

Humanist Viewpoints

NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW INC



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COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN HUMANISTS 42nd ANNUAL CONVENTION - APRIL 20,21,22 2007

Venue : Jika International Hotel, 551 Heidelberg Road, Fairfield, VIC (telephone (03) 9481 2822; Melway map ref. 31 A11)

Sessions for Humanist members : Friday 20, -- Saturday 21 April 2007

Public sessions : Sunday 22 April 2007 in Chandler Room, open to the public. Price of admission, including lunch and teas, \$40

PROGRAM :

1000-1030: Atheist welfare work in India: Vikas Gora

1030-1050: Morning tea

1050-1235: Human values in schools

1050-1125: Victorian Association for Restorative Justice

1125-1200: Religious bias in Queensland schools: Zelda Bailey

1200-1235: Ethical education versus religious instruction: Harry Gardner

1235-1400: Lunch

1400-1600: Being good without god : Panel discussion: Brian Ellis, Leslie Cannold, Dennis Altman, Dick Gross

1600: Afternoon tea

Enquiries : MLBerg@optusnet.com.au

APPEAL FOR BOOKS

In the recent heavy downpours in Sydney a considerable amount of water flooded the bookshop area at the front of Humanist House. A lot of books were affected and many had to be disposed of. The bookshop has proved to be a useful function of the humanist cause and we would very much appreciate donations of books from members for sale. For further information call David Duffy 9585 9620 (mornings only).

HUVAT

Because the Easter Holiday break coincides with the usual HUVAT/Committee meeting of the second Sunday in April, a decision has been taken to defer the April HUVAT to **Sunday April 15th**. On that day John August will speak on 'Consciousness'. The **May 13th** HUVAT will be Meg Wallace speaking on 'Euthanasia, advance directives and living wills'. On **June 10th** the speakers will be provided by the Sulha Peace Project Listening Circle, speaking about different cultures and their philosophies.

HUMANIST SOCIETY of NSW WEBSITE

<http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/>

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE DUE BY THE 1ST OF JULY EVERY YEAR as follows:

Single \$30, Double \$40, Pensioner/Student \$15, Viewpoints only \$20

Please send to Humanist Society of NSW Inc., 10 Shepherd Street, Chippendale NSW 2008

EDITOR'S COMMENTS

After Meg, your Sub-Editor and I dropped off the previous *Viewpoints* to the printer in December, we flew to New Zealand. We stayed in Wellington for over a week. We met the author of *God Under Howard*, Marion Maddox, and we also had a one and a half hour meeting with the Head of her Religious Studies Department, Professor Paul Morris, who was undertaking a Report on a series of public meetings held in NZ as part of an Inquiry into 'religious diversity', provoked by the Muslim question. The public were asked to make submissions to the Inquiry. I had put in a submission as a member for some years of the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists (NZARH) pointing out, among other things, that it was inappropriate to define the secular nature of NZ out of existence in the terms of reference of the Inquiry. The NZARH and the Wellington-based NZ Humanists Society had also put in submissions. Professor Morris' Report has just come out. The NZARH has had a meeting to discuss the minimalist way he dealt with the secular nature of NZ despite our submissions. As if to confirm what we were arguing, the 2006 census figures have also just been released. 'No Religion' is up 5 percentage points to a significant 31.3 per cent of the population. This is higher than that of Australia around 16 per cent, not including 'no response' to the religion question. Combining the two gives a figure of about 25 per cent. On yet another matter, I put in a joint submission with the President of the NZARH, Liz McKenzie, to the NZ Charities Commission's call for submissions to its Inquiry as to what information concerning charities should be made public. It's important to know that 'advancing religion' is held to be a charitable activity. This means all religions that satisfy the criteria for the legal definition of religion are charities and



eligible for tax-exempt status. We argued everything concerning their finances should be on the public record as they are hugely supported by all taxpayers. The Charities Commission response to submissions will be interesting as we were not alone in calling for transparency. Watch this space. Australia does not have a Charities Commission although one was recommended by the 2000 Charities Definitions Inquiry. It was opposed by the Catholic Church. Government is avoiding questions about it.

