

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 602#

SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND THE STATE

A SECULAR AND RELATED MATTERS CHRONOLOGY

Max Wallace

1215 Magna Carta raises the principle of equality through a ‘fair trial for all’, leading to the notion of the rule of law.

1517 Martin Luther posts a document on the front door of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany. It contains 95 theses attacking church indulgences. Luther later spreads his ideas through the newly invented printing press. It is the start of the Reformation.

1533 Henry VIII disestablishes Catholicism in England, sets up the Church of England with himself as head of the church and the state. Henry loots the Catholic churches of their wealth and assets and divorces his first wife.

1601 The Statute of Charitable Uses becomes law in England in the last days of the reign of Elizabeth I. For the first time, it formalises the status of religion as ‘charity’. Five centuries later, in **2006**, Pope Benedict XVI characterises religion as ‘supernatural charity.’

1688 William III (William of Orange) a Protestant, reigns in England. A Bill of Rights establishes supremacy of parliament over king.

1774 James Madison, a future US president, writes his ‘Memorial and Remonstrance’, laying the groundwork for the drafting of America’s secular First Amendment to their constitution. It argues against the use of tax-raised funds to finance churches and religion.

1776 July 4, American Declaration of Independence.

1788 Australia colonised.

1789 French Revolution ends monarchy and the power of the Catholic Church in France. The concept of the citizen with rights is formalised with the themes of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

1791 First Amendment to the American Constitution lays the foundation for the secular state. Thomas Paine’s *Rights Of Man* is published.

1799 First British income tax legislation.

1801 Napoleon re-instates the Catholic Church as national religion of France.

1802 Thomas Jefferson's Danbury letter makes first mention of a wall of separation between church and state.

1805 A British court in *Morice v Bishop of Durham* extends the 'charitable purpose' of the 1601 Statute of Charitable Uses to mean purposes that serve the purposes of the wealthy including 'advancement of religion.'

1830s Sealers and whalers arrive in the early decades in New Zealand. As it is colonised, New Zealand is made part of New South Wales.

1836 A *Church Act* allows funding for four main religions in the colony of Sydney. An exasperated Governor Bourke says he looks forward to a time when churches would 'roll off state support like saturated leeches.'

1840 New Zealand becomes a separately governed Dominion of the British Crown. 6 February, the Treaty of Waitangi is signed by Māori tribes and the British government.

1848 Attempted revolutions and uprisings in Europe and elsewhere, partly caused by new political ideas and chronic poverty.

1870s governments fund 'free, compulsory and secular' schools in Australia and New Zealand

1891 *Pemsel* case in British Privy Council confirms tax-exempt status of religion as charity.

1905 France formally separates church and state by an act of parliament. Article 2 states 'The Republic does not recognize, does not salary, nor subsidize, any religion'.

1910 A referendum in Queensland allows Bible studies as part of the public school curriculum. It is never repealed. A similar referendum in Victoria failed.

1910-1920 Origins of fundamentalism, creationism in the US, and the re-emergence of the Klu Klux Klan.

1917 Russian Revolution. Separation of church and state seen as a conflict between two elements of the bourgeoisie, liberal capitalists and conservative church hierarchy. Lenin's lieutenant Bukharin wrote 'the real basis for the demand [for separation] was a desire for the transfer to the bourgeoisie of the revenues allotted by the State to the Church.' Nevertheless, the regime separated church and state in **1918** while nationalising the church's capital and landed estates. **1936** Bukharin wrote the Soviet constitution deliberately including a Bill of Rights to avoid the terror that followed the French Revolution. Stalin had him arrested. After a show trial in **1938** he was shot.

1921 Sinclair Lewis publishes *Elmer Gantry*, a satire on US revival tent religion, designed to separate converts from their money.

1929 Mussolini regime arranges Concordat with Vatican establishing it as a separate 'nation' state in Italian territory with tax exemptions.

1930 Anne Lennon criticises tax exemptions for religion on her soapbox in the Sydney Domain. She is arrested for doing so. Rationalist Association of Australia appeals against her conviction and loses.

1933 Hitler's government and the Vatican sign Concordat reviving ten per cent church taxes imposed on all German citizens.

1935 The Family, a covert American group dedicated to realising 'God's will', starts as an anti-labour alliance in Seattle. God's 'intention' is the prominent rich should rule the world to meet the needs of the small. Therefore, the rich have to be cultivated to become Christians to realise that intention.

1947 *Everson* case in the Supreme Court formalises separation of church and state in US.

