by the religious sector. Of course the proposed commission should be headed up by a rationalist, but in our current political climate such a sensible suggestion would perhaps be 'pie in the sky'.

SOME FIRSTS IN AUSTRALIA

Steve Maxwell

Steve Maxwell is currently secretary / treasurer of the Rationalist Association of NSW.

On Sunday afternoons, 2pm –5pm, he speaks on a soapbox at Sydney's speaker's corner opposite the Art Gallery of NSW. His subjects are what interest him: rationalism, history, art, culture and current affairs. He is currently researching and writing a world history of speakers' corners.

THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL SPEAKER IN HYDE PARK, LONDON.

ANTHONY MARTIN FERNANDO 1864-1947 was the first Australian Aboriginal rights activist and Hyde Park speaker.

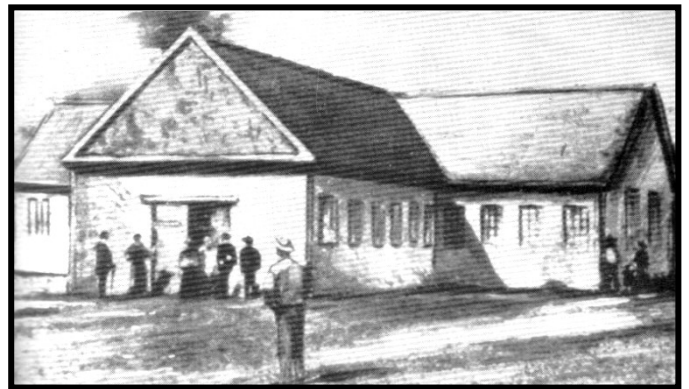
Fernando was born in Sydney in 1864, the son of an Aboriginal mother, his 'guiding star' from whom he was separated as a child. He claimed to have been brought up in the home of a white family who denied him an education and treated him like a pet. As far as historians can ascertain, Fernando was driven into self-imposed exile in the early 1900s, after being excluded from giving evidence in the trial of white men accused of the murder of Aboriginal people. He believed that the only way to secure justice for his people was to go to Europe

There he confronted the British. He accused the British authorities of turning a blind eye to the systematic extermination of Aboriginals by the Australian Government. He complained bitterly about the church mission stations, describing them as 'murder houses'. In 1928 he continued his crusade by speaking in Hyde Park London, picketing Australia House, writing letters to newspapers and petitioning European powers, including the Pope. He proposed that an Aboriginal state be established in Australia's north, free from British and Australian interference, under the mandate of a European neutral power. The British and Australian authorities were horrified, and accused him of being a German spy. Newspaper reports of the time described Fernando: 'his long grey beard damp with mist, his frail elderly frame wrapped in a large overcoat'. Pinned to his coat were scores of small, white, toy skeletons and he wore a placard proclaiming: 'This is all Australia has left of my people'. In January 1929, Fernando was described as a toy hawker. A religious man who could quote tracts of the Bible, he believed

that God had entrusted him with a mission to save Aboriginal people from the colonial system that oppressed them. Fernando retired to an old men's home. He died on 9 January 1949 at Ilford, Essex.

The above was sourced from: Australian Dictionary of Biography Alison Holland, Fiona Paisley, 'Fernando, Anthony Martin (1864 – 1949)', Australian Dictionary of Biography, Supplementary Volume, Melbourne University Press, 2005, pp 127-128.

THE FIRST CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA



The first church in Australia, From a drawing on page 25 of Frank Clune's "Serenade to SYDNEY" Angus & Robertson 1967.

There were no plans to send a clergyman on the First Fleet. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel lobbied the Crown to include a clergyman.