Meg and I also spoke at Rationalist House on 17 December after we moved to Auckland from Wellington. Meg spoke on '*What's religion got to do with it?*' arguing that religion is just one belief among many and should have no special status. The title of my talk was '*Understanding la laicite*', a description of French secularism. This talk was 'U-tubed' and can be viewed on the NZARH website. We had a good crowd and useful discussion. After returning to Sydney, I was interviewed for half an hour on secular matters on the Kim Hill program on Radio New Zealand on 27 January. NZARH have also put that interview on its website. Finally, before we left NZ a very important book was published – Nicky Hager's *The Hollow Men*. It reveals how the conservative NZ National Party were working hand in glove with members of the secretive, ultra-conservative Exclusive Brethren sect during the last NZ election. When this was revealed during the course of the election National lost its lead in the polls and Labour's Helen Clark, an atheist was re-elected Prime Minister. After the election, the leader of the Nationals, Don Brash, tried to stop the publication of the book with an injunction, but failed. After its release, he resigned. Recommended reading. Finally, on 26 March I ran a 'What is Humanism? What is Secularism?' workshop for Continuing Education at ANU. I hope to find a venue at one of the Sydney universities for this workshop in the future as well. **Max Wallace.**

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

On several previous occasions I advised of the moves the Humanist Society had made to amalgamate with the Rationalist Association. You will no doubt be wondering what has happened in relation to this.



To recap, both the Humanist and Rationalist organizations share a common history (the Humanist Society of NSW having been originally set up by Rationalist Association members) and both organizations retain common core values. However by 2004, in different ways, both organizations found themselves under a cloud. The Rationalists had been in decline for some years with a dwindling and aging membership and prior to their 2005 AGM had not had a meeting for some time. The Humanist Society, while retaining a strong membership base and an active meeting schedule, nevertheless faced questions about its long term financial prospects with operating costs marginally but consistently exceeding income. Together, we recognized that the combined organization would have a strong membership and financial base and could look forward to promoting Humanist and Rationalist values for the indefinite future.

Humanist Society members approved the proposed merger at the 2005 AGM and in their AGM in the same year, the Rationalists voted almost unanimously to amalgamate with us. Meetings of a specially formed committee led to a new set of rules for the combined organizations being written and at subsequent EGMs of both organizations in early 2006 these rules and an agreed merger process were adopted. All that remained was for the appropriate paperwork, including audited financial returns, to be submitted to the Department of Fair Trading.

The Humanist Society prepared the necessary documents, but unfortunately, eighteen months later, the Rationalists have persistently failed to do so.

At the last AGM of the Rationalists in 2006, a number of members tried to pass a resolution calling on their executive to proceed with the amalgamation forthwith, but this was opposed by the executive and lost on the President's casting vote. The members of the Rationalists did however not vote to reverse their 2005 decision to amalgamate.

At the last meeting of the Humanist Society committee I asked the President of the Rationalists what the status of the amalgamation process was. She informed the committee that the Rationalists were still considering the issue.

The problem for us is that a failure to amalgamate will call into question the long term survival of the Humanist Society and, as President, I believe that ensuring the Society's survival is my paramount responsibility.

A majority of the members of the Rationalists are of course at liberty to decide not to amalgamate at any stage. But as such an action would be severely prejudicial to the interests of the Humanist Society, it would be consistent for any Rationalists who are also Humanist Society members and voted against amalgamation, to resign from this Society.

Without amalgamation, given the parlous state of our finances, the Society, I suggest, should consider selling Humanist House to solve the problem. There are no funds to refurbish Humanist House. It is near the end of its economic life. The society could consider following the model of the Victorian Humanists who hire rooms (such as the Balwyn Library) as they require them, while keeping their finances secure.

