



V *HUMANIST* Viewpoints



Father of four, Ron Williams, fails in his attempt to stop the Chaplains in Schools Program

HUVAT

Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk 4pm
2nd Sunday each month.

- Jul 8** - **John August** "Debrief on Takeover Attempt"
Aug 12 - **Col. Valery Yaryanich (ret)** formerly of Soviet Strategic
Rocket Forces "De-alerting & Abolition of Nuclear Weapons"
or
Gillian Ellis "Are we all Doomed" in event Colonel's visa not
granted
Sep 9 - **AGM** 1:30 for 2pm start - notice by separate email

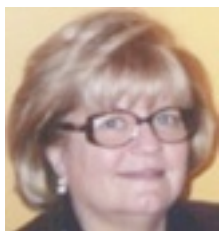
Also in this issue...

- Chaplains High Court Case
- Enlightenment Values
- Future of religion in schools

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Honorary Secretary Comments

Affie Adagio



The SGM was a well run event which the President, John August, chaired effectively using Peter Young's 'Rules of Debate'. The Public Officer Paul Zagoridis served as the returning officer and Cameron Schraner

was the timekeeper. There was no wastage of time and the three expulsions which the HumSocNSW committee had recommended to the membership were carried out by the meeting. The expulsions were Hugh Drewitz, Phillip O'Hearn and Mark Pavic. The proper legal process of the constitution had been strictly followed over the correct timeframe.

After the business of the meeting we settled into a pleasant much deserved peaceful supper with our many supporters.

Future Projects: We are now looking forward to future projects which will highlight Humanism and members have expressed plans.

CAHS 2013 Convention. We are making preliminary plans for next year's Convention as it will be our responsibility to organise in Sydney. Please be aware and ready to support it by attending the functions which will probably be in April/May.

Sept. AGM: This year our AGM will take place on 9th September, 1.30 registration for 2p.m. start. Followed by supper as usual.

**We have an exciting
time to look forward to.
Remember to join us
and spread the word to
our friends.**

Editor Comments

Frank Gomez

This newsletter is also available electronically as a PDF in colour. Members who would like **an additional** electronic colour version by e-mail **at no extra cost** can contact me directly at frankgomez@me.com.

Some members have indicated they would be interested in **only** receiving the electronic copy for future editions to assist the Society in reducing costs and the unnecessary printing of paper. If you are happy to forgo the receipt of the printed version and just receive the electronic version then please make that clear in your email. It is entirely optional and your decision doesn't affect the manner in which you receive all other communications from the Society.

CAN YOU HELP?

The Book Room at Humanist House needs book donations and volunteer assistance (please ring Gillian on 9660 9658)



Subscriptions are due by the 1st of July every year as follows:

Single \$35, Double \$45, Concession \$20, Viewpoints only \$20

Please send cheque to Humanist Society of NSW, 10 Shepherd St, Chippendale NSW 2008

President's Report

John August



We recently had an SGM which confirmed the expulsion of three members, endorsing an original committee resolution. The meeting was in fact easier than some I've chaired over the past few years, and I thank all members who

turned up, and I thank the majority of members for confirming those expulsions.

Teaching of Ethics in NSW has been confirmed by the NSW Parliament inquiry, which is good to know. Unlike Queensland, it seems the religious lobby have been unable to quash the initiative - whatever else you can say about the current NSW Government, at least it is not a puppet of the religious lobby. Some areas of policy are probably tainted - but hopefully more the result of political argy-bargy than decisive influence.

The Chaplain Court Case

Nationally, the High Court has upheld the appeal by Ron Williams against the funding of School Chaplains. I'm sure this will be discussed elsewhere, but in the meantime - the High Court did not see Commonwealth funded Chaplains as officers of the State, violating religion being a test for public office, but they did see that this sort of funding should pass through Parliament.

This was interesting, in that the separation of church and state in the constitution was read down - at some level there is sufficient indirection that while the money originates in Government, the employee is not an officer of Government. You wonder how close they would have to be before they **were** an officer of government.

As funding must be done through an Act of Parliament, funding activities are more open and accountable. It is not on the whim of Government - it must go through Parliament.

The Government has said it will enact the necessary legislation. The problem is that they've tried to enact a "blank cheque", taking scrutiny back away from Parliament. The issue remains that they feel that School Chaplains are a good thing, something the Government ought to do. That's a quite strange sentiment.

