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Editorial by Diane Preston

As Christians around the world pray and wonder over the Baby Jesus asleep in his manger on a Silent Night under the heavenly stars, we reflect in this newsletter on the task of the Royal Commission to protect our children from sex abuse.

The task of the Commission is great and our expectations of what it can achieve are greater. We wish the Commission to address the systemic causes of sex abuse in our Society to help future generations and give hope to those who suffer and continue to suffer.

Not a day goes by without a revelation on the cover up of child abuse by religious institutions, particularly by the Catholic Church. The first Catholic Church official convicted for covering up was Roman Catholic Monsignor William Lynn, who was sentenced to prison in Philadelphia for 3 to 6 years in November of this year. The presiding judge said he "enabled monsters in clerical garb to destroy the souls of children". The District Attorney Seth Williams said, "He locked away in a vault the names of men that he knew had abused children. He now will be locked away for a fraction of the time he kept that secret vault."

Having successfully convinced the Federal Government to extend the terms of reference of the Royal Commission to all institutions concerned with the welfare of children, religious institutions are in the process of arming themselves against the inevitable assault on their authority as agents of the Almighty and protectors of their flock. One such arm is the new Truth Justice and Healing Commission. It is a lay-led Catholic council set up by the Catholic Church to advise its Bishops and co-ordinate the communications of the Church with the Commission. Whether this is a cynical exercise in public relations or a genuine attempt to

listen and learn is yet to be seen. There are indeed Catholic individuals and groups that seek genuine reform. Peter Johnstone is chairman of the group 'Catholics for Renewal'. He is a former Director-General of Community Services for Victoria. In October 2011 his group sponsored an open letter to the Pope, signed by more than 8000 Australian Catholics, about the "manifestly inadequate" church response to sexual abuse by the clergy.

"The church's decision-making is too remote from the people. The church is very centralised on matters of importance, and the record shows that local bishops were acting under clear instructions in only reporting such matters to Rome and hiding them from civil authorities".

In this edition of the newsletter we hear from two senior Barristers on this subject, Eamonn Moran and Robert Lancy.

Eamonn outlines the legal landscape in which the Royal Commission sits in the context of Commonwealth and State responsibility for the protection of children in Australia. Eamonn also refers to the recent Inquiry in Ireland, the Ryan Commission Inquiry into Child Abuse.

Robert provides us with a perspective on the existence and origins of abuse in all its forms. Robert confronts us with the reality of abuse through human history. He argues that hierarchical social institutions create a sympathetic environment in which abuse can harbour. The challenge he puts is to identify and dismantle such an environment.

We will continue to keep abreast of this subject. As you are aware from the last newsletter we made a submission to the Victorian Inquiry into Child Abuse. It focused on what can be done under existing Victorian legislation, namely the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 to assist in the management and control of the potential risks religious organisations pose to the children of Victoria. The submission also supports the introduction of legislation providing for mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse by priests, churches and other religious organisations. The submission is on our website.

From the President...

This morning an analysis of the shocking school shooting at Newtown in the US came across my desk. It draws upon Aristotle's view of causation. Any act, says Aristotle, may have four different causes: material, efficient, final and formal. The 'efficient' cause of gun violence is a shooter who intends to kill. The material cause of gun violence is the gun. The final cause is provided by answers to questions like "What was the shooter's motivation? What could he possibly have hoped to accomplish?" The formal causes are those that identify the social context and dynamics that shaped the event.¹

The author goes on to argue that addressing only the efficient and material causes of gun violence is unlikely to solve the problem. What's needed is a deeper understanding of the psychology behind those who feel it is somehow OK to go and kill multiple innocent people, and of the culture that enables this to happen, not just once but many times.

Reading this article had me reflecting on the differences and similarities between American culture and Australian culture. Yes, we speak the same language – but many will attest to a very different sense of humour. Yes, we share a similar legal code – but the glorification of the individual and their rights in the US is not yet fully fledged here in Australia. In my own professional sphere of governance, it has always baffled me how Americans can think their habit of combining the role of Chair with the role of CEO could possibly be considered 'good governance'. Here in Australia, ASX Guidelines specify an independent Chair in order to ensure a degree of balance of power.