Richard Howard.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Angela Drury

A warm welcome to NEW MEMBERS

Kristopher Evans, Noelene George, Peter Markham, Max Lees, Meg Hodder, Nicola Corcoran, Lilia Walters-Black, Ralph Seccombe, Johanne Knowles, and Les Shearman.



Thank you for generous DONATIONS to members Lola Archer, Peter Markham, Ralph Seccombe, Ian Warwick, Frank Aitchison, and Brendan Kavanagh.

A BOOK LAUNCH for Vicki Potempa's autobiography *Of my Shoulders* was held at Humanist House on Friday 2 March. It was very well attended and several copies of the book sold. Vicki has donated 50 books to the Humanist Society of NSW to be sold at \$35 each as a fundraiser.

Thanks are due to Robin Hall who donated the wine for the night, to young Miranda Drury who attended to serving drinks, and to Affie Adagio and others who bought and arranged the food.

Vicki introduced her life story; Meg Wallace referred to her review of the book; Angela Drury read two passages of interest; Brett from Justice Action and Breakout Printing spoke of Vicky's activism for prisoners and her prison visiting; and Margaret Kirkby from Womens' Abortion Action paid tribute to Vicki's work for abortion rights and womens' rights.

It was a successful, social evening crowning Vicki's many years as a humanist and as an active member of NSW Humanists.

OFFICE BEARERS

President: Richard Howard.

Vice Presidents: Affie Adagio, David Duffy.

Treasurer: Victor Bien.

Public Officer: Meg Wallace.

Committee: John August, Anthony D'Angiolillo, David Duffy, Sturt Duncan, Brian Edwards, Gillian Ellis, Fred Flatow, Harry Giann, Robin Hall, Ian Jones, John Markovina, Steve Maxwell, Max Wallace, Meg Wallace, Ann Young.

OFF MY SHOULDERS BY VICKI POTEPA Book Review

This book, designed and printed by Breakout 2007, is extraordinary in several ways.

Firstly, it is written by an extraordinary person, but more of that later.

The book is also extraordinary in that Vicki has provided an extensive story of her life to pass on to her grandchildren. That is something so few of us manage to do.

Vicki's memory has served her well. Her story lays out for us a fascinating tale of a life that spans from Malta to Cairo to Nairobi and through many countries in her youth, to Australia as a young woman who found life was far from a piece of cake. Her later travels span the globe, and provide a rich background to her many experiences. Her vivid and detailed descriptions of places, events and people, provide much detail and colour to her full and very busy life.

Vicki would probably be the first to admit she is not a polished writer, but she is articulate and her story flows with such ease that takes you along, wondering what on earth will happen next.

The book is also extraordinary in the tale she has to tell. Vicki worked as a linguist for the allied forces in the war, was accused of being a traitor for befriending

an Italian POW (after the war had ended), literally built her own home in Sydney, and physically and financially supported the housing of others in her extended family. And of course, she got involved with NSW Humanists for whom she worked tirelessly for 40 years. Her long and active involvement with us has been recognised by life membership as well as working with women's action groups (particularly in the movement for abortion reform legislation: a cause for which she has special interest, as her account of her own experience demonstrates). If that is not enough, Vicki also got involved in a volunteer prisoners' welfare program.

This is only a brief sketch of her achievements and does not do justice to Vicki's tenacity in facing the many challenges, disappointments and heartbreaks life threw at her. It takes a book to tell her story, and Vicki does this best herself.

The book is an important contribution to our historical records. It is very much an Australian story even though Vicki's childhood was spent elsewhere. It chronicles the life of a post-war immigrant up to 1950s Sydney, giving us an understanding of the sexist and racist discrimination that women faced in the nations of her childhood, and then Australia, at the time. We follow the struggles she had to provide herself and her family with a home (or should I say homes – it was hard to keep count!). It is difficult for us today to appreciate the backbreaking, soul-destroying effects of the scant recognition of women's perceived role as the servants of their husbands and the bearer and carer of their children at that time. Lack of educational opportunities was also a crippling factor. Times are changing, although very slowly. Vicki recounts her developing political awareness through the early women's movement with its activities in setting up women's shelters and abortion law reform activities that I joined in other places at a later time.

