

# **AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS**

## **PRESS RELEASE 555#**

**29 May 2014**

### **'BIG SECULARISM' AND THE CITY OF GOD**

**There has been a recent ABC debate between Marion Maddox from Macquarie University and David Hastie from PLC Sydney on State funding of Religion and education.**

This is a response compiled by Jean Ely:

David Hastie promotes denominationalism as an Australian ideological sprawl in which any and every religion and religious school flourish at taxpayers expense. He accuses Marion Maddox of 'Big Secularism'—the 'determination to ban government support for religious activities'.

If so, she is in illustrious company: Thomas Jefferson and Founding Fathers of the American Constitution; Andrew Inglis Clark, major draftsman of the Australian Constitution; Henry Bournes Higgins and Founding Fathers who placed Section 116 in the Australian Constitution;<sup>i</sup> and Justice Lionel Murphy, dissenter in the 1981 DOGS case. Some might say, Christ himself.<sup>ii</sup>

She echoes arguments of the 1844 NSW Select Committee on Education.

It appears to your Committee impossible not to see, that the very essence of a denominational system, is to leave the majority uneducated, in order thoroughly to imbue the minority with peculiar tenets. It is a system always tending to excess or defect, the natural result of which is, that wherever one school is founded, two or three others will arise, not because they are wanted, but because it is feared that proselytes will be made; and thus a superfluous activity is produced in one place, and a total stagnation in another.<sup>iii</sup>

This was written by Robert Lowe, a man of the British Enlightenment. Dr. John Dunmore Lang, a Presbyterian Minister influenced by the Scottish Enlightenment delivered it to the Legislative Council of N.S.W. By 1844 J.D. Lang had visited America and converted from denominationalism to Hastie's 'Big Secularism', namely separation of religion from the state.  
iv

Was education for Lang's generation, 'secular' instruction as opposed to 'imbuing children with peculiar tenets'? Hastie and Maddox are skirting around the edges of this perennial problem. What does 'secular' instruction mean and what should we teach our nation's children if we wish them to survive as citizens of the 'saeculum'? Are the minority of our children to be separated out for citizenship in the 'City of God' – whatever or wherever that may be — while the majority fall into disadvantage?

These are Augustinian distinctions, taken seriously by priests and parents seeking golden pathways to Heaven and/or the good job for God's elect. Yet Hastie has a twinge of Christian regret for disadvantaged children in underfunded public schools.

We do not have blasphemy laws and open discussion is long overdue. Hastie and Maddox should be encouraged to keep opening up the 'religious' – or is it the –'secular' Pandora's box in our educational predicament. They might profit from consideration of Richard Ely's distinction between 'civic' and 'corporate' Protestantism<sup>v</sup> and extend their research to include recent studies of the influence of the British Enlightenment in Australian history.<sup>vi</sup> Meanwhile, the effect of entanglement of church and state upon our religious leaders is found in the unofficial story of the DOGS case in *Contempt of Court*.<sup>vii</sup>

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The ABC debate is found on the following :

Too Much Faith in Schools: The Rise of Christian Schooling in Australia  
<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/03/20/3968199.htm>;

Big Secularism or the Australian Sprawl? Why Marion Maddox is Wrong about Christian Education  
<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/03/31/3975454.htm>

Sprawling Divisions: A Reply to David Hastie  
<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/04/28/3993631.htm>

**LISTEN TO DOGS PROGRAM**

**ON 3CR**

**855 ON THE AM DIAL**

**12.00 NOON SATURDAYS**

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<sup>i</sup> Ely, R. *Unto God and Caesar*, (1976) MUP.

<sup>ii</sup> Matthew 22:21;

<sup>iii</sup> *Report from the N.S.W. Select Committee on Education 1844. H.R.A* , Vol. 1, pp 1-4

<sup>iv</sup> Lang J.D. *Chiefly Autobiographical, 1799 to 1878* (ed. Gilchrist, A ) Vol. 1, p. 359

<sup>v</sup> Ely, R. 'Now you See it: Now you Don't: Issues of Secularity and Secularisation in Publicly Funded Elementary Schools in the Australian Colonies during the Middle third of the Nineteenth Century' to be published in the *Journal of Religious Studies* 2014.

<sup>vi</sup> John Docker, *Australian Cultural Elites: Intellectual Traditions in Sydney and Melbourne*, Sydney 1974;

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Gascoigne, J with the assistance of Curthoys, P, *The Enlightenment and the Origins of European Australia*,  
Cambridge University Press 2002

<sup>vii</sup> Ely, J. *Contempt of Court* (2011) Arena Publishers, Melbourne