

**AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF
GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS
PRESS RELEASE 941**

**JANE CARO AND REV JOHN DICKSON:
RELIGION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

The ‘religion’ question surfaced in the media this last week with Jane Caro arguing that *God has no place in public schools in Rationale* while John Dickson from the Anglican church responding on the ABC with [*What’s So Offensive about Australia’s public school chaplaincy program? An Open Letter to Jane Caro*](#) . Jane Caro replied at <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/jane-caro-public-school-chaplaincy-is-still-a-bad-idea/13930492>

Jane’s central argument was:

‘Our (public) school helped us to understand we were all of equal value. That’s because public schools believe that.

It is this inclusivity that demands public schools be secular, because prioritising any faith is an enrolment barrier. If you accept every child, you must create a community that is welcoming to every child.

It is because of the core inclusivity of public schools that having chaplains in such schools – however nice and well-meaning – is an anathema. Worse, it is an insult. It represents the arrogance of those of a certain faith – in Australia’s case, Christianity – who regard any value that does not directly reflect their own world view as automatically inferior and suspect.

The chaplaincy program sneers at the great central virtue of public education: namely that it welcomes every child as an equally important member of the school community regardless of the kind of family they come from.’

John Dickson countered Jane’s article on the ABC with:

I think very few of us who are broadly supportive of chaplains in public schools find your piece offensive. But I find myself wondering how your argument amounts to more than an expression of your personal distaste of religion.

First, you say that the chaplaincy program is “anathema” and “insulting”, and that it expresses the sheer “arrogance” of a Christianity that sees alternative values as “inferior”. But is there not a certain irony here? Isn’t your article contending for religion’s “inferiority” to your particular version of secularism? It is true that I regard your more doctrinaire version of secularism to be inferior to Christianity on almost every count — ethically, historically, aesthetically, practically, and so on. I am sure you would return the compliment. But we needn’t rush to call each other arrogant for doing so. We have different views. Let’s just argue them, with arguments.....

And

Jane, you may have revealed your hand in the final lines of your article, when you write, “Freedom of religion and freedom from religion are among our core [secular] values”. Freedom “from” religion? No, a healthy secular democracy does not exclude religion — from schools or politics or wherever. It simply ensures that religious programs are never imposed, always voluntary, just like the public school chaplaincy program. Anything else seems driven by a personal distaste of religion.

DOGS POSITION

DOGS agree with Dickson that a healthy secular democracy does not, in fact cannot exclude religion as such. People have beliefs – different and differing belief systems. They also agree that religious program should never be imposed but always voluntary.

BUT

They would remind him that the chaplaincy programs are not voluntary.

The chaplains are paid for with taxpayer’s money and paying taxes is not a voluntary activity. If paying taxes was voluntary not a coercive activity, we would not have the billion dollar taxation evasion industry and the Gina Rinehart’s, the Packers and other oligarchs would not invest in tax havens. Meanwhile, taxpayers who send their children to public schools are also

expected to pay a double education tax – one for the underfunded public schools their children attend, and another tax for the wealthy religious schools of every religion that can be imagined. This is called entanglement of religion with the State and is unacceptable in a truly secular democracy.

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