Sometimes Australian freethought groups look with envy at the US constitution, with a strict separation of Church and State institutionalised in most court proceedings. Our own High Court, interpreting s116 of the Australian Constitution – that differs by *only one word* from its American counterpart – has made a very different interpretation, declaring that it means only that there shall be no official (government) Church in Australia. This

Also in this newsletter we celebrate the advances our Committee member Jason Ball has made in transforming the culture of the AFL in its attitude towards gay footballers. Committee member Lyn Allison updates us on the progress of religion in public schools campaign after the VCAT case. We update you on the upcoming Sean Faircloth tour which we encourage as many as possible of our members to participate in. We also treat you to extracts from the archives of our past.

We wish you a safe and happy festive season

interpretation has allowed government funding of religious organisations and support for religious programs in a way unthinkable in the US.

And yet the principle of secularism – separation between Church and State – is perhaps more deeply embedded in Australian culture than in American culture. Australians have always had a healthy scepticism about the intrusion of a powerful church into everyday life and private thoughts. Even sacred Sundays eventually fell to the power of tribal sports. The American phenomenon of religious fundamentalists being taken seriously on the political stage has not yet taken root here ... and yet, and yet ...

As former High Court judge Michael Kirby said, "The principle of secularism is one of the greatest developments in human rights in the world. We must safeguard and protect it, for it can come under threat in contemporary Australia."²

Next year in March and April, the RSA will be hosting Sean Faircloth, Director of Policy and Strategy at the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, on a tour of Sydney, Melbourne, regional Victoria, Perth and New Zealand. The main purpose of this tour is to raise awareness about the value of genuine secularism – for the religious as well as the non-religious. There are further details of the tour elsewhere in this newsletter.

Any Australian interested in holding back the threat to freedom *from* religion should put the dates of this tour in their diaries now.

¹Zency, Eric. *Aristotle in Connecticut*. Center for the Advancement of the Steady State Economy. www.steadystate.org. Accessed 20 December 2012.

²The Hon, Michael Kirby AC CMG, *In Praise of Secular Education*, December 2009.

The Lion, The Lamb and the Royal Commission

By Robert Stephen Lancy.

The recent establishment of the Royal Commission into child sexual abuse has focused considerable public attention on the systemic duplicity of certain institutions that are said to constitute some of the so-called “pillars of society”: churches, the armed forces, charities and the educational system.

A vast chasm has been revealed between the public rhetoric, explanations, defences and apologies – all crafted by public relations professionals -- and the brutal facts. The stark truth is that sadistic cruelty, torture and torment have been perpetrated on helpless victims within these institutions.

It should not come as a surprise. Systemic cruelty and brutal violence are deeply ingrained in human history and culture. Entire civilisations and economic systems were founded and sustained by such methods. The Empires of the ancient world were based on slavery, conquest and the ruthless exploitation of the weak, poor and vulnerable. This all appeared to be perfectly “normal” and unremarkable in these cultures, as evidenced by Aristotle’s famous remarks in the *Politics* that slavery is part of the natural order of things and that men are naturally superior to women.

The Feudal system was also based on the exploitation and virtual enslavement of the lower segment of the population and the subjugation of women and children. The horrific slaughter of the Crusades, dressed up as an exercise in religious piety and zeal, again confirmed the central place of violence and cruelty in the human psyche.

The colonial empires of the Europeans were created and maintained by appalling violence, mass slaughter and the enslavement of millions of human beings. Such methods and techniques were not regarded as immoral or inhuman by those who orchestrated and implemented them. The whole process was legitimated by missionaries bringing the “love of god” to these suffering millions. It was explained by the politicians in the inane cliché of “the white man’s burden”!

Not only has such behaviour between cultures and peoples been commonplace, cruelty and brutality have been part of the everyday fabric of life within societies. The criminal justice system routinely used torture, flogging and executions. Schools and armies were brutal. The Inquisition happily went about its sadistic work, torturing and executing “heretics” and Maranos. The working and living conditions of the lower classes in nineteenth century Europe were typically intolerable and

vile.

In the twentieth century the horrors of the two world wars, the Russian Revolution, the Gestapo, the KGB, the Japanese conquest of China and the Holocaust confirmed humanities’ capacity for cruelty and brutality. It is trite, but true, to observe that there has never been any shortage of executioners and torturers willing and able to inflict misery on their fellow humans.

Is it then any real surprise to find that such behaviour continues today? Especially in institutions in which rigid discipline and banal ideologies form a toxic environment designed to dominate the vulnerable?