Vicki doesn't mince words. She tells things as she sees them. At times the story becomes rather personal, and Vicki's opinion of people and events is less than flattering. This is her story, however: this is Vicki... take her as she is. Although I only first met Vicki some months ago, after reading her book I feel I now know her quite well.

Finally, Vicki is an extraordinary person who speaks several languages, can build and demolish houses, sew prolifically, raise children, earn enough money to support extended family by just about any means, negotiate anything and survive whatever life throws at her ... and write a book! This is Vicki Potempa's Australian story: an insight into the everyday experiences of a battler.

Meg Wallace.

***THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP
MUST BE OVER BETWEEN THE
STATE AND THE CHURCH SAYS
IRISH MP***

Speech by Liz O'Donnell T.D. (member of Parliament, Progressive Democrats) delivered in Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament), on Wednesday 9th November 2005 on a report that detailed widespread abuse of children at the hands of the Catholic Church in Ireland. (Edited for length).

A Ceann Comhairle, it is difficult to overstate the importance of this Report produced by Judge Frank Murphy and his colleagues. It is a landmark document in the context of child sexual abuse - abuse compounded in its gravity because the actors were members of the most trusted group in our society.

The victims, children of all ages, suffered not only the most awful forms of sexual, physical and psychological abuse at the



hands of clergy, but also suffered the silence, betrayal and inaction on the part of the Church who placed the protection of the most vulnerable below the Church's priority of protecting themselves and protecting the Church. Child protection came last.

The End of The Special Relationship

This Report, however, is landmark in another aspect. It will change forever the special relationship that has existed for many decades between Church and State. This Report must be the starting point for the State's response to all contained in it.

This new beginning cannot happen unless the old relationship ends. The unrelenting deference, which constituted the relations between State and Church. It was given and expected.

It was extremely influential in terms of outcome. It must end absolutely. Only then can the State act as it should as we go forward – objectively.

The systemic failure outlined in the Report means that nothing less is acceptable. If the Church leadership, the hierarchy, were a Cabinet, it would resign *en masse* or be thrown out of office. But the Church is neither democratic nor accountable. In many ways it is a secret organisation - with its own diplomatic service, civil service, laws and self-regulatory codes, which have failed the public.

Because the Church in Ireland was the main interface with God, the Irish people and the State have shown deference personally and collectively over many decades. This veil of deference is the root cause of society's failure to stop the Church's systemic mal-administration and dereliction of duty to protect children as outlined in terms of the Report. Because what happened in one diocese is just a microcosm of the situation in all dioceses, the findings are damning in their import.

The fact is, there have been hundreds of crimes of clerical abuse against children,

which went unpunished. Priests were transferred instead of being exposed. Priests with propensity to offend were ordained, appointed to curacies. Bishops colluded and covered up these matters.

The first response of the State must be to unequivocally state that the special relationship is no more and to take steps to demonstrate that disconnect between State and Church. From now on, with that veil of deference removed, the State can deal with the Church authorities in the same way as it would any other voluntary or State agency that provides services for children and families.

This means no longer accepting the good offices of an admittedly remorseful hierarchy, after the event. The track record is such that we cannot accept that the Church will be truthful or capable of self-regulation.

The late disclosure of files by the Church to Ferns Inquiry shows that the instinct for self-preservation and denial is still rife.

This 'no more Mr. Nice Guy' approach by the State means no longer countenancing the unhealthy enmeshing of the Church in the secular layers of our society. It means no more consultation between Church and State on IVF. On abortion services. On stem cell research. On Ireland's support for family planning in the third world. On contraception or supports for single mothers. On adoption. On homosexuality. On civil marriage.

