

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

PRESS RELEASE 930

‘WAITING FOR GONSKI’ AND SEPARATION OF RELIGION AND THE STATE

According to Jane Caro, Tom Greenwell and Chris Bonnor have recently published a ‘forensic and gripping analysis’ of the Needs’ policies in Australian education from Karmel to Gonski.

The main reason they give for the abject failure of both Karmel and Gonski alongside growing disadvantage and inequity in Australian education is found on pages 264-266 of their book – the power of the private (religious) school lobby groups. They wrote:

Why did the private school lobby groups prove to be so powerful? In part it’s because in any contest over school funding they begin with some distinct advantages. They represent some very wealthy people and when a stoush goes public, they are guranteed to have significant section of the Murdoch media on their side. They have deep connections and almost unlimited access to our politicians. A letter home from a principal or a sermon delivered from a pulpit is likely to receive the kind of respectful hearing a politician cannot rely on, no matter the merits of their argument. In 2017, it was a critical reason why the Shorten Labor Opposition went in to bat for the private schools sector against Gonski 2.0. And Labor was rewarded handsomely when the Catholic lobby made thousands of robocalls, and principals sent letters home to parents, on their behalf (in the Batman byelection).

Yet, although there is a very extensive, well documented analysis of the pressure placed by religious groups on the State which has led to the current inequalities and shovelling of disadvantaged children into underfunded, run down public schools, Greenwell and Bonnor come up with an astonishing solution.

Their analysis concentrates upon the main difference between religious and public schools as the difference between fee charging and free education. They also prove that religious schools are now costing the taxpayer as much if not more than public schools and the economic argument that such schools save the government money, no longer applies.

Instead of looking at Finland, which is not mentioned as an example to follow, the solution they advocate is the ‘integrated’ systems of New Zealand and Canada. They believe that parents who wish to choose a religious education for

their children should be paid by the taxpayer to do so. They suggest that religious schools should be fully funded but no longer charge fees.

After their analysis of the shenanigans of the religious lobby in the last fifty years, one is gobsmacked at their naivety.

DOGS are saddened by the Bonnor/Greenwell solution. The authors have done a very comprehensive historical analysis of the last fifty years, and their hearts are in the right place. But they have forgotten, if they ever knew, about where our public system came from and why a dual system has always separated our children and the society into tribes. Religious schools have separated our children on the basis of class, but they also separate them on the basis of creed. This is called sectarianism plain and simple.

Religious schools are sectarian schools. They can and do separate children, teachers and employees on the basis of religious belief as well as their ability to pay fees. Religious schools have never cared about ALL the children. They are only concerned about those with the first class ticket to heaven and the good job. If tempted with taxpayer funding, religious men have quickly succumbed to Mammon.

Our public system was the old nineteenth century Irish National System which attempted to solve the sectarian problem and bring children together. It was opposed and throttled by the Irish Catholic bishops and Presbyterian Church in Ireland. The result is the sectarian warfare in twentieth and twenty first century Ireland. Australia was more fortunate. For a century we had more than three quarters of our children in public schools open to all, including 25% of Catholic children many of whom were too poor to attend fee paying Catholic schools. And we still do. A child's religion is not a matter for discrimination in our public schools.

Greenwell and Bonnor oppose the separation of children on the basis of the ability of their parents to pay. But they do not put their minds to the task of considering the separation of children on the basis of religious belief. History is full of tales of the most brutal wars of all – the wars of religion.

So DOGS would wish to remind our readers of the reasons why the Americans of the Enlightenment placed the First Amendment in their Constitution and Inglis Clark and Higgins were responsible for placing a similar clause – Section 116- in our Constitution;

The

[MARCH 2022 CHURCH & STATE MAGAZINE](#)

Published the following article:

Keep Your Distance: Why The Framers Were So Adamant About Separation Of Church And State

[Keep Your Distance: Why The Framers Were So Adamant About Separation Of Church And State](#)

By Frank Breslin

We have a long tradition in America of separation of church and state that prohibits government's promotion of religion on the one hand, and interference with its free exercise on the other.

In their refusal to establish a state church or to favor one religion over another, the Founding Fathers didn't think that religion was bad but that there was something amiss in human nature, a certain tendency, a will to power and a lust for domination, that always bore watching. It was a virus that lay dormant until its host came to power, whereupon that person or group became suddenly rabid with a mania that sought to convert, punish or persecute anyone not of their fold or persuasion. Paradoxically, the guise under which this malady manifested itself, as the history of Europe made only too plain, was religion.