In fact it should be a reminder that they are doing something they really should not - perhaps it will be a trigger for more public unrest - we can only hope that Secularism becomes more of contemporary issue in the public space.

The Census

The Census came out recently, with roughly 2% more people in Australia being non-believers, and 2% less being believers. I was phoned by Geoff Winestock from the Australian Financial Review, but sadly he ended up with an article which did not mention us. The one that got away.

Regardless of just how many believers we have, Church & State should still be separate - but the erosion of belief would help to undermine any claim fundamentalist Christians would have.

The Greens & the Ellis Defence

The "Ellis Defence" is that Catholic Church property trusts are different enough from the Church operations that they cannot be sued; the idea that priests are not employees is also a defence.

The NSW Greens are pushing for legislation to reverse these two defences. They hosted a forum at NSW Parliament House on the 13th of June, I attended along with member Steve Maxwell. It was quite an experience to hear the stories of this abuse.

Interestingly, not all Catholic Churches use the Ellis defence; Churches in the Newcastle archdiocese respect state laws and have been willing to pay the damages assessed in courts; Sydney Churches are not similarly inclined - perhaps because of Cardinal Pell.

It seems the Catholic Church subverts regular legal process and directs victims away from making claims. It has the so-called "Towards Healing" program, which is seen as directing people away from the courts. Further, when complaints are made to the Church, it seems they do not always pass them onto police. It seems rather strange.

These are the machinations of the Catholic Church, but the legal system has its own problems, regardless of which Church (or anyone for that matter) is involved. In "secondary abuse", victims must recount their experiences three times - once to the police, another time to the criminal courts, and a last time to the civil courts. Within the courts, their stories are challenged aggressively by the defending lawyers, making the painful experiences even worse. One victim recounted how the defending lawyer said he needed to take some responsibility for what happened because he had been paid for it.

Our legal system has a many ancient traditions built into it - in particular, the right of the accused, that they be able to "face" the charges put to them. However, in the process of granting this "right", genuine victims are subjected to further psychological harm. It is a difficult quandary. Perhaps while being able to "face" the charges, the ability to challenge testimonies by victims should be limited and curtailed.

Then there's monetary compensation, a difficult notion. I can see the value of monetary compensation, but the problem is that monetary compensation is a precarious thing, frequently dependent on luck and the vagaries of the situation.

Further, an individual must take an initiative to obtain it - with some trying to point the fingers at those victims. Still, in much of the legal system, it seems that only some people amongst those entitled are willing to push for legal compensation.

What would happen if everyone entitled to it pushed for compensation? It makes you wonder - how much would it cost to do everything properly - to properly compensate victims, to properly support carers, to properly support public (including mental) health?

Regardless, what would otherwise be compensation is sidelined as the result of arbitrary legal conceptions (like the Ellis defence) that seem even more dubious than any concern about the legal compensation itself - or most legal concepts in circulation.

However, there's a very real justification for legal compensation against the Catholic Church - it sees that these problems still occur, and that the Catholic Church has not (broadly speaking) cleaned up its act. Child abuse is still happening. Perhaps the archdiocese around Newcastle is cleaning up its act. But it's still happens - and it does not seem that the broader Catholic Church will clean up its act until this sort of external pressure forces it to.

There's a link at : <http://davidshoebridge.org.au/2012/05/28/release-of-report-on-justice-for-victims-of-sexual-abuse-in-the-catholic-church/>

The Catholic Church

We can worry about the overall impact of the Catholic Church - by seeking the compassion for others, and the worth of Jesus, they claim to do good in the world.

And there are Catholic charitable works, looking after the poor and needy - something that is worth acknowledging. Through "Liberation Theology", elements of the Catholic Church have stood up against

dictatorships.

But do they truly reduce suffering in the world? Their approach to abortion and contraception means women lose control of their bodies, not to mention the spread of STDs like HIV. Their approach to the priesthood - of disconnecting with prevailing values about abuse and responsibility - means that abuse continues. Their approach to Voluntary Euthanasia embraces needless suffering and a lack of autonomy.

Then there's the "show" of Catholicism. Of people who pay lip service to being good people, but mostly want to be part of the tribe, and possibly superior, and in fact lead selfish lives. One wonders how destructive this could be.

Separately to "sexual abuse" per se, the Catholic Church was also involved in the forced relocation of children from UK and Canada to Australia.