It has become a regular and constant theme in the media to expose abuse in its myriad forms. There is a growing focus on the domestic abuse of women and children, the abuse of children within schools and religious organisations of all persuasions and the racial abuse directed against aboriginal and other non white people. There is anti semitism in all its forms, homophobia, the denigration of Muslims. There is the unspeakable cruelty practised every day against animals in slaughterhouses around the world.

It is reminding us of how intractable these behaviours are. The domination, exploitation and torment of the weak, of the marginalised, of the vulnerable, of the outsider, of the inferior, of the other, has been going on since the time of the Pharaohs. Typically it has been legitimated, explained or justified on the basis of some obscure political or religious doctrine, that “justified or demanded” such conduct.

It is thus intriguing to watch the phony wringing of hands and the feigned remorse of the church and military hierarchy, as if all of these revelations came as a complete shock, a bolt out of the blue. It is breath taking hypocrisy from those who have spent their lives within these institutions, as they pretend to be astounded and appalled at the revelations currently flooding into the daily media.

So what is really going on here? Human brutality and cruelty, which has gone on for millennia, within a system of covert denial and euphemistic double talk, and which polite society prefers to keep hidden from view, is once again being exposed. A courageous few in a new generation are prepared to break the silence and challenge the orthodoxy of established propaganda.

This is admirable. It is necessary work and long overdue. But there is a more fundamental question. Can such conduct be eradicated, restrained or curbed in future generations? This in turn raises profound questions concerning the causes and conditions that give rise to such conduct and whether those causes and conditions can be addressed in any meaningful way.

Before moving to that question it is necessary to draw an important distinction between brutality and cruelty as a constant element in human evolution and the modern concept of abuse which may be a specific subset of the wider problem, but which is sufficiently discrete to form a separate category.

The abuse currently gaining media attention is essentially the misuse of power and authority over the lives and wellbeing of individuals within the framework of institutions to which the State, directly or indirectly, has delegated power and control. These institutions are the delegate of the State and are thus clothed with its authority.

Many of the victims of abuse come from environments steeped in inequality and lack of opportunity. Many come from backgrounds of dire poverty, entrenched unemployment and systemic ill health. Anger and violence in these environments are often seen as the only way to survive in such hostile circumstances. Bourgeois niceties mean little in this world.

Because many of the perpetrators are appointed and anointed by the State, it becomes relevant to enquire into the role of hierarchy in human affairs. By invoking the myth of an omnipotent supreme being, ancient human war lords, with the help of their propagandists, arrogated to themselves the "divine right" to speak for such a being and to implement their version of an order inspired by such a being. Such an order, not surprisingly, placed them and their descendants at the top of the heap.

The modern democratic industrial state has evolved light years from these Bronze Age ideas. Nevertheless, modern society remains highly stratified. The fault lines of class, wealth and privilege remain. Hierarchical structures are still potent, even if they are more carefully disguised.

The primal hierarchical myth is thus being repeated. It is evident in the daily mantras of the State and its organs and in the behaviour of apologists in institutions that have been created on the basis of dominance and submission. Hence it is little surprise to find so much exploitation and abuse within social institutions that derive their primary authority and legitimacy from this model.

The impulse to violence is enlivened as soon as the authority of those in a dominant position is challenged. The wife who disputes the "command" of the husband. The private in the army who is charged with "insubordination" when questioning orders. Children who "defy" their

parents. These are all well rehearsed examples of a much wider tendency.

So one suggestion, worth exploring, is the notion of enabling people to think, talk and behave outside the model of dominance and submission. To conceive of and imagine a world not constructed on the principle of hierarchical dominance and submission. No commissars, kings or popes. One way to imagine such a world is to deal with fellow human beings in an equal and compassionate manner. Language then becomes seminal because it lays the foundation for discourse and learning.

We need to learn to conduct dialogue in a non-confrontational style, to decouple the investment of the ego in the exchange so that disagreement is not construed as a personal affront or an invitation to retaliate or control. It is possible to disagree with each other in a calm, respectful and rational fashion, without reacting egotistically or feeling the need to resort to violence.

A skilful dialogue presupposes an adequate and nuanced vocabulary, a respect for the process and the self control to engage without rancour and conceit. Such qualities are well within the reach of educators and can be imparted in young minds through example.

In relation to domestic disputation can the impulse to violence be curbed or restrained? If so, how? Does anger have a concrete form which necessarily entails a violent response? By developing insight into the arousal of anger, a destructive emotion, we may be able to restrain the impulse. There is a time gap between the arising of anger and a violent reaction. By stretching out that gap, self control can be asserted and violence avoided.