1948 *McCullum* Supreme Court case confirms separation and removes religious instruction from public schools.

1948 United Nations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Religion and non-belief are characterised as being equal in status.

1949 Communist revolution in China; India adopts a secular constitution. Religions, non-belief have equal status; in the US, Billy Graham commences revival meetings in circus tents.

1954 'Under God' added to Pledge of Allegiance and 'In God We Trust' added to the currency in the US.

1959 Cuban revolution shocks America.

their tax-exempt status, but he identified with their values; Prime Minister Robert Menzies allows some modest government funding of Catholic schools to attract the Catholic vote in Australia.

1970 District Court for District of Columbia hears *Green v Connally*. Finds 'discrimination on account of race is inconsistent with an educational institution's tax-exempt status.' Integrated schools commence as does the rise of the Religious Right as a reaction to this decision; in a dissenting judgment in *Walz v Tax Commission of the City of New York*, Justice Douglas says 'One of the mandates of the First Amendment [of the US constitution] is to promote a viable, pluralistic society and to keep government neutral, not only between sects, but also between believers and non-believers.'

1971 National Right To Life organisation is formed in the US to combat abortion. The Catholic Church stays in the background fearful of losing its tax-exempt status.

1972 Gough Whitlam rolls over to allow government funding of religious, mainly Catholic, schools in an attempt to win the election, which he does, narrowly.

1975 *The Age* of 11 November details a Report from the Australian Anglican Church entitled *The Politics of Living* written by the church's Social Responsibilities Commission. The Report says 'In a truly democratic society no group may claim exclusive privileges as a right ... Australia is a pluralist society, not a Christian society ... an attempt to argue the church, because it is the church, has some inherent superior right to privilege is bound to backfire as it becomes clearer that Australia is and must be a secular society.' The Report disappears without a trace.

1975 In a desperate attempt to attract the Catholic vote for the forthcoming election, the Labour government of New Zealand passes legislation on the last sitting day to allow government funding of religious schools. They lose the election but the funding remains.

1981 *Defence of Government Schools* High Court case, Australia, denies separation of church and state, approving government funds for religious schools. Turning point in Australian history. From that point the Catholic Church grows to become immensely wealthy.

1982 Reagan administration reverses IRS's ban on tax-exempt status for schools that discriminate on the basis of race.

1983 Australian Council of Churches publishes *Changing Australia*. Ignoring their own tax-exemptions they declare: 'avoiding tax is theft' and 'when taxes are not paid, either necessary services are not provided or else other people have to pay more'; Australian High Court concludes Scientology is a religion and eligible for tax-exempt status.

1985 Canadian Supreme Court in *R v Big M Drug Mart* finds endorsement of Christian Sabbath a form of coercion against non-believers. Implication is that freedom *from* religion should have same status as freedom *of* religion.

1987 Reflecting the huge growth of organisations seeking status as tax-exempt religions, Japanese film maker, Juzo Itami, makes *The Taxing Woman Returns*, a satire concerning the ardent pursuit by a determined woman tax officer of a criminal organisation laundering money through a bogus tax-exempt

1992 Phillip Hall publishes *Royal Fortune: Tax, Money and the Monarchy* in London. Exposes monarch's tax exemptions. After a *World in Action* TV program based on the book, the Queen decides to pay some income tax.

1992 Japan, the *Nikkei Weekly* exposes a wealthy Buddhist sect running a substantial amusement park for financial gain while paying no tax.

1993 Japanese Aum Supreme Truth cult inexplicably allowed into Australia at Perth. They buy a Western Australian pastoral property and experiment with sarin gas on sheep. **1995** March: tax-exempt Aum use sarin gas to attack civilians in Tokyo subway killing twelve, injuring thousands. **1995** May: Aum pay for J. Gordon Melton, a US cult apologist, and two others, to fly to Japan in an attempt to characterise the police investigation into them as an attack on religious freedom. The Americans leave when they realise they were set up; Aum members later convicted.

1996 Australian Commonwealth Employment Service abolished and replaced by mainly Christian agencies with lucrative contracts; dramatic increases in private, religious school funding including funding for religious chaplains in public schools.

1996 Citizens' Initiated Referendum in Colorado concerning whether religions should pay property taxes fails after the churches jointly fund a misleading and costly television campaign against it.

1996 Brazilian Internal Revenue investigation into exploitation of tax exemptions by wealthy evangelical, Edir Macedo and his Universal Kingdom church. Styled on US evangelism, Macedo's empire was then estimated to generate \$US800M annually in Brazil alone with temples in 30 other countries.