In engaging with the reality of the Catholic Church, it is important to look at both the good and bad. It is difficult to do this in a finessed way. I don't think the bad outweighs the good of their charitable works, but along the way it is important to acknowledge the good they do.

We could also wonder - is there a less harmful way of doing the sort of good the Catholic Church does? Could we imagine an alternate history where this was the case?

It's something of a coincidence - not something I planned - but I did go to another event related to Catholicism, this time put on by the Australian Catholic University.

ACU Euthanasia Debate

Hidden within Catholicism is an attempt at engagement with the other side. I was able to see that at a debate on Voluntary Euthanasia hosted by the ACU at the Australian Museum in Sydney. I was joined by our Vice President, Fred Flatow.

We had a somewhat one sided panel, with the main speaker, Dr. Bernadette Tobin having about 20 minutes, and three supplemental speakers for the most part against Voluntary Euthanasia - and the one voice in support, Dr. Philip Nitschke.

To be fair, they did show a video where a man described how his father was forced to die privately and in unfortunate circumstances, partly through the law and partly through the lack of support he received.

One issue seemed to get lost in the wash - it is **not** illegal to commit suicide. However, it **is** illegal to **help** someone commit suicide. A lot of the discussion seemed to get lost in whether an **individual** should be able to make a decision to

end their own life. In fact, an individual **can**, and it seems strange to focus on something currently legal being a problem.

In fact the issue is whether someone should be able to call on another's **assistance** in committing suicide. There's multiple stages - are we focusing on the individual's sovereignty about making the decision, their ability to seek help, or other's ability/legality in providing help ? The argument did seem to get lost in between.

Much emphasis was made on pressures that might prompt someone to end their life - such as them being a drain on their family or society. While panelists saw a pressure if VE were legal, people committing legal suicide at present might have those thoughts in mind. Logically speaking, the pressures could be stronger if VE were legal, but the difference would be one of degree not kind.

Dr. Tobin emphasised the distinction between killing and letting die - something I shake my head at - and emphasised people being pushed into euthanasia. Part of her argument was a dismissal of elements of Peter Singer's argument, merely because it started to endorse non-voluntary euthanasia - for young disabled newborns who are going to die painful deaths anyway. That's dismissing something because it has consequences you don't like - rather than truly engaging with it.

The panel tried to undermine the idea of personal autonomy, claiming decisions are made in a social context, and also that personal autonomy should not be a trump - it should just be a factor. However, just because things can be a combination this does not undermine the idea that the sovereign portion can make the whole decision sovereign.

We cannot consider ourselves to be slaves of circumstance, the society around us or social pressures. Are we to deny that sovereignty, that ability to make our own decisions ?

In fact, this ambiguity about personal decisions is pervasive. In economics, there is the ideal of the "sovereign individual", with advertising informing them of options available. However, as identified by Galbraith, advertising shapes our desires, it does not merely inform our choices. And you wonder if you can take anyone who has ended up a drug addict - or indeed immersed in any sort of addiction - making a sovereign choice and deciding to become an addict. And, we can also wonder if women are "deciding" to wear the Burqua - or are they coerced ? Or living in a social context ?

Yes, it is a convoluted issue. But that doesn't deny that there **is** an important element of personal sovereignty that is to be respected. Further, we can wonder why the concern doesn't span to **all** the areas in our society where there's some ambiguity

about whether people are making sovereign decisions.

The point is there are two risks - that without VE, people will either suffer or have to undergo difficult suicides. With VE, there's the issue that people will be coerced into euthanasia - but that's not a concern which should trump everything else. In any case, regulation can prevent it.

Dr. Nitschke told a story of a good death, where after a conversation, the gentleman made his decision, pressed the button and died holding his wife. That compares well to fading into drugged out oblivion and finally dying - or far worse stories.

There was some discussion about the availability of Palliative care and whether it conflicts or contrasts against VE, with one concern being that VE being available would mean that there was less money available for Palliative Care. Certainly, in the Netherlands, Palliative care is seen as a complement to VE, not something in conflict with it. The experience in Oregon is that the very small numbers of assisted deaths could not possibly affect spending on palliative care and in any event the evidence shows that assisted dying and palliative care are complementary, and that palliative care standards have been maintained.

