

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 968

Are Some Christian school Apologists troubled by a Guilty Conscience?

On January 31, Jenna Price wrote an article in the Fairfax Press entitled : [Why we should defund private schools and examine their values](#) in which she argued, following the *Four Corners* Program on the Sydney Opus Dei schools

There is no better time to defund private schools than now. And no better time to examine the values these schools teach to an ever-increasing number of students enrolled.

Her article provoked 577 comments, many agreeing with her. DOGS were interested in the large proportion agreeing with their No State Aid for private schools position.

On February 13, a reply appeared, again in the Fairfax Press. This was written by David Hastie, an Associate Professor and deputy vice-president of Alphacrucis University College in Brisbane.

Alphacrucis is a multidisciplinary Christian University , a Pentecostal College in Brisbane shaping and forming students to make an impact in the world of Business, Counselling, Education, Ministry, Music and beyond.

Hastie's article is entitled:

[Defunding private schools is not on, but we can make education fairer](#)

DOGS are interested in the twinges of Christian conscience exhibited by David Hastie in his article. After providing a simplistic account of the nineteenth century struggles of the public system to provide an education for all the nation's children, with the usual private school side-swipes at the State centralised administrations, Hastie, weeps crocodile tears for the disadvantaged.

'For inequity has never been our way, and is never the mission of teachers. But many educators are now part of an unintended structure that produces inequity and social fragmentation

This has nothing to do with ideology, but rather a simple metric: our high level of school choice – according to the OECD, the highest in the world – means parents can vote with their feet. When enrolments jump from state to non-government schools in postcodes with lower social capital, they take a proportion of public funding and higher social capital families with them. This drain is driving many state schools into a spiral of decline and disadvantage. It is a burden that educators of religious faith bear heavily’ he writes.

DOGS applaud Hastie for admitting that genuine Christians might well be concerned about the growing inequities caused by the mushrooming of their schools at taxpayers expense. But his answer to the problem is a strange one.

He is not prepared to return to a free, compulsory and non-sectarian system of education. No, he wants to continue the mushrooming of Christian schools, but with ‘*a common vision between public and non-government schools’ which will mend a great social divide.*’

The problem is that the objectives or ‘visions’ of the two systems are diametrically opposed to each other. The public system does not discriminate against children or employees but adheres to the right of every child to a free, non-sectarian education. The religious system adheres to the right of the school to discriminate on the basis of belief. This was underlined on Monday 13 February 2023 when an alliance of religious leaders rejected a proposal by the Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) to [even limit such discrimination to allow religious preference only where “the teaching, observance or practice of religion is a genuine occupational requirement”](#).

DOGS SUGGEST that if David Hastie accepts the Christian view that all are equal under God, including children of school age, then schools which discriminate against the enrolment of children on the basis of class, creed, or colour cannot be part of any common vision between either genuine Christian or public schools.

And if he takes the trouble to find out the more recent history of the State Aid issue, he might discover that back in 1979-1981, so-called Christian schools in Australia, when fearful of losing their taxpayer dollars, argued for 26 days in the High Court of Australia, that they were no more religious than public schools. For the love of money, they sold their soul.

Perhaps – and this is what is perhaps the worrying fact, for David Hastie and his co-religionists, - back in 1979 the Christian schools were right. Public schools, which do not discriminate against children, parents, teachers, principals, or anyone else on the basis of class, creed or colour, are more Christian than those

that claim to be ‘value based’ religious schools but close their doors to the needy, and any child that does not fit their stereotype.

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