1998 Government of Thailand obliged to investigate corruption and financial malpractice in Thailand's 30,000 Buddhist temples.

1999 UK Charities Commission denies charitable tax-exempt status to Scientology; the head of the Seventh Day Adventist church in the US resigns after a financial scandal, the last of a series of questionable activities.

2000 Australian Broadcasting Commission's radio transmitter in northern Australia sold to the UK's multi-million dollar fundamentalist Christian Voice. They build studios in Queensland, and broadcast daily to the Pacific and South Asia in many languages via satellite, beaming the signal to the transmitter in northern Australia.

2001 September 11 terrorist attacks in the US.

2002 Australian prime minister John Howard opens Hillsong Pentecostal Church in Sydney. Previously, Hillsong's leader, Brian Houston, published his book *You Need More Money: Discovering God's Amazing Financial Plan For Your Life*. Hillsong later open a church in Paris and other locations around the world.

2004 Sociologist Nikolai Mitrokhin estimates the Archbishop of the Russian Orthodox Church had used the duty-free status of the church to import \$1.5B worth of cigarettes into Russia for sale to the benefit of the church.

2005 Members of Exclusive Brethren covertly spend up to a million dollars in an attempt to defeat atheist prime minister Helen Clark's Labour Government in New Zealand at an election. When information about this leaks, she is re-elected.

2006 Libre Pensée publishes *Livre Noir*, explaining how the French government subsidises the Catholic Church in France, in conflict with Article 2 of the 1905 legislation stating the Republic does not subsidize any religion.

2007 US congress finance committee investigation into six televangelists on the grounds their vast wealth is an abuse of their tax-exempt status.

2008 Australian journalist Michael Bachelard publishes *Behind The Exclusive Brethren*, detailing the group's close attention to tax and other government benefits and their members' attempts to influence politics.

2008 South African business magazine, *FM*, investigates religious wealth in the republic. Finds religious sector 'is a substantial part of the South African economy'. It is 'opaque' and 'little understood'.

2008 Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* publishes a series of articles on the Vatican Bank: 'more impenetrable than the Cayman Islands, more discreet than a Swiss Bank [the Vatican bank] is a fiscal paradise on Earth'. Reveals the bank which is never publicly audited only accepts untraceable cash or gold bullion as deposits, ideal for money laundering.

2009 Brazilian evangelist Edir Macedo moves into his sumptuous palatial residence in Lisbon, Portugal.

2009 Writing in *Australian Humanist*, Perkins and Gomez estimate the gross cost of religion to Australian taxpayers through exemptions, grants and other benefits to be \$31B annually.

2010 The High Court of Australia, in *Williams v The Commonwealth*, finds federal government funding of religious chaplains in public schools to be unconstitutional. The government prepares legislation to override the decision.

2011 New Zealand High Court rules that an interest-free mortgage scheme for members of an evangelical trust that 'advances religion' is not unconstitutional. Taxpayers are thus divided by those that pay interest on their mortgages and a privileged few who legally pay no interest, and are subsidized by taxpayers who do pay interest.

2012 Writing in *Free Inquiry*, Ryan Cragun and his associates estimate US taxpayers' subsidy to religion to be \$71B annually.

2012 A Chicago Muslim is charged with channelling funds to al Qaeda via an Islamic charity.

2012 NZARH research finds churches in New Zealand are worth \$11B. The Catholic Church is the wealthiest.

2012 It is revealed the Greek Orthodox Church owns property worth 700B euros, double Greece's national debt. The church refuses to divest any of its property to help the nation. 100,000 people join a 'Tax The Church' Facebook page.

2012 In the second *Williams v The Commonwealth* High Court case, the Court finds the legislation allowing government funding of religious chaplains in public schools to be unconstitutional. The government re-routes the money through the states to continue the funding.

2013 The Government of Cyprus confiscates 40 per cent of accounts in banks holding sums over \$130,000. The Orthodox Church of Cyprus loses \$130M.

2015 April, Canadian Supreme Court, *Quebec Secular Movement v City of Saguenay*, rules unanimously that prayers in city councils are unconstitutional. Justice Clément Gascon says state neutrality ‘requires that the state neither favour nor hinder and particular [religious] belief, and the same holds true for non-belief. It requires that the state abstain from taking any position and thus avoid adhering to a particular belief.’

2015 May, a New Zealand parent, Jeff McClintock, takes his daughter’s school, and the NZ Attorney-General, to the High Court to argue that religious instruction in public schools is a breach of New Zealand’s Bill of Rights.

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