To me, that's mixing the issues needlessly. I'd be happy to support the provision of VE simultaneously with an increased budget for Palliative Care. Certainly, our world is about financial pressures and trade offs. As my mother once said "you never have enough money to do all the things you want to". There are always going to be budgetary pressures, and people are going to politically abuse this fact where they can. It is for us to own our collective choices, and not use the bugbear of "what **might** happen" as an excuse to avoid ownership of the issue. I'd never want to have VE used as an excuse to limit or reduce funding for Palliative Care.

Getting past the yes/no issue, there was the issue of the medicalisation of VE. Dr. Nitschke wanted to keep doctors out of it, while Fr. Frank Brennan wanted to keep VE as a medical speciality.

Here I could see both sides. However, in one area I agreed with Fr. Brennan - VE should not be considered a service which is obligatory to provide - if a doctor will provide it, the state would not stop it from being offered, but nor would it oblige its provision.

It's an interesting contrast - I don't believe doctors are obliged to carry out abortions, and we can wonder whether Chemists are obliged to sell contraceptives. But it seems unlikely VE would ever turn into an obligation for doctors.

-John August

Future Famine Fears

"Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist." - attributed to economist Kenneth Boulding.

A forum on Future world without growth? was held on 14 April at UTS. organised by Sustainable Population Australia. (Sydney contact HumSoc member George Carrard, see back page Viewpoints)

Details of the speakers are as follows. I was able to attend only the first segment:

Julian Cribb explained the reasons why we are facing future famine. Julian, one of Australia's foremost science communicators, has 32 awards for journalism and has written and edited eight books including *The Coming Famine*. (<http://www.sciencealert.com.au/jca.html>)

Dr Graham Turner spoke about the famous book "Limits to Growth". Contrary to popular myths, Graham's research shows that their 'business-as-usual' scenario of global collapse over coming decades, is a remarkably accurate account of the global economic-environmental system. Both their work and Graham's more detailed modelling of the Australian system indicate that achieving sustainability requires herculean changes in population, technology, consumption and work-life balance. Following a distinguished career as a physicist, Graham is now a whole-of-system sustainability analyst at the CSIRO. (<http://www.csiro.au/files/files/plje.pdf>)

Professor Dexter Dunphy led a discussion on corporate change programs aiming for sustainability. Dexter is a leading authority on corporate sustainability, and supporter of sustainability initiatives within the University of Technology Sydney and other organisations. He is Emeritus Professor in the School of Management at University of Technology Sydney.

Mr Cribb reports the challenge is to double food production to feed 10 billion by 2060: this in a world where water availability is being cut in half, much agricultural land built on or desertified, global warming of 2 degrees by 2050 already locked in, no fossil fuels, costly fertilisers, less investment and less technology. Food insecurity leads to conflict over land and water, government failures and migrant tsunamis.

He also mentioned the problem of the megacities, for example Manila is expected to be 36 million by 2030. These cities cannot feed themselves and would start to starve within 3 days. If cut off by natural disaster or isolated due to quarantine, there will be species wide cognition over the internet, which will maybe shock humanity into change. (We have already seen something like this with George Bush's neglect of New Orleans after Katrina).

Mr Cribb does see opportunities, given the political will to confront the problems. He suggests massive reinvestment in agricultural science; investment in farming, soil science, and food delivery systems; a change of global diet to less meat and dairy, and redesign of cities to recycle water and food nutrients. Urban farming and fish farming are to be encouraged, no food wastage, less transport of food, research knowledge of traditional edible plants, high tech foods and more respect for food.

Despite the opportunities he says it is simply not possible to feed 10 billion on this planet. Poverty reduction (and education of women) is the best way to reduce the birthrate. The Australian population is not sustainable unless the global population is sustainable.

(reported by A. Drury)

Enlightened Values

Victor Bien

Defending and promoting the values of the Enlightenment should be an objective of our Humanist Society.

My idea or realisation that the Enlightenment is a suitable "meta" objective will work as an organiser or "wrapper" for our several, disparate, more specific objectives such as the separation of church and state, differences over atheism versus "positive" humanism, differences over what we should understand as "religion" which comes into sharp relief in the personal/cultural differences between members who support celebrants and those who are indifferent to it or perhaps even hostile to it, abortion law reform, euthanasia law reform, environment/sustainability policies, foreign aid policies, debates about left-right policies such as free markets and regulation etc. Over the decades this situation has been sometimes described as Humanists having an "identity" crisis. Importantly, and closely related to this situation is ambiguity, uncertainty and even disagreement of what sort of future we want to build and related to that what sort of people we want to attract to membership.