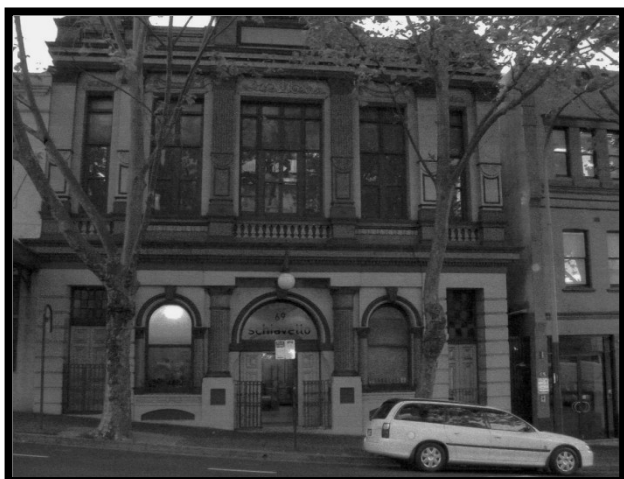
The first church service in Sydney was held on 17 February 1788. The Reverend Richard Johnson (1753-1827) preached under a great gum tree on the corner of Bligh and Hunter Street, Sydney. (It is now known as Richard Johnson Square.)

Reverend Johnson built the first church chapel at his own expense in 1793. The chapel burnt down on October 1, 1798.

Reverend Johnson took his official position very seriously and laid the foundation of his church in Australia.

He never forgot his priestly duties to his congregation of convicts, officers and soldiers. He sailed with his family from Sydney on the Buffalo in 1800. He died on 13 March 1827.

THE FIRST FREETHOUGHT HALL IN SYDNEY.



Sydney Lyceum, 69 Campbell Street, Sydney.

The Freethought movement of the nineteenth century laid the foundation for religious freedom and its protection under Section 116 of the Australian Constitution. The movement is still represented in Sydney by the Freethought Bookshop, 58 Regent Street Chippendale, and the Humanist House, 10 Shepherd Street, Chippendale.

On 26 January 1890, The Australasian Secular Association laid the foundation stone of the Sydney Lyceum, the first Freethought hall in Sydney. In 1889, the Australasian Secular Association had called for tenders to build the

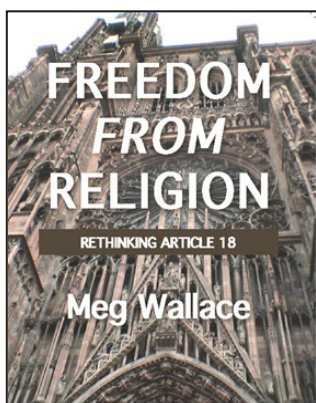
Lyceum Hall for £5,000. Mr. E. Evans architect's design won the contract. The building is still standing at 69 Campbell Street, Sydney.

About 1250 people attended the ceremony. William Lorando Jones (a freethought veteran and the only person in Australia to have ever been jailed for blasphemy) presented Ebenezer B Skinner (President of the Progressive Secular Lyceum) and William Whitehouse Collins (1853-1923) (National Secular Society lecturer) with an inscribed silver trowel and a mallet for their parts in urging the building of the Lyceum Hall. The Sydney Secular Progressive Lyceum movement was inspired by a movement of spiritualists in the USA, but by the 1880s free-thinkers and secularists had taken over in Australia.

Due to the Depression of the 1890s and the Sunday trading act that made it illegal to charge admission to theatres on a Sunday, The Australasian Secular Association had to sell the building in 1895 to the Disciples of Christ, the forerunner of the Church of Christ. The building remained their City Temple until 1970. It is now the showroom of Schiavello Systems.

FREEDOM *FROM* RELIGION: Rethinking Article 18

Meg Wallace B.Soc.Sc. LLB(Hons) PhD



Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promises the freedom of every person to have and follow ('manifest') the religion or belief of their choosing. This book details how governments, courts and religious authors have mostly misinterpreted or ignored this promise, in ways that privilege specific religious groups, so that state involvement in religion is ubiquitous throughout the world. This has led to the need to recognise that Article 18 is primarily about freedom *from* religious beliefs and dictates. The author concludes that Article 18 needs rethinking if its promise is to be realised. She proposes that government policy should be impartial towards religious belief, and outlines the principles of political secularism through separation of religion and state.

Freedom From Religion is available as an e-book or print-on-demand through Amazon online.