The Founders thought that religion, something good in itself, could be used toward either good or bad ends, and, unless preventive measures were taken, could induce in the susceptible a madness so malignant and vicious as to destroy the very essence of religion itself. By persecuting whoever refused to accept their religion or whose lives were deemed insufficiently righteous, those in power could impose a religious tyranny so suffocating in its grip, scope and intensity that one involuntarily thinks of barbed wire and concentration camps.

Various theories have tried to account for this bizarre aberration – the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the ascent of man from beasts, innate human depravity, the Freudian “id,” defective genes or bad social engineering.

But more important than those theories themselves is the lesson to be drawn from those institutions that promise heaven on earth. Given the weak human vessels in which this religious feeling resides, even this noble sentiment could become tragically twisted and unleash on the world unspeakable horror. Immanuel Kant's words come to mind when considering such would-be utopians and their spiritual gulags: “Nothing was ever made straight with the crooked timber of humanity.”

In government, the need for transparency, accountability and investigative journalists – assuming they haven't been censored, banned, imprisoned or shot – is not a casual suggestion, but the *sine qua non* for maintaining even a pretense of institutional integrity. Human nature is self-contradictory and prone to temptation, especially when the camera's not running or the press isn't present. And, no matter the institution, it's always wise to audit the books – both the official ones and the real ones hidden in the back-office safe.

Politicians, as the saying goes, campaign in poetry but govern in prose, so that we had better distrust whatever they're saying and doing by an ironclad system of checks and balances, fact-checking and vigilant oversight. As soon as they pass a law, they'll invite a lobbyist to insert a loophole, recalling Juvenal's admonition, “Who shall guard the guards themselves?”

Even religion can be dragged in the mire by persecuting those of another faith or of no faith at all until, weakened by torture, the unfortunates would end their suffering by conversion or death. So, to prevent these abuses of power as had occurred in Old Europe when Catholics persecuted Protestants, Protestants persecuted Catholics, Protestants persecuted other Protestants and both Protestants and Catholics persecuted the Jews, the Founders erected a “wall of separation” between church and state as a safeguard against such outrages.

They wanted to put an end to intolerance, bigotry and sadism that wore the flattering garb of religion and spoke in the sanctimonious accents of self-promotion. They believed that what they were doing was ushering something new into this world, *novus ordo seculorum* or “a new order of the ages” (see the back of a one-dollar bill). America was to be a radically new experiment in government which, like ancient Athens, would show the world that free men had no need of princes and kings but could govern themselves. No wonder the royal courts of Europe hoped this fledgling experiment wouldn’t succeed lest the contagion of democracy spread to their people.

The Founders refused to involve government in religion, religious quarrels or animosities that for centuries had convulsed Europe’s political landscape. Under stressful conditions, similar hostilities might also threaten our newfound nation, already a powder keg of sectarian tensions. Lending the power of the state to favor any one denomination or religion over another could exacerbate those mutual suspicions still further that might suggest the beginning of an established state church.

A wall of neutrality would keep government from pitting one church or religion against another, a policy that had fanned the flames of centuries-old hatreds. Every religion must therefore be allowed to worship in its own way with neither interference nor support from the state. Everyone must be protected from “religious enthusiasm,” as that quaint 18th-century phrase understatedly put it. The only service government could render religion was to stay out of its way as long as one religion didn’t interfere with another.

This was an insight only painfully arrived at after generations of bloodshed, as monarchs imposed their religion on all their subjects (*cuius regio, eius religio*: whose realm, his religion) to unify and transform their dominions into virtual theocracies to facilitate rule. The Old World was replete with examples of such murderous fury, as competing factions virtuously butchered one another in the conviction that they were “doing God’s will.” Intending to bring their countries together, kings only managed to tear them apart. The Founders were only too well acquainted with this blood-drenched chronicle, and they resolved to keep such hatreds far removed from our shores. History had taught them that bringing religion into the public arena was to let loose a monster. Still raw in their memory were the anti-Catholic Gordon riots of 1780 that only 11 years earlier had shocked all of Europe as parts of London were left in flames. It was a vivid reminder, if any were needed, of the deadly contagion of “enthusiasm.”

If Gordon had prevailed against the British government, there was no telling whether the outcome would have turned back the clock two centuries when Protestants murdered Catholics only to be followed by Bloody Mary’s retaliation upon her Protestant subjects. It would have been the same sad old tale of religion’s debasement by score-settling, persecution, torture and death. Religion was nitroglycerin that had to be contained for everyone’s safety.

So the separation clause was added to the Constitution as the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights. It was imperative that government stay out of religion, neither encouraging nor impeding its practice. It makes admirable sense since every religion or even non-religion is thereby protected; every faith is of equal value since government plays a neutral role – plays

a neutral role, that is, except when one religion or denomination harasses or persecutes another faith's members, who refuse to believe as that religion dictates. Government then intervenes to protect the innocent.