The membership issue saw a serious outcome or event in recent times when the Society suddenly was confronted by a whole cohort of people whose values were quite at odds with the broad membership and the tradition of the Society. That situation built over many many years - the genesis being when we adopted a "membership drive" stance from about the mid 90s in my opinion. So as you know we went through a traumatic period of having to strip the membership from certain people - to "expel" them - to use the term of our Constitution.

What made for great difficulty for the Society was that most of these unsuitable people were basically atheist and supported the separation of church and state. So on the face of it you'd think at first blush that they'd make suitable members. The problem was their political views in another aspect of life put them at odds with broad Humanist values. If you want to know more details speak to someone on the Committee. Our freedom of speech on these matters are seriously hampered by Australian defamation laws.

Now here is a small citation about the Enlightenment from the Encyclopaedia Britannica DVD 2012:

Inevitably, the method of reason was applied to religion itself. The product of a search for a natural—rational—religion was Deism, which, although never an organized cult or movement, conflicted with Christianity for two centuries, especially in England and France. For the Deist a very few religious truths sufficed, and they were truths felt to be manifest to all rational beings: the existence of one God, often conceived of as architect or mechanic, the existence of a system of rewards and punishments administered by that God, and the obligation of men to virtue and piety. Beyond the natural religion of the Deists lay the more radical products of the application of reason to religion: skepticism, atheism, and materialism.

The idea of society as a social contract, however, contrasted sharply with the realities of actual societies. Thus the Enlightenment became critical, reforming, and eventually revolutionary. Locke and Jeremy Bentham in England, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Voltaire in France, and Thomas Jefferson in America all contributed to an evolving critique of the arbitrary, authoritarian state and to sketching the outline of a higher form of social organization, based on natural rights and functioning as a political democracy. Such powerful ideas found expression as reform in England and as revolution in France and America.

So with this very selective, excessively terse citation, I think you can see how the concept of the Enlightenment brings into its orbit and unifies all the matters that concern Humanists.

The second part of the above citation when read in conjunction with Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* sets out the basic limits to what is acceptable and what is not in a democratic free society. Central to maintaining a healthy social contract are the notions of the rule-of-law and checks and balances. These two notions limits how far democracy can go either to the right or left.

News in Brief

"No Religion" Fastest Growing

Census 2011 figures released show that the category "No Religion" has shown a marked increase with 5 of the 8 states and territories showing it as the top response. The ACT, Tasmania and SA have the highest number of non-religious at over 28%.

David Nicholls, president of the Atheist Foundation of Australia said, "Today's results released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that Australians with no religion is climbing quite rapidly while the religious and particularly the Christian portion of society is in decline.

The No religion figure for 2006 was 18.7%. This climbed to 22.3% in 2011.

Circumcision ruling backs the rights of the child

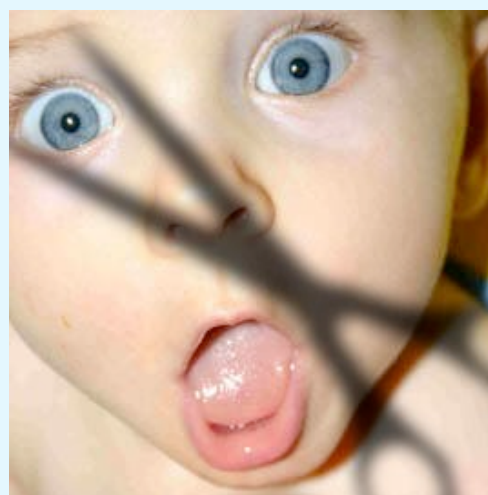
JEWISH and Muslim groups in Germany have condemned a court ruling that deemed circumcision to be equivalent to grievous bodily harm.

The court, in Cologne, declared this week that the procedure violated a child's "fundamental right to bodily integrity". Religious groups said the ruling trampled on freedom of belief and could lead to "circumcision tourism".

The ruling said: "The body of the child is irreparably and permanently changed by a circumcision. This change contravenes the interests of the child to decide later on his religious beliefs."

The case concerned a four-year-old Muslim boy who was circumcised at the request of his parents but was later taken to hospital with bleeding.