DARE TO STAND ALONE

The Story of Charles Bradlaugh,

Reviewer: *Nigel Sinnott*

Dare to Stand Alone: The Story of Charles Bradlaugh, by **Bryan Niblett**

Oxford: Kramedart Press, 2010, 2011.

391 pp., 4 plates. ISBN 978-0-9564743-0-8

Charles Bradlaugh (1833–91) was arguably Britain's best-known or most notorious public atheist of the nineteenth century. Not only did he campaign against ecclesiastical privilege, he also championed Malthusianism (birth control), republicanism, civil liberties and radical politics (though not socialism, of which he disapproved).

Biographical accounts were written about Bradlaugh in his lifetime (including one book that was grossly defamatory), and in the decades following his death. In 1971 David Tribe, an Australian then living in England who had become president of the National Secular Society (which Bradlaugh founded in 1866), became author of *President Charles Bradlaugh, M.P.* (London: Elek), a well-researched volume that many people regarded as the definitive biography.

Forty years later Bryan Niblett, a barrister and computer scientist, has revisited the Bradlaugh story and given his own full account of it. The author's style and emphasis is different from that of the earlier book, but he was inspired by admiration of Bradlaugh's immense moral courage and staying power, as I know was David Tribe.

I approached *Dare to Stand Alone* with the uneasy feeling of having to judge, at the end, whether it was better than or an improvement on *President Charles Bradlaugh, M.P.* It did not take me long to realise that I was worrying for nothing. The two biographies differ in emphasis and style, but not in literary or historical quality. They complement each other admirably.

In a post-title page, Bryan Niblett explains that he took his title from "Dare to be a Bradlaugh! / Dare to stand alone!" in *The Secular Song and Hymn Book* (1876), edited by Annie Besant during her freethought phase. (She had quite a few phases!) But there is no mention that this was in fact a cheeky adaptation for infidel purposes of a hymn, "Dare to be a Daniel" (1873), by Philip Paul Bliss

(1838–76) that was much popularised by Salvation Army bands.

As an example of differences between the two books, I find that Niblett has a useful appendix, "Note on the Four Portraits of Bradlaugh by Walter Sickert", whereas Tribe made no mention of Sickert. Tribe makes several references to Charles's pious brother William Robert Bradlaugh (1847 – 1917), who was convicted of embezzlement. However, Niblett mentioned him only once as "his brother William (far from being his favourite)" (p. 46).

On the other hand both Niblett and Tribe come to very similar conclusions about some of the people in Bradlaugh's life, such as Annie Besant; the poet James Thomson ("B.V."); the man who coined the term secularism, George Jacob Holyoake (prevaricating and a bit slippery); George William Foote, who succeeded Bradlaugh as president of the National Secular Society, and Edward Aveling (intellectually gifted, ethically unscrupulous and manipulative — a quintessential Victorian cad).

A large chunk of *Dare to Stand Alone*, about 145 pages, is devoted to Bradlaugh's battles to take his seat in the House of Commons after he was first elected in 1880. The arduous and complicated saga dragged on until 1885.

Niblett, like Tribe before him, felt it necessary to go into detail probably because of the misinformation that has drifted around over the years about this sorry business. Once Bradlaugh was able to take his seat (as the junior member for Northampton) he took a particular interest in Indian and Irish affairs and was responsible (1888) for an Oaths Bill providing "that every person, upon objecting to being sworn, shall be permitted to make his solemn affirmation instead of taking an oath in all places and for all purposes where any oath is or shall be required by law".

The parliamentary struggle, Bradlaugh's need to earn an income from writing and lecturing (ordinary MPs were not paid in those days, and most were gentlemen of independent means), and his rather workaholic temperament probably account for his death at the age of 57. His legacy includes the National Secular Society, still going strong today, and, as Bryan Niblett rightly points out, the pages of the *National Reformer*, which he edited from 1860 until his death.

I have a few minor criticisms, mostly directed at the publishers or printers. I do not like the excessive use of small capitals at the beginning of chapters, and proof reading could have been better in places: "Theosophical Society", "Theosophic Society" and "Theosophist Society" appear on pp.