This also means, like it or not, looking at the church's almost universal control of education. Our national school system was established 170 years ago and while they were originally meant to be (to use today's terminology) mixed religion or multi-denominational, in practice, it did not happen. As a result, virtually all national schools are under the management of one church – the Catholic Church.

Despite the State paying the bulk of the building and running costs, the relevant church authorities privately own and control the vast majority of national schools. The Bishops are patrons of 95% of national schools (3,013).

The same institution that has been found so wanting, effectively decides who is suitable or not to work in our children's schools. If our stated commitment to "taking all necessary action to protect children" is to be more than rhetoric, it is imperative that we radically address this issue. Indeed the investigation into the Archdiocese of Dublin should deal with transfers of lay teachers for allegations of child abuse without due regard to child protection.

The Money Trail

I'd like to turn, Ceann Comhairle, to the neuralgic issue of money. Again in light of the terrible wrongs suffered by victims, discussing the finances might be viewed as unseemly. But money has been a motivating factor in the actions and inactions of the Church authorities in this whole subject.

Central to the Church's self-serving response over the years have been private financial settlements without liability, as well as confidentiality deals.

If the State is carrying out audits in every diocese, investigations that could uncover scores of previously undisclosed abuse cases, I believe they must also audit the Church's wealth. Given the nature and extent of the wrongdoing of this institution against citizens, the Church should be obliged to open up its books. Discovery orders should be made to gain some understanding of the money trail. Such an audit of Church assets and wealth is long overdue and should have taken place prior to the indemnity given to the religious orders. I note also that, true to form, the Church has the temerity to claim €100,000 for their legal costs for dealing with the Ferns Inquiry.

It is estimated that the Church now faces a compensation bill of up to €250 million for clerical sex abuse resulting from existing claims and new cases set to emerge following the publication of the Ferns Report. On top of this is the €128 million already paid to victims of abuse in children's homes run by religious orders.

Going back to the need for separation and objectivity between Church and State. Sadly, it is difficult to argue that this was the paradigm within which the negotiations on the indemnity deal struck by the government with the religious orders, took place.

The cost to the orders, as I said, was about €128 million while the cost to the State would be a blank cheque- the State covering every single lawsuit brought against the congregations for child abuse in reformatories and industrial schools. This is not, of course, to understate the share of responsibility the State had for some of the horrors that unfolded in those places. But, the uncomfortable fact is that in several cases taken in the courts by victims outside the redress scheme, the liability of the State has not been proven.

So blanket indemnity was overgenerous by the State - why? All roads lead to the deference of the special relationship.

The result was a bad deal for the State and a good deal for the religious orders. Initial estimates of the potential liability were in the region of €250 million. Three or four times that amount may prove closer to reality, in terms of liability to the taxpayer.

The special relationship has not served Ireland or its citizens well, and it did not serve the victim's of abuse well. For example, the implication posed in the Ferns Report is that complaints of sexual abuse made against priests to the Gardaí [police] were handled inadequately. Evidence given to the inquiry team shows that some complaints made to Gardaí do not seem to have been recorded in any

Gárda file. Most worryingly, they do not appear to have been investigated in an appropriate manner, due reluctance of members of the Gardaí to investigate allegations against members of the Catholic clergy.

Again the veil of deference descended. Undoubtedly progress has been made in relation to the relationship between the Gardaí and the Church, and this must continue.

I welcome the Government's commitment to introduce new legislation. But legislation alone will not suffice. The law must operate and apply in a context of objectivity and cool detachment. Victims, family members, friends, politicians and Gardaí and judges must not be deterred or reluctant to speak out and act in these matters. I welcome that the Government is to move to allow for barring orders against persons, including priests, who are a risk to children in order to restrain them from occupying any employment that exposes them to children and a new criminal offence of failing to protect children from injury or sexual abuse, or reckless endangerment.