This policy of separation is still on the books, and with good reason: Human nature never changes. There are still groups today whose agenda is converting and persecuting, hating and perhaps even murdering those of other faiths, denominations or of no faith at all to save them from themselves and the fiery furnace to come – unless these “lost souls” submit and “see the light.”

Or, more exactly, “the light” by submitting to them who claim to know the innermost secrets of God himself, as if the Almighty were only the God of their particular denomination or faith alone instead of the God of them all under different names! What a sorry little God he would be if he weren't more open-minded than his closed-minded children who insult him by their demeaning image of him and use that caricature as their puppet who “tells” them alone what he wants for their country or political party!

Whether such proselytizing zeal is disguised aggression, megalomania or repressed self-doubt that feels both threatened and driven to convert others to dispel that doubt, these are very dangerous people and should never be part of government or have their theological views of the Second Coming guide an administration's foreign policy toward Israel and that tinderbox of the Middle East.

And yet, unbeknownst to themselves, these individuals render the nation an inestimable service by being a constant reminder of the very reason for upholding this separation of church and state.

The Founding Fathers believed that religion was, and must always remain, a private affair because bringing the volatility of “religious enthusiasm” into the public arena would only trivialize religion and destabilize a nation. They feared the political effects of interdenominational feuding, the polarization caused by doctrinal differences, the demonization of dissenters and the eruption of religious intolerance and hatred.

However, there was also a second reason why the Founders feared religion in politics – the rise of religious opportunists who would inflame political passions to promote themselves. Religion would become in the hands of these charlatans a theatrical performance and political tool to hypocritically showboat their “piety” to manipulate voters for political gain.

An unscrupulous politician could disguise his lack of convictions by putting his finger in his mouth, holding it up to the wind to determine which way the wind was blowing and telling his audience whatever he thought it wanted to hear. This individual well understood the art of inciting “enthusiasm” or hysteria toward some plan of action and call it “the will of God.”

The Founders would have blanched at politicians returning to their constituents and pandering to their sincerely held religious convictions to gain a following or court popularity – not that they couldn't take part in religious services as private citizens, but not as representatives of their government lest people think they were lending the prestige of their office to their particular church or religion.

These Founders also knew their Bible, as it played such a pivotal role in their 18th-century world. They knew of Christ's admonition in Matthew 6 about not playing the hypocrite by standing on the street corner and making a public display of one's piety, for one would have already received one's reward. Instead, one should withdraw to one's room, close the door, and in privacy pray to God. Grandstanding didn't count as prayer with the Lord! As experienced men of the world, they knew only too well how politicians might cynically abuse religion to seek power and votes.

They were also highly educated, even erudite, men, especially Thomas Jefferson, whose library contained a Who's Who of "great authors," one of whom was the celebrated French playwright Moliere, author of "Tartuffe," the embodiment of religious hypocrisy. It is both an uproarious romp into the glacial regions of inner emptiness, as well as a manual for observing the bobbings and weavings of unctuous sanctimony raised to high art.

In that great patrician school of Parisian sophistication, it was thought that the only way to effect moral change was never by sermons but by ridicule. Many don't mind being considered a scoundrel, but never a fool! *Castigat ridendo mores* ("Comedy corrects manners") was the essence of Moliere's art that skewered human folly by laughter alone. This caustic mockery of his characters and the gales of laughter that broke forth from the audience were much more effective in pillorying vice than sermons delivered from Notre Dame's pulpit. Moliere, the French Aristophanes, was and always has been a moral institution for the French, who can laugh at themselves in his characters with no loss of face. Jefferson and his colleagues well understood that some members of government might be tempted to play Tartuffe on the political stage. One Tartuffe, or a group of them, could do untold harm to a nation by using religion for political ends. To elites, the 18th century was an age of taste and decorum, moderation and dignity, and everything had its proper place. Religion especially could never be allowed to be vulgarized or cheapened by demagogues toying with people's religious emotions.

There would be no limit to their unbridled ambition and religious hypocrisy in saying whatever would ingratiate themselves to the favor and trust of an audience. So profound was their cynical abuse of religion for being elected that they would wax rhapsodic on the metaphysical subtleties of Hottentot theology if they thought it would secure them a "leg-up" over their political rivals at election time.

Our Founders felt that religion was something sacred and should always remain so by being kept off-limits to political wolves in sheep's clothing.

Frank Breslin is a retired high school teacher with 40 years of experience in the New Jersey public school system, where he taught English, Latin, German and social studies. A version of this article previously appeared on The Huffington Post.

LISTEN TO THE DOGS PROGRAM

855 ON THE AM DIAL: 12.00 NOON SATURDAYS

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