

## AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT

### SCHOOLS

#### PRESS RELEASE 795

### RELIGION AND THE ELECTION OF THE MORRISON GOVERNMENT

#### Commentaries on June 4, 2019

The Labor Party is trawling through the ashes of the election but they will, in time, thank God they didn't win. But, along with greedy franking credit seniors and aspirational miners, the usual nasties are claiming the victory for Morrison's one extra seat in the House of Representatives. Foremost are the religious groups. Leading the charge, in the Murdoch Press, was a spokesman for the Catholic Church Education Empire.

- ***The Catholic Empire fights back:*** Dallas McInerney chief executive of Catholic Schools NSW, wrote an opinion piece in The Australian of June 4, 2019 entitled: *Thank God for Catholic schools: they save billions* at <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/thank-god-for-catholic-schools-they-save-billions/news-story/b9993069de5a4a6004c149b47ef356be>. He believes the State Aid argument is won, done and dusted. He crowed:

*Thankfully, both major political parties have already moved beyond this argument. On this issue, the Coalition and Labor, which won 75 per cent of the primary vote between them, are on a unity ticket.*

Even the old chesnut story of the Goulburn strike was pulled out in his article. It was as if all the hard work of the State school groups was irrelevant. However, the State Aid problem had certainly not been buried, if the 78 comments on the article are noted. But his figures, which no doubt are questionable, are still interesting.

He claimed that from 2014-2017, the Catholic schools saved the government \$1.46 billion. That is less than \$300,000 per year for the largest State in the Commonwealth! He claimed also that from 2018, there will be a saving of \$2.56 billion. That is \$534,000 per year. For even State Treasuries – chicken feed, given all the funds they are already channelling into the bottomless pit of Catholic demands. If these figures for NSW are extended to the rest of Australia, we are looking at merely a few billion besides the tens of billions transferred, with minimal accountability, into Catholic Church coffers every year.

**If, throughout Australia, it only takes a few billion to solve the State Aid problem and put all our children in public schools, leaving the rest to be independent – let's do it!**

**Making religious schools public is only part of the problem caused by the current entanglement of Church and State in Australia**

- ***Gotta have faith? Religion was the sleeper issue we didn't see coming : Julie Szego in the Sydney Morning Herald. at***  
<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/gotta-have-faith-religion-was-the-sleeper-issue-we-didn-t-see-coming-20190531-p51t5s.html>

And the faithful are now claiming that they rose up on May 18 to re-elect the Coalition. For them, that is one narrative gaining traction to explain the shock win.

“[I will burn for you](#),” Morrison promised in his election-eve pitch to undecided voters. This was not code for coal evangelism, but a phrase employed by Pentecostal Christians as they hold up their hands, denoting strenuous service for Christ.

Not all ears were attuned to his pitch to the faithful.

If you can still trust the pollsters, there were correlations and overlaps between the seats that swung heavily to the Coalition in Queensland and western Sydney, the census data showing higher than average rates of religious affiliation and the electorates that registered significant “no” votes in the same-sex marriage plebiscite.

Christian Schools Australia had also effectively urged a vote for the Coalition, arguing the election was “the most critical for religious freedom in living memory”. For the “quiet Australians” behind Morrison, they’re noisy folk.

They are pushing for ‘religious freedom’ legislation so that so-called Christian schools can discriminate against pupils and teachers who do not fit within their religious, sexual, or any other guide lines.

They should be careful what they wish for. Christians may find themselves being discriminated against by other religions that are even more dogmatic than themselves, and back we go into the vicious religious wars of the murky past.

**There is also a question whether the Government can legislate about religious matters. It is not one of the powers listed in Section 51, and there is always Section 116, sitting there in the wings. You never know when a High Court will be forced to apply it as it was intended.**

- **Using My Religion.**

Not all Christians voted for the Morrison Government, or went along with his brand of religious fervour as it was used in the interest of power politics. In an interesting June 4 article in the Christian newspaper, *Eternity* Greg Clarke had this to say at

<https://www.eternitynews.com.au/opinion/using-my-religion/>

It is worth looking at carefully, because, as a Christian, the CEO of the Bible Society Australia, this man represents a lot of Christians who respond to more than the hype of Advertising men.