Non-prosecution

I want to turn, a Cheann Comhairle, to the failure to prosecute cases of child abuse. For many years, I have been baffled by the non-prosecution of child abuse cases even when validated by the Health Boards.

As Opposition Spokesperson for Justice from 92 to 97 I tabled dozens of parliamentary questions to the Taoiseach [Prime Minister], for the DPP, asking why the statistics were skewed? Because of my interest over many years I became a contact point for many families, exasperated because of non-prosecutions. The DPP does not give reasons – leaving victims and their families distraught.

In some cases it was because of delay. Frequently the accused would take civil actions seeking to stop the prosecution on the grounds that delay in prosecution

prejudiced the defendant's right to a fair trial. This device was successfully used by the notorious child rapist George Gibney, who escaped prosecution and is now living abroad. Many abusers have availed of this and it is the judiciary, not the State that have developed to some extent the law in this regard.

In my view we must change the law to state that delay alone cannot be used by the defendant in child abuse allegations, to stop prosecution. The passage of time, and thus delay, is part and parcel of child abuse. Many victims will only disclose when they are safe or adult.

In summary, a Cheann Comhairle, it is time for straight talking and respectful disengagement by the State from the Irish Catholic Church across all sectors. This enmeshed relationship has been characteristic of Irish life since the foundation of the State.

One recalls [former President] De Valera's drafts of Bunreacht na hÉireann [Constitution] being edited, page by page, by the Hierarchy. And my own Party's unhappy but courageous suggestion of disengagement known as “taking God out of the Irish Constitution”.

One recalls the many battles, mostly lost, between State and Church; the pregnant women isolated and condemned from pulpits, dismissed from schools, banished to Magdalene laundries. The unrelenting deference expected and given at State functions and in terms of diplomatic protocol. (The papal Nuncio is numero uno in our diplomatic corps); the non-extradition of [pedophile priest] Brendan Smyth; the related intrigue in the Attorney-General's Office. Issues never really resolved as to any Church's involvement; the millions paid out in private financial settlements by the Archdiocese of Dublin and perhaps others; the abortion referenda and the wording being negotiated with the Bishops and the pro-life movement; my own mauling when as a Minister, in July 2001, I criticised the Church authorities

for doing what this Report has now found – transferring paedophile priests rather than exposing them for prosecution; the fact that many priests so transferred went on to play leading roles in the child abuse scandals in the United States; the secrecy about money and possible movement offshore thereof; the hiring of the best lawyers, the hardball played by them on the Church's behalf, and it still goes on; the deafening and immoral silence of the Vatican on the Ferns Report.

It is overwhelming. It is compelling. There is no other way to say it. The special relationship must be over between the State and the Church.

<p>LIBERAL CALLS THE NSW DIVISION OF HIS PARTY 'CULTISH'</p>

Writing in *The Canberra Times* on 30 March 2007 Liberal Party member Irfan Yusuf said the NSW Liberal Party was now like a cult. Irfan Yusuf was an endorsed Liberal candidate in local government and Federal elections. He was a delegate to the NSW Liberal Party State Council until 2000. He was writing following the Liberal Party's loss in the recent 2007 NSW Election. He argued 'when small "l" liberal John Brogden led the party in the 2003 election he received hardly any assistance from the NSW Young Liberals ... the NSW Young Liberals had just been taken over by an ultra-conservative faction led by a staffer of a right-wing NSW upper house member with close ties to [the Catholic cult] Opus Dei.'

Yusuf said a far-right section of the conservative wing of the Liberal Party organisation saw Brogden as an enemy. He claimed that when 'Brogden faced an internal pre-selection for his seat in 1998, I sat on his preselection panel. I was approached by members of the far-right, some of whom attended as observers, and asked to put a difficult question to Brogden. One of those who discussed the preselection question with me said, 'This Brogden fellow has to be stopped. Can you imagine him as leader? Or worse still, as Premier?''