The problem nevertheless remains that in every moment when a step forward is made in the understanding of human violence there will be another moment in which the lives of untold millions of humans are being conditioned. In those lives there will be no respite from the daily dose of indoctrination, ignorance and national, tribal or religious bigotry. What will remain is the selfishness and the fear that are the root causes of the greed, hostility and anger that humans nurture toward their fellow creatures.

Unless and until this hierarchical, exploitative indoctrination is transcended and we arrive at a more selfless insight, the lion will not lie down with the lamb anytime soon. Whatever the findings of the Royal Commission might be.

Robert Stephen Lancy, Barrister at Law, Victorian Bar.

Inquiries into Child Abuse

By Eamonn Moran

On 17 April 2012 the Family and Community Development Committee of the Victorian Parliament was requested to "inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on the processes by which religious and other non-government organisations respond to the criminal abuse of children by personnel within their organisations". The Committee is due to report to the Parliament no later than 30 April 2013. The evidence presented to that Committee to date has painted a worrying picture of extensive child abuse perpetrated by members of non-government organizations, with the abusers then being shielded from justice by their organisations.

Against that background the announcement by the Prime Minister on 12 November 2012 of the proposal to establish a Commonwealth Royal Commission into institutional (both public and private) responses to child sexual abuse was generally welcomed.

The Royal Commissions Act 1902 (Commonwealth) empowers the Governor-General to commission a person or persons to inquire into and report on "any matter which relates to or is connected with the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth, or any public purpose or any power of the Commonwealth". A Royal Commission has extensive coercive powers. It may summon witnesses to give evidence or produce documents with criminal consequences attached to a failure to comply without reasonable excuse. It may issue a warrant for the arrest of a witness for failing to attend in answer to a summons.

An individual summonsed to appear generally cannot rely on the privilege against self-incrimination as an excuse not to answer a question or produce a document. However, statements or disclosures made or documents produced by a person to a Commission are not admissible in evidence against him or her in any civil or criminal proceedings.

It seems appropriate that a national Royal Commission is established to inquire into what clearly is a national

problem with cross-border implications. It is to be hoped that federalism issues will not hamper the scope of the Commission, particularly in its exercise of compulsive powers. Child protection as such is not a matter within the legislative competence of the Commonwealth and the offences constituted by sexual abuse are generally State offences. There is an argument, however, that Australia's ratification in December 1990 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child would provide the Commonwealth with sufficient power through reliance on the external affairs power in section 51(xxix) of the Constitution. In any event, section 7AA of the Royal Commissions Act does provide a mechanism for a Commonwealth Royal Commission to have concurrent functions and powers conferred under State law.

The involvement of religious organisations in child sexual abuse is likely to raise the issue of the applicability to the Commission of the statutory religious confessions privilege that exists in some States and at the Commonwealth level.

The terms of reference of the Royal Commission have not yet been published nor its reporting timelines. The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse established in Ireland lasted for 9 years before it finally reported. It is to be noted that the Prime Minister's announcement referred specifically to child sexual abuse. The Irish Commission had a broad reference that included sexual abuse but extended to physical and other abuse as well as neglect. The Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry relates to "criminal abuse". Whatever its final terms of reference, given the seriousness of the issue, it is to be hoped that the Commission can complete its work as quickly as possible in a manner consistent with the enormity and importance of its task.

Eamonn Moran is a QC at the Victorian Bar and the former Chief Parliamentary Counsel for Victoria.

New Goals

By Sally Whyte*

The football field is the Mecca of Australian masculinity, where weakness is the enemy. Sledging your man by spitting “faggot” at him is as common as hot pies and cold drinks. It is in this place that a gay man is most terrified to speak the truth about his sexuality.

Jason Ball, 24, thought he would never come out to his football club, a major part of his life since he was five years old. He had told his parents, his school friends and work colleagues, but still avoided conversations about girls and relationships with his teammates at the Yarra Glen Football Club.

“I remember having a conversation with one guy, he’d just broken up with his girlfriend, and then he put it back on me and said ‘What about you? You’re in a relationship aren’t you?’ and I was like ‘Yes I am.’”

“And my heart’s beating really fast and I’m thinking ‘Is this where I have to tell him?’, and he said ‘What’s his name?’”

