

Fighting the National School Chaplaincy Program

A brief look at the reasons the Rationalists think Chaplains are doing more harm than good in Australian Schools.

Edited from a submission to Education Minister Simon Crean by RSA Secretary Meredith Doig.

Of the many low points in the federal election, one of the lowest was Julia Gillard's pandering to prop up her party's dismal showing in Queensland. She agreed to a demand by the Australian Christian Lobby to throw \$222 million at the parachurch ministries seeking to dismantle our once distinguished secular education system.

The RSA don't deny that children are in need of pastoral care. If individual religious chaplains provide such care, then we do not object as long as that's all they do. But the evidence from the organisations (Scripture Union, Access Ministries etc) that provide these religious chaplains gives their tactics away. We all know that they are in the business of 'recruiting for Jesus', no matter what they may say publicly. For example:

In the foreword to a book on school chaplains, Scripture Union's CEO, Tim Mander admits: 'To have a full-time Christian presence in government schools in this ever-increasing secular world is an unbelievable privilege. Here is the church's opportunity to make a connection with the one place through which every young person must attend: our schools.'

At a time when we desperately need more rather than less scientific literacy, these organisations hold to a literal interpretation of the bible. For example:

The Scripture Union believes and expects its chaplains to believe that '... the Old and New Testament

Scriptures are God-breathed, since their writers spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; hence are fully trustworthy in all that they affirm; and are our highest authority for faith and life.' (Scripture Union – Aims and Beliefs)

How can the Government support a program – no, more than support, fund a program that is staffed by people whose organisation thinks the Old and New Testaments are 'fully trustworthy in all that they affirm'? Does this include, for example, the possession of slaves (Leviticus 25:44), selling daughters into slavery (Exodus 21:7), or killing anyone who works on the sabbath (Exodus 35:2)?

Unlike in America, religion has not until recently been a major political force in Australia. But with the strength of their partisan lobbying growing by the day, one has to ask: 'Where are they getting their funding?' Some of these religious bodies are international organisations, with explicit mandates to recruit young impressionable minds. For example:

A directive from a Scripture Union International says 'We believe that our mandate is to bring children and young people into the life of established churches by programs that serve them in environments in which they feel comfortable', and 'We believe that, in the case of families that are not Christian, the evangelism of the whole family rather than of children in isolation

is still our objective. However, if this cannot immediately be realised, we believe that God still calls us to evangelise children themselves.' (Scripture Union International, 2005, p 5)

In Australia, National School Chaplaincy Program (NSCP) guidelines proscribe proselytising, but it's hard to know what actually goes on. Scripture Union encourages their chaplains to get kids into out-of-school activities, where they are removed from teacher or parental scrutiny. For example:

'The good news is that God is doing some incredible work through the ministries of SU Queensland. School chaplaincy, camps and missions are exposing thousands of young people and children to the good news of Jesus every year.' (SU News, June 2006).

'We intentionally make opportunities to present life-giving messages that invite children to respond positively to Jesus. Our approach is urgent because children will, by their nature and because of the world in which they live, turn away from God unless they are evangelised and nurtured.' (Scripture Union International, 2005)

'Last year alone, over 2500 kids went on SU Queensland camps where many committed their lives to Jesus for the first time.' (2006 Scripture Union newsletter).

As the submission the RSA made for the NSCP review points out, most chaplains are not qualified for much

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Free Thought and Progressive Events

Humanist Society of Victoria Inc

Balwyn Library Meeting Room, 336 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn (Melway map 46 E8), Victoria. 7.30 pm for 8. All welcome, entry by donation. Enquiries: ph. (03) 9857 8318

28 September

Alex McCullie (Council of Adult Education), on 'A current look at humanist morality.'