He claimed the factional disputes in the NSW Liberal Party have ended: 'The zealous converts have taken over the now dominant conservative wing. Far from being a broad church, the party now more resembles a cultish congregation where position comes at the price of supporting a narrow set of socially conservative principles.' He claims 'the current dominating forces in the NSW party are driven almost exclusively by ideology ... As the ABC *Four Corners* program entitled "The Right Stuff" (broadcast in July 2006) showed, this new right has even gone to the extent of sidelining conservatives who do not agree with its narrow religious and ideological agenda.'

He argued 'the only person who has any ability to rein in this far-right cabal is the Prime Minister himself. The situation has become so bad that now the NSW Nationals are openly canvassing the possibility of dissolving the Coalition. One can hardly blame them. Any continued association with a party dominated by such ultra-conservatives is virtually unelectable. When that happens, the Liberals might find the only party willing to enter into a Coalition agreement will be Fred Nile's Christian Democrats.'

Interestingly, on 28 March, two days before Yusuf's article, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that 'controversial Liberal MP David Clarke, a member of the ultra-conservative Catholic organisation Opus Dei, booked the [NSW Parliament's] Theatre for [a] seminar to celebrate Harmony Day.' The problem was that forum was hosted by 'Youth for Human Rights Australia' whose main sponsor is the Church of Scientology. The *Telegraph* reported that 'fifteen Canterbury Girls High School legal studies students complained about ... [the] forum.' This is all a bit strange. The Catholic Church detests the Church of Scientology. In France the Catholic-influenced, influential newspaper *Le Monde*, often reports the travails of the Church of Scientology there. As someone forgettable once said 'please explain.'

DARWIN DAY: 1

Event at Georges River College, Senior campus at Oatley: Speakers invited were Dr Andrew Simpson Macquarie U to speak on Fossils, Natural History, Museums and Charles Darwin and Dr Anne Musser Australian Museum to speak on Australian Megafauna. Despite sending direct invites to 33 high school head science teachers again we had no students turn up! I am wondering whether the the formula is wrong or out-of-date or whether there is some sort of defamation of the Darwin Day event by rabid creationists discouraging teachers from sending excursions to attend. I have to do some investigation to find out about this last aspect. (We should note that my daughter's teacher said, she was a creationist but had to go along with the Board of Studies' Syllabus because that was what she was obliged to teach. I know from my previous Christian life that there are significant number of Christians in the science teaching service). We have in mind a different approach in contacting teachers for the event in 2008.

The Australian Museum ran two events for Darwin Day, 1. on the 13th Feb when Prof Rick Shine, evolutionary biologist, of Sydney U spoke on how essential it is to use evolution theory to effectively control Cane Toads. 2. Flock of Dodo's DVD film focussing the intelligent design (ID) movement in America. The evolution of cane toads has a human interest dimension, something like what David Attenborough might have shown.

It was feared that the cane toad was another introduced pest like rabbits whose population would tend to explode due to lack of natural predators. What most upset people was that the furry quoll of Kakadu National Park were threatened with extinction by this monster. Snakes have also been hard hit but not all. There is a red bellied black snake that is successfully evolving resistance to the toxin. But Prof Shine found that the toads do have other effective predators notably ibis like birds

who know how to flip the toad over to eat them without touching their poison sacs.

We tend to think of evolution has working very slowly but Shine found that evolution can be very rapid as seen in certain aspects of the toad. The toads who are at the forefront of the migration north towards Darwin are dramatically different compared with the toads who stay put in northern Queensland. He found that the fast migrators jump up to 50 times further per day (up to 1km/night) than the ones who stay put and also jump much more consistently in one direction than the ones that stay put. They know to jump along highways because that is the fastest way. There is an evolutionary advantage in being the first in new territory - more food, more choice of food less competition from other toads... He commented that "the fast migrators are different guys from the ones that stay put". Similarly other aspects of toads evolve fast as well. They evolve fast because they are enormously fecund and their life cycle is fast. I don't remember whether they live reasonably a long time as well.