“He said ‘Has he come to any football matches yet?’ I said ‘No.’ and he said ‘Well you should bring him down. It would be great to meet him.’”

It’s not the reaction one would expect, and it’s definitely not what Jason expected when he finally came out to his teammates.

“They were incredible. I think I was very lucky in a regional country town to have people like that.”

Jason, a gay footballer, watched as the AFL used its considerable voice to tackle racism and promote respect for women. The significant changes wrought there made him think that voice could help young people like him who are terrified of being shown the door at their clubs.

In September he called upon the AFL to screen anti-homophobia advertisements during the Grand Final, to even consider a “Pride Round” to show that homophobia isn’t okay for players or spectators at any level. The slow reaction from the AFL and the defence from the old guard that ‘the AFL can’t solve everything’ highlighted an issue that has been swept under the rug for too long.

Does the AFL have a homophobia problem?

Last year the Western Bulldogs’ Justin Sherman was suspended for four matches and asked to pay \$5,000 to charity after racially vilifying another player.

Will Minson was suspended by the Bulldogs this year for making a comment about his opponent’s mother.

In August, St Kilda’s Stephen Milne was fined just \$3,000 for calling Harry O’Brien a “fucking homo”. He wasn’t suspended.

Commentators and talkback callers were quick to condemn the former incidents, but the punishment for a homophobic slur was brushed off by many as an overreaction and political correctness gone mad.

A player’s race and his family are well and truly off limits on the field and off, but despite professing an inclusive environment, the AFL is moving slowly in taking a stance against homophobia.

Jason Ball has watched these events unfold as a country footballer with disappointment.

“What was sad for me was Harry O’Brien—who is someone I really respect—said he had no problem with it because he’s not gay, so it doesn’t matter. But I thought he would have the maturity to say ‘It’s not on for those people I know who are gay or who might be gay because it is insulting to them’—but he didn’t say that.”

Jason decided that this year was the time to tell the AFL to take a stand against homophobia. It was a big step in a league that includes Milne, his apologists, and Jason ‘stay in the closet’ Akermanis.

It was a giant leap from the boy who feared he would be kicked out of the team if he revealed his sexuality. “I thought I wouldn’t be able to play if they found out.”

Jason’s campaign on [Change.org](https://www.change.org) shows that the homophobia in football matters, with over 27,000 signatures supporting a push for the AFL to speak out and “show all of the gay supporters and players that the AFL has got their back”.

Before Jason’s face, before his voice, a gay footy player was a shadowy, mythical creature. Since Jason has been in every newspaper and 6pm news bulletin, many have seen that a gay footballer doesn’t threaten the game, or any ill-founded sense of masculinity.



Jason's story has set the record straight on the misconceptions surrounding homosexuality and football. Last year Jason Akermanis wrote that homosexual players should stay in the closet. He talked of his discomfort in the locker rooms with a gay team mate.

"Locker room nudity is an everyday part of our lives and unlike any other work place. I believe it would cause discomfort in that environment should someone declare himself gay." Jason Ball laughed when I mentioned this to him and said that nothing had changed in the locker room since he had come out.

"I've played on good looking players and very ugly players and it does not affect my game. I still want to beat them just as much." His sexuality may be different to his teammates', but the importance of winning the ball is the same.

In the week after the media attention, Jason played in the Grand Final for Yarra Glen. He zoned out to any shouts from over the fence, but has since found out that he and his sexuality were a topic of conversation around the ground.

"There was a lot of confusion... people were not sure if it threatened their masculinity if they said they were okay with me being gay. I heard some really inspiring stories of guys who I would not have expected at all, who really stood up for me from my team, from opposition, supporters."

It is the threat to masculinity that has formed parts of Professor Murray Drummond's research into sport and the culture that surrounds it. "The sports where we have a larger amount of violence... what they call blood sports and so forth... if you're involved in those sports you are perceived to be more masculine."

He agrees with Jason that change is needed but that change in football culture will be incremental. "The AFL still has the opportunity to be proactive, it doesn't have to be the panacea for every social issue, but there are certainly social issues that it can address... other people will say it's not an issue because we don't have gay men playing AFL football. Well, we don't have gay men playing AFL football because they're not coming out, so we don't know, it's a chicken or the egg type thing."

Jason says "I'm not asking them to solve homophobia, I'm just asking them to tackle homophobia in football. The AFL is part of the problem."