The doctor was charged and tried for grievous bodily harm but was acquitted on the grounds that he had parental consent.



Chaplains High Court Challenge Loses Religious Argument

Williams v Commonwealth involved a challenge to the [National School Chaplaincy Program](#) brought by Ronald Williams, a parent of children who attended a State Primary School in Queensland. At the State Primary School the chaplain was employed by Scripture Union of Queensland, which was funded by the Commonwealth. There were several bases for the constitutional challenge. One of the most publicised was the argument that it breached section 116 of the Constitution by requiring a religious test for an office under the Commonwealth.

The High Court unanimously dismissed this argument, and held that the connection between the chaplain and the Commonwealth was not sufficient to render the chaplain an "office under the Commonwealth". Though the funding agreement for the chaplaincy program was held by the majority to be invalid for other legal reasons it is expected that the scheme will continue because both the Government and Coalition support enabling legislation to get around the ruling.

Words and Music



Words and Ideas by David Tribe is available for \$15 for the total benefit of the Humanist Society of NSW. A very popular piece of literature which is selling fast so send in your order with your cheque or money order.



Love is Born CD is composed and the lyrics are written by Dennis Morris (past President of HumSocWA). The songs are English interspersed with Zulu, and are highly relaxing. The \$15 is totally for the benefit of the HumSocNSW so please send in your order with your cheque or money order.

Religious teaching in need of re-boot

Anna Halafoff, a research fellow at Deakin University, calls for a new approach to religious and ethics education in Australian schools.

After last week's High Court challenge verdict on funding chaplains in schools, religious education is back in the headlines.

The role of religion in Australian schools has been vigorously debated for more than a century. Recent events including the landmark High Court case, the pending Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) case outcome in Victoria, the decision to review Special Religious Education programs in NSW, and the move towards a National Curriculum all highlight the need to examine the role of religion in Australia's schools.



A changing curriculum

Before the National Curriculum was conceived in Australia, education had largely been the responsibility of state, rather than federal, governments. Consequently each state's approach was different, and religious school curriculum varied significantly.

While a state by state account is beyond the scope of this article, a brief history of Victorian policies on religion and education provides some insight into the current issues.

From 1872, the secular nature of government schools in Victoria prevented any teaching of or about religion during school hours. There was, however, constant pressure from religious groups to have access to students and unofficial religious instruction did occur.

From the 1950s, volunteers from Christian and Jewish groups were permitted into government classrooms, but instruction was delivered alongside, rather than within, the official curriculum. In the 1990s, other faiths also began

to offer Special Religious Instruction (SRI) programs, which now include Buddhist, Sikh, Baha'i, Hindu and Muslim options.

But it wasn't until 2006 that state policy allowed for the teaching of general religious education (GRE) in Victoria. This involves teaching students about diverse religions within the curriculum. While some faith-based schools and organisations deliver such programs, they are by and large yet to be developed or resourced in Victoria's government schools, except for in Years 11 and 12. Instead, the Victorian government continues to fund ACCESS Ministries, an inter-denominational body that provides Christian education and chaplaincy in government schools. Other Special Religious Instruction providers do not receive state government funding to develop or deliver their programs. SRI classes are intended to instruct children into a particular faith tradition, whereas GRE programs teach children about diverse religions and beliefs and their role in society. Accredited volunteers from religious groups teach SRI, whereas GRE is taught by qualified teachers. Religious teaching in a changing society

There are serious concerns about religious instruction in Australia, as its exclusive nature and its emphasis on particular religious traditions is problematic in an increasingly multi-faith society. International and Australian scholars also argue that educating students about diverse religions and beliefs generates greater levels of inter-religious awareness, respect and understanding, and promotes social inclusion.

Exposing students to many religions is important for promoting tolerance.

Despite a growing number of Victorians not ascribing to any faith, a proposal by the Humanist Society of Victoria to teach ethics classes as a non-religious option was rejected in 2010. In the recent Victorian case, Aitken and Others vs. DEECD, a group of parents argued that their children faced discrimination as a result of not participating in Special Religious Instruction classes. The case was heard in March, but the decision is yet to be announced.

Lagging behind

Australia's government schools have been described by experts such as Cathy Byrne as "lagging behind" other nations with respect to their treatment of religion.

For example, the United Kingdom includes diverse religious education in their government schools and in Canada there are religions and ethics programs.