Victorian Atheist Society

Venue: Unitarian Hall, 110 Grey Street, East Melbourne. Melways Map 2G, D2. (Opposite the old Mercy Hospital). Car parking on Hall forecourt (Additional spaces at rear of Hall, enter via driveway on left of building). Second Tuesday of the month at 8pm. Visit <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~atheist/>>

14 September

Russell Blackford (Co-editor of *50 Voices of Disbelief*) 'Living in a world without objective values.'

12 October

Ian Robinson (Rationalist Society of Australia President) 'A Rationalist fallen among theologians.'

09 November

Tamas Pataki (Author of *Against Religion*) 'Religion and mental illness.'

Australian Skeptics Victorian Branch

Skeptics' Cafe
La Notte Café,
140 Lygon St, Carlton.
Third Monday of the month
6 to 9pm. A casual evening of
discussion. Meal from 6pm.
Donation requested. Everyone
welcome. Visit <<http://vicskeptics.wordpress.com/>>

20 September

Lynne Kelly 'A skeptic tackles Stonehenge.'

18 October 18

Video Night, hosted by Peter Bromley.

15 November

Ian Enting, author of *Twisted: The distorted mathematics of greenhouse denial*.

Existentialist Society

Venue: (See Atheist Society) First Tuesday of the month at 8pm. Visit <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~exist/>>

7 September

Dr David Rathbone (Philosophy, University of Melbourne) 'Existentialist? Yes! - but what kind of existentialist? The essence/existence dichotomy.'

5 October

Assoc. Prof. Stan van Hooff (Deakin University) 'The nature of moral obligation.'

Other events

26 October

Annual dinner for members and friends of the Humanist Society of Victoria.
Guest Speaker: **Gary Thomas** (Director of Indigenous Education, La Trobe University).
6.30 pm for 7, Jika International, 551 Heidelberg Rd, Fairfield (Melway map ref. 31 A11).
Three-course dinner including beverages, \$55; cash bar available for pre-dinner drinks.
Book before Friday 15 October: ph. (03) 9857 8318

Information printed here is correct at the time of going to press, but should be checked with the relevant organisation closer to the date.

Brain Teaser!

A numberless problem in numbers

'How old are your three daughters?' asked Tom, to which George replied, 'You should be ashamed to have forgotten, but I'll give you a clue. Their ages add up to the street number of your house.'
'Well, that's useful information, but not enough to work out their ages.'
'Ok, the product of their ages is the same as your own age.'
'Well then, that's really getting somewhere; however I still need more information.'
'Alright. Eloise, who is the eldest, plays the violin.'
'Ah, now I have it! Incidentally, if I had been any younger, these conditions could not have been met.'

How old is Eloise?

Taken from Issue 2 of *The Australian Rationalist Quarterly*, 1980. Answer will be in the October newsletter.

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of the counselling work they do. In their submission to the Review of the NSCP, the Australian Psychological Society expresses severe concern about this:

'When chaplains work outside this role [of spiritual and religious guidance], the risks to both students and schools are immense and will ultimately result in significant costs both financial and human.'

The Society also says there is '... clear evidence schools chaplains are engaging in duties for which they are not qualified ... that church organisations and ministries are supporting school chaplains in their boundary violations ... and that the government is complicit in encouraging dangerous professional behaviour by funding school chaplains independently of other services carried out by professionals who are both qualified and registered.'

This can get serious when they deal with kids at risk of self harm. For example, one chaplain reports '... in the last week I've got two grade 5 kids on suicide watch' (ACCESS Ministries, 2009)

Perhaps the most vulnerable group is teenagers wondering about their sexuality. In a submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee regarding the Marriage Equality Bill 2009, Gen8 Schools Ministries says they 'utterly reject and repudiate' the assumption that homosexuality should be regarded as 'acceptable sexual behaviour'. One can only wonder what sort of counselling chaplains provided by this organisation would provide.

For more information on the National Schools Chaplaincy program, make sure to catch our 5-page editorial on the topic in Issue 86 of the Rationalist Journal.

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To have your event included in this listing, email details to newsletter@rationalist.com.au