At the time of publication, not a single current AFL player has voiced support for Jason, or his campaign. "I'm sure they're aware of the issue, but their silence is pretty deafening. I think no one wants to be first."

The AFL is only just beginning to move against homophobia, but Jason's supportive family and club give him the strength to laugh at an issue that once terrified him.

"I remember my Dad was okay with me coming out, but if I was to barrack for any other team but Collingwood I would have been kicked out."

*** Reproduced with the kind permission of *Farrago*, where it first appeared.**

The Fairness in Religions in Schools Campaign

By Lyn Allison

Following the decision by Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to dismiss the complaint against the Victorian Government over the conduct of special religious instruction in state primary schools, a public forum was organised in Melbourne on November 4. Speakers representing The Fairness in Religions In Schools (FIRIS) school parents, the barristers for FIRIS and the Humanist Society of Victoria (HSV) in the VCAT case, an interfaith minister and the coordinator of the Religions & Ethics Education Network Australia, reflected on the decision and developed, with input from the audience, a plan of action:

1. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) should be challenged on its continued policy which instructs school principals to *accommodate every accredited special religious instruction (SRI) provider who presents themselves. In particular, evangelical activity in State schools needs to be withdrawn.*

2. A meeting of school principals should be convened to discuss possible joint action over their unreasonable difficulties in managing SRI. Such issues should also be referred directly to school councils.
3. Teachers should be made aware that existing rules governing 'supervision' of SRI are limited to issues of behaviour and safety. In this way, teachers could be brought on-side and encouraged to raise awareness of the problems imposed on them by SRI.
4. Educational authorities should compile teaching resources for general religious instruction (GRE) and teachers should be allowed and urged to qualify for GRE, with support from the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Citizenship as well as DEECD.

HSV has emailed the principal and school council of every state primary school in Victoria advising them about the results from the forum. An appeal against the VCAT decision has been lodged.

Sean Faircloth in Australia, March 2013

By Rod Bower

The RSA is delighted to announce the visit of Sean Faircloth, author of *Attack of the Theocrats, How the Religious Right Harms Us All and What We Can Do About It*. He will appear in Australia in March and April of next year. Sean is the Director of Strategy and Policy for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (US) and is an experienced politician and lobbyist, having served ten years in the Maine legislature prior to joining the RDF. Concerned about the breakdown of the "wall of separation" between church and state, his book describes the effects this has on the law and on everyday life in the USA.

The RSA is committed to rational thinking in all areas of life. Like Sean, we are particularly concerned that over the last few decades there has been an unrepresentative influence of conservative religious lobby groups on Australia's politics. Often it has been at the expense of rational thinking and evidence-based public policy. Furthermore, this change is occurring "under the radar" of many Australians. Sean's book includes a 10 point plan for a secular (religiously neutral) America, and the RSA believes many of his points are relevant in Australia. During the visit we hope to gather and refine Australian ideas and work with Sean and a range of freethought groups to develop a corresponding plan for Australia—a plan that will provide a focus for our work over the next few years.

We also hope the publicity surrounding Sean's tour will assist in getting the general public to understand better the benefits of secularism for both the non-religious and the religious, and the need for separation of church and state at all levels of government.

The final schedule for the tour is still being developed, but we can tell you already of some exciting events to put in your diary.

- ▲ On Sunday 24 March Sean will appear at the Sydney Opera House with prominent Australians to discuss current and potential threats to secularism and what should be done about them.
- ▲ On Tuesday 26 March there will be a major event in Melbourne
- ▲ On Wednesday 27 March, Sean will be in regional Victoria at Kyneton
- ▲ On Thursday 28 March, there will be a lunchtime talk at the Wheeler Centre and a book launch at Embiggen Books
- ▲ After Easter, Sean will also be appearing in Perth as a guest of the WA Humanists
- ▲ And finally, he will be appearing in New Zealand in early April as a guest of the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists.

Check www.rationalist.com.au for further details as they develop.



Nerida Wallace (third from right) with other recipients of the Certificate for Service

Rationalist Advisor Recognised

Congratulations to a good friend of the Rationalists, barrister and mediation expert Nerida Wallace. Nerida was recently recognised by the Law Institute of Victoria for the professional excellence of her work and for her outstanding contributions to the legal profession and to the work of the Institute.