The National Curriculum provides an opportunity to address this in Australia. The "need to nurture an appreciation of and respect for social, cultural and religious diversity" has been given prominence within the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians and The Shape of the Australian Curriculum documents.

Religion and ethics in the National Curriculum

The Religions, Ethics and Education Network of Australia (REENA) was formed in February 2011 by leading Australian scholars, educators and community leaders. Over the past twelve months REENA has met with senior representatives in the Victorian, New South Wales and federal governments and with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the agency responsible for the development of Australia's National Curriculum, to discuss the place of religion in the National Curriculum.

While it was recently reported that hopes for a separate religion subject or a substantial religion component in Civics and Citizenship within the new Australian Curriculum have been dashed, ACARA is incorporating religions and ethics

education into several subject areas, including History and Civics and Citizenship, and in the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities, such as Intercultural Understanding and Ethical Behaviour.

Opportunities for appropriate resource development, drawing on local and international best practice, are also being considered, in consultation with REENA.

These are, largely, optimistic developments. Awareness of diverse religious and non-religious worldviews is a crucial component for living and working in an increasingly diverse society.

Ensuring that religions and beliefs education is adequately developed and implemented across the National Curriculum will improve religious literacy and provide a critical education about the role of religion in society.

Despite increasing pressure from academics, parents and teachers, however, the issue of Special Religious Instruction in Victorian government schools is yet to be resolved. The recent review of ethics education programs in NSW recommended that Ethics classes should be allowed to continue and that an independent review of Special Religious Education (SRE) programs and ethics classes be conducted in 2014-2015.

REENA has called for a similar review in all Australian states that deliver SRI/SRE programs, with the hope that all Australian schools can offer inclusive religions and beliefs education for all students.

Reprinted courtesy of The Conversation

Stop Debt Vultures

(from Jubilee Australia)

This week saw the Federal Parliament debate Jubilee Australia's proposal for a new law to protect highly indebted poor countries from ending up the prey of profiteering private financial outfits known as vulture funds.

Since 2011 Jubilee Australia has been stirring public sentiments with the story of a small New York based private equity firm that earned \$32 million by suing the Democratic Republic of Congo in an Australian Court. Vulture funds search for debts owed by very poor countries which they can buy from the original lender at a discounted rate, only to sue the country for the full amount (plus interest and fees) in order to make a profit.

Thousands of Australians have sent Stop Debt Vulture postcards to their member of Parliament since the beginning of this year, such that when Jubilee's staff arrived at Parliament House last week to have face-to-face discussions, they found the support of many MPs and Senators right across the political spectrum.

As a result, Independent Member Rob Oakeshott moved a motion in the House of Representatives, seconded by Labor MP Melissa Parke, calling upon the federal government to act - to close the legal loophole which currently allows vulture funds to unconscionably profiteer off the indebtedness of developing country's in Australian courts.

What next?

Next is the Senate, where Jubilee hopes its motion will be moved in the coming days, jointly sponsored by three Senators each representing the different parties. To find out what you can do help, visit the [Stop Debt Vultures](#) campaign website.

Jubilee Australia is an independent non-profit research and advocacy organisation established in 2001. Its work draws attention to the policies of government and practices of business that impede the alleviation of long term poverty, particularly in the Asia Pacific.

Level 7, 379 Kent Street, Sydney NSW / +61 2 8259 0817 / www.jubileeaustralia.org

Member News

from the membership secretary

New member: Welcome to new member Stephen Lee, who is a celebrant.

Expulsions: The members who attended the Special General Meeting of 6 May upheld the resolution of the committee to expel three members, Philip O'Hearn, Hugh Drewitz and Mark Pavic (the vote was 77, 73 and 81% respectively in favour of expulsion). The procedure was painstaking and prolonged in accordance with the requirements of the Constitution.

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Humanist of the Year 1993, Member of the Order of Australia 1988, a talented actor, science journalist and broadcaster, Robyn, presents Radio National's Science Show, Ockham's Razor and In Conversation. Robyn has written more than 10 books and received an Honorary Doctorate in Science from the Universities of Sydney, Macquarie and Deakin.



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Mother, bilingual sociologist, peace activist. Dorothy is also an environmentalist, a feminist and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. As founder of the Ethnic Communities Council Dorothy was, and is still, a vital influence in the ethnic communities.

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