The important point for Darwin Day is that it is essential to keep evolution in account to most cost effectively manage this pest. I think the dodo analogy was that ID is yet another invalid idea on its way to extinction just as the flat earth idea, the sun goes around the earth idea and the phlogiston theory of heat idea all went extinct; however, there is the worrying thought that extinction may go the other way - that science and the project of the enlightenment may go extinct due to the closing-in of a multiplicity of anti-science, anti-rationalist, anti-open society movements - fundamentalist religions and ideologies of all sorts, postmodernism etc. If we properly realise this we realise that the Humanist Movement has its work cut out for it!!

Victor Bien

DARWIN DAY: 2

This year's other Darwin Day public event was held in conjunction with the **Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts in the Sydney CBD**. Darwin day is an international event, with Richard Dawkins its patron, with the aim of celebrating Darwin and evolution. The event was well attended, with about 60 people. It seems about half found out about it from SMSA promotion, with the remainder through promotion by other means - which could include the event being listed on the NSW Humanists web site, the International Darwin Day website, and my own emails to the Australian Science Communicator and other lists. In any case, we can only call it a success, based on the number of people who attended. It would be even better to know we were "reaching out" to people who were not much familiar with evolution and Darwin; maybe we're not, but for sure Darwin Day is making an impact, and its only a matter of riding the wave. Dr Andrew Simpson from Macquarie University was our first speaker, who spoke about natural history museums and some of the geological ideas in vogue prior to modern geology and evolution. He painted a fascinating picture of times long past. When one human objective was to catalogue God's diversity, and a favourite passtime of priests was to catalogue the natural history of their area. At the same time, museums were row upon row of diverse animals without any structure. Further, there were some attempts to date the earth based on the height of fossils which were assumed to God's failed creations from the flood and the rate at which water receded - and these calculations were a *lot* longer than contemporary Christian ideas about the age of the earth! Robin Holliday, a molecular geneticist, spoke on the incompatibility between science and religion. Science has effectively solved the "mystery of life", understanding its chemical processes - fundamentally, there is no need to call upon a God to explain the modern world. We've no need for miracles, the stuff of religion, in science. And the contrast between

evidence for evolution and the general public's awareness of the details of evolution - not to mention those who believe in Creationism - is staggering. We had a lively discussion and it was an event which people seemed to appreciate. I noticed about five Humanists known to me in the audience - the event was a good one, both for Humanists and the general public.

John August

VALE BERYL DALEY 1916 - 2007

It is with great regret that we inform you of the death of one of Humanism's most decorated members, Beryl Daley. Major Stevenson, as she then was, was one of only two Australians who were awarded the American Legion of Merit Medal, the other being General Sir Thomas Blamey, for their contribution to the war effort. She served in Singapore, New Guinea, Leyte, Manila, and Okinawa and was present at the surrender of the Japanese.

After mothering five children she enrolled at university and went on to become a lecturer in English Literature.

Beryl's Humanist activities included establishing a women's program on ABC radio, and the Alternative Publishing Co-operative Ltd know as APCOL. Later she became a director of an alternative living community near Port Macquarie.

The North Shore Group of the Humanist Society enjoyed the occasional meeting at Beryl's home at Chinaman's Beach and talks by her on topics arising from her Divinity Studies at Sydney University.

Our Society is much the poorer from this loss.

Ann Young

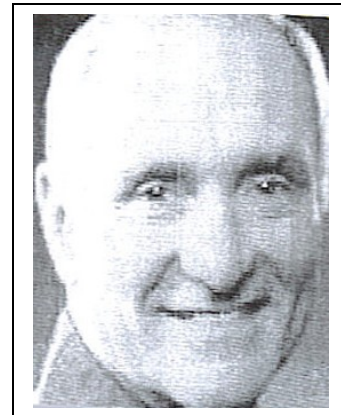
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SOCIETY

OUR PATRON



Robyn Williams AM

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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