319 and 320, and Theosophical Society does not appear in the index. The book also lacks a contents list at the front. Some readers might object to the use, at times, of very short chapters, but I accept that the author has used them for effect, to highlight important events. There are 90 chapters in all.

Otherwise I found this a very readable and informative account of one of England's greatest freethinkers, who from very humble origins rose by self-education and prodigious hard work to being a major public figure. In Bryan Niblett's words, "one man, relying on reason, and daring to stand alone, can make a difference in the world." Charles Bradlaugh deserves to be remembered and *Dare to Stand Alone* has served him well.

Secular Public Education™



The public schools of Australia are currently being subjected to an unprecedented and unacceptable level of unauthorised religious activity during school hours. The Victorian government's decision to remove religious instruction from school hours is the first practical recognition by any Australian government that this is a serious problem.

Many religious programs and activities are being arranged and organised by school chaplains employed via the Commonwealth funded National School Chaplaincy Program. Any human rights protections that exist within the flawed state and territory legislation allowing religious instruction during public school hours, is being flouted or ignored.

Emerging as a registered not-for-profit entity in September 2015 the **Secular Public Education™** organisation will seek to inform and educate parents and guardians of Australian public school students regarding statutory and human rights in relation to religious instruction, as well as non-legislated chaplaincy and religious activities within schools. When requested, we will directly advocate on behalf of individual parents and guardians on a case-by-case basis.

See **Secular Public Education** on Facebook

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THE RIGHT TO ASSISTED DYING

Meg Wallace

In February this year, the Supreme Court of Canada made a historic ruling on voluntary euthanasia.¹ It held that access to voluntary euthanasia is a basic human right. In doing so it rejected the approach of the UN that accepts prohibition of assisted suicide by governments wishing to do so. The Court declared that Canadian legislation prohibiting assisted suicide is invalid, as it is a violation of the right to life, liberty and security of the person, under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. This right is also protected in the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* ('ICCPR'), which Australia has adopted.

The Canadian Court pointed to the fact that everyone has the right to make decisions concerning their bodily integrity and medical care. This principle allows a person in a grievous and irremediable medical condition to request palliative sedation, refuse artificial nutrition and hydration, or request the removal of life-sustaining medical equipment (they can also refuse nutrition and fluids). The Court held that prohibition of voluntary euthanasia interferes with this right to make decisions concerning one's bodily integrity and medical care and thus 'trenches on liberty'. It held that forcing people to endure intolerable suffering deprives them of their security of person according to the principles of justice, which are founded on a belief in the dignity and worth of every human person. The alternatives, taking one's own life prematurely when able to (often violently or dangerously) or suffering until death, are 'cruel'. The right to life is no longer seen to require that human life be preserved at all costs.

The existing law is inconsistent.

The Court pointed out that as the right to liberty and security of the person allows individuals to refuse life-saving or life-

preserving treatment, prohibition of assisted dying is overreach by the law. This is because **(1) It denies some individuals of the right to liberty and security of the person** in medical decision-making. **(2) this denial is contrary to the general objective of the Charter**, which is to ensure *universal* enjoyment of that right; and **(3) this denial has no relation to the Charter's objective** – it is concerned instead with protection of specific *societal interests* surrounding exercise of the right.

Societal interests are invoked in advocating the prohibition of assisted dying – such as religious belief, the need to protect the vulnerable from exploitation, mistake or duress, or the reluctance of some physicians to be involved.

Societal interests are properly the consideration of safeguards

The Court accepted there are legitimate societal concerns to protect the vulnerable, but these are consequential to recognition of a right intended to be universal. It examined over 40 submissions from groups both supporting and opposing the prohibition of assisted dying, as well as the administration of legislation in countries that permit assisted dying. It found no evidence that physicians are 'unable to reliably assess competence, voluntariness, and non-ambivalence in patients, ensure informed consent and prevent abuse'. Indeed, the Court also found that comprehensive consideration of options, outcomes and safeguards involved where assistance in dying is available has meant that palliative care actually improved in those jurisdictions.