*‘ It’s a little frustrating. People are using Christianity, my religion, to build their personal brands. I was first alerted to it in 2015 when someone showed me a photo from Kim Kardashian’s ‘socials’ where her daughter was carrying a pink Bible-themed sticker book. Why go out in public with that book, I wondered? What is being communicated by the queen of social media? Perhaps having a portable Sunday School lesson is a sign of being a good mother? Christian virtue signalling? I really don’t know.....*

*..Celebrity culture is one thing; rugby is another. People are quoting Bible verses, getting sacked for it, praying on the pitch, and pointing to the heavens after they score. Then there’s politics. Prime ministers are citing theological beliefs in their victory speeches after debating hell during their election campaigns. Even dead politicians who described themselves as profoundly agnostic are being commemorated with Scripture. “The golden bowl is broken,” wrote Blanche d’Alpuget in her statement on her husband Bob Hawke’s death, quoting from Ecclesiastes. I do hope she did so deliberately, to invoke that wonderful passage about remembering your Creator in the day of your youth (something Hawke did before losing faith).*

*Stanley Fish, the literary critic, was asked in the late ‘90s what theme would define the 21st century. To everyone’s surprise, his immediate reply was “religion”. He has been right thus far. From September 11, 2001, when extreme Islamic beliefs led to the epoch-making events of that day, religion has occupied centre stage in world affairs.*

*But at that time, religion was being seen as the problem. It poisoned everything. We’d be better off without it, was the cry. Something has changed as we head to 2020. Religion is returning, but in an unpredictable manner.*

*While 30 per cent of Australians recently described themselves in the census as having no religion, when questions are asked about spirituality the answers are more confusing. Generation Y, now hitting their 30s, perceive spirituality as an important aspect of mental health and wellbeing. According to McCrindle Research’s 2017 Faith and Belief in Australia report, younger generations are more likely to talk about spirituality, Jesus and Christian faith than their parents or grandparents. No topic is taboo anymore, and that includes spiritual things.*

*Australians have voted in their current Prime Minister at least partially because of perceptions around religious freedom. And this is not the old folk; it is better correlated with lower-income groups (which includes young people) and multicultural sectors. In other words, younger people want to keep spirituality on the agenda. It’s part of being a well-rounded, healthy diverse human being.*

***I feel so passionate about the deep, eternal value of Christian faith that seeing it become a marketing accoutrement is hard to take.***

*So religion is everywhere. But it’s getting used to build people’s ‘personal brands’, and this is bugging me. It’s on all sides, too. So the right wing are aligning Christianity with Western culture, claiming that biblical thinking undergirds the success of the West. Jordan Peterson is the stand-out here. And the left wing are aligning Christianity with “love equals love,” as if that were a biblical concept. It’s annoying....*

*You are free to use my religion, as long as you promise to:*

- *Read a Gospel and think about how serious following Jesus really is.....'*

*Greg Clarke is CEO of Bible Society Australia.*

- THE DOGS Position was summed up in a letter from Adrian D'Ambra, Dingley Village, to *The Age*, Tuesday June 4:

### **Defend the Secular State:**

Thomas Jefferson argued in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom of 1786, 'that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever...'

Freedom from compulsion is the 'religious' freedom essential to public and private life in a modern democracy. It requires an unequivocal statement of the secular nature of our nation-state, and needs to be followed by some appropriate policies.

The first of these would surely have to be the repeal of any tax exemptions and other secular privileges for religious organisations, followed by the withdrawal of all public funding from private religious schools.

Instead, what we are likely to get from this authoritarian regime is a regressive protection of Christian religious privileges and prejudices preceded by a completely unnecessary debate in lieu of the myriad policy debates we should be having.

**Thank you Adrian D'Ambra.**

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**<http://www.3cr.org.au/dogs>**