As Australia has undertaken to apply the ICCPR provisions in our law (which it has not done), based on the reasoning of the Canadian Supreme Court, one can argue that there is a *right* to assisted dying in Australia.

¹ *Carter v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2015 SCC 5

The Last Word **ANGELICA DIVINE**

Catholic Mother of 14 writes:



One part of me wishes that, given all the work I've done for the Church, I could be recognised with a Papal Knighthood like Rupert Murdoch (despite his divorce, contrary to Canon Law). But, as a woman, the other part of me understands that the role of women in the Church is clearly

defined. However, dear readers, just on the quiet, I've got a sneaking suspicion they're saving up a Mary MacKillop for me. I'll find out when I finally get to Heaven. Can't wait! Imagine it – me! *Saint Angelica Divine*, Australia's second Saint, for her services to Truth through her many writings!

In the meantime, I accept my role of unappreciated motherhood with proper dignity. Except, I have to say, when my teenage sons (I think there are about six of them) complain about the whereabouts of their washing when I'm off to daily Mass. I know it's my job, not theirs, but it's a question of priorities.

Well, what a few weeks it's been.

The religion-hating socialist-communist Labor Party of Victoria has stopped those committed, highly intelligent and kind Access Ministries people from spreading the word about Jesus within school hours in public schools. They have to make do with lunchtime meetings. It's a travesty, but this is what happens when the foolish people of Victoria go berserk and stray from the fold of proper, truly conservative government.

It's the children who pay the price of not learning about all that Jesus has to offer. I say, look what they're facing. In Matthew 13:41-2,49-50; Mark 9:43, 48-9; Luke 16:19-31; John: 3:18, Jesus warned about hell and eternal condemnation for all those who do not repent or believe in Him, and that God does punish unbelievers for all eternity. It's truly shocking that children are

going to be denied this crucial information.

Meanwhile, back in NSW, our Christian premier, Mr Baird, has rightly stopped a homosexual, gay-encouraging, anti-heterosexual film about gay 'families' from being shown in public schools. Good on him! At least someone is holding the line against this hideous gay marriage thing that deluded citizens think is OK because that shallow US Supreme Court approved it, and countries like that wicked, depraved New Zealand have legislated for it.

Speaking of the land of the long black cloud, I see the NZ government is going to have an enquiry into 'voluntary' euthanasia as is our Green-infested Senate. Why do they bother? It's come up about a dozen times in our state parliaments and George only has to make a phone call to any waverers about their future preselection/career/superannuation prospects and they soon come back to God's plan for the terminally ill.

I was saying this to the nurse, a good Catholic girl (though somewhat overweight) from a nice, Catholic family, as she was changing my 94 year-old mother's nappies the other day in the Sacred Heart Nursing Home for the Elderly and Disabled.

Mother was crying and complaining and saying we should let her die. Once again, I had to remind her by shouting that God forbids the taking of life and she should be grateful for the pain she's experiencing because it draws her closer to Him. I had to shout as she's almost totally deaf now and can't watch Mass on TV as she's nearly blind.

She's not a bad old girl. She used to give me a clip over the ear if I made a mistake reciting my Catechism. She's reaping the rewards for teaching me so well. I'm so grateful I can advise her, in her old age, where she's wrong.

All for now. Je vous en prie: I'll pray for you.



APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

THE RATIONALIST ASSOCIATION OF NSW. INC

Established in 1912. ABN 27091210952.

MEMBERSHIP fee: \$20 per year, \$10 concession.

(Membership renewals fall due before the date of the AGM in September.)

Please send a cheque or money order to

The Rationalist Association of NSW Inc.

58 Regent St, Chippendale NSW 2008

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I hereby apply to become a member of the The Rationalist Association of NSW Inc.

In the event of my admission as a member, I agree to be bound by the rules of the Association.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Information disclosed on this form will not be revealed to other ordinary members or to non-members except as necessary in the course of printing and mailing.

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