Nerida is Principal of Transformation Management Systems, a boutique mediation service that draws on her extensive experience providing practical solutions to difficult legal situations. She was instrumental in guiding the Rationalists through our recent dispute, providing advice that proved to be critical at certain points along the way. With her calm and supportive manner, it was very reassuring knowing she was always there at the end of the phone.

Best wishes and congratulations from your friends the RSA!

Vale Lois Sweet

The Rationalist Society of Australia lost a great friend and a dedicated worker for the cause when Life Member Lois Sweet passed away last week.

Lois's connection with rationalism began through her late husband. When the RSA established an office in Commerce House in Flinders Street, where coincidentally Lois ran her successful secretarial business, she began doing many of the secretarial tasks of the Society. She continued to do so when the RAA office was relocated at her home in Croydon after 1988.

After Bill Cook's death in 1983, Lesley Vick became the new President and in due course Lois became the official Secretary of the Society. Lois had no children and no close relatives and it would be true to say that the RSA became her life's work. In recognition of her long service, she was made a Life Member of the RSA. She was elected to the Board of the Rationalist Association of Australia in 1998.

The principal contribution that Lois made to Rationalism was in the area of organization. In most organizations there are plenty of people who are good at talking about the philosophy and policies of the body but people who are prepared to take on the nitty-gritty of day to day organisation are much less numerous. Lois had great skill in following through on the myriad day-to-day tasks.

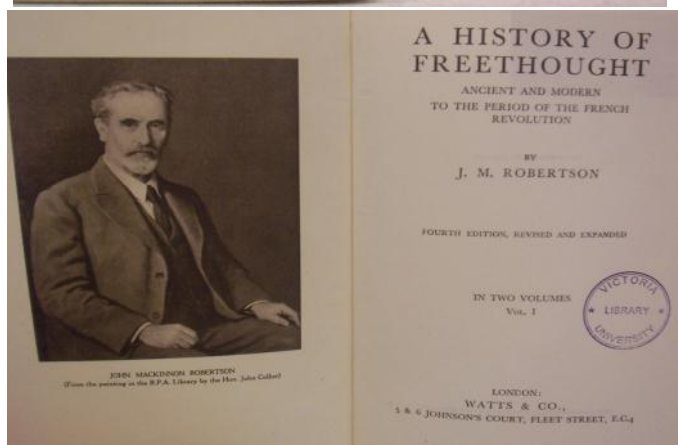
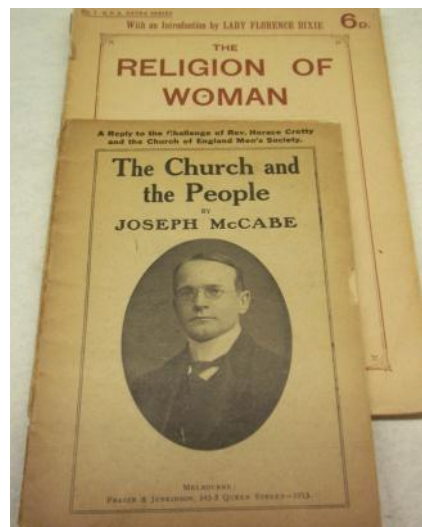
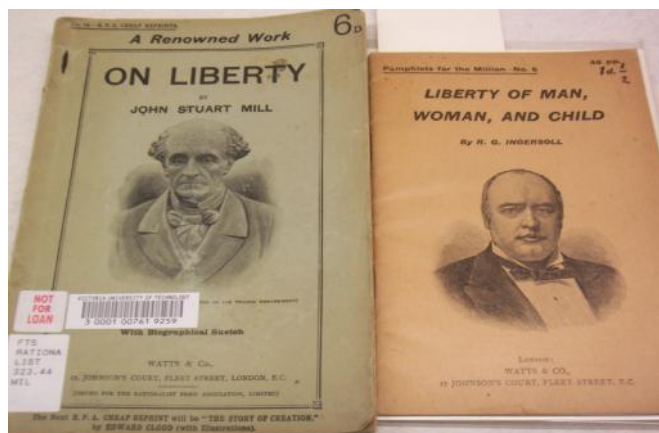
No organisation can be successful unless it manages to recruit and hold members and this was a particular ability of Lois'. As well as sending out membership renewal notices on a strict schedule and followup notices for those who didn't renew, she also spent a great deal of time and effort making contact with the membership by telephone and this work was of particular value in obtaining a good attendance at Rationalist conferences. She was a key factor in the organisation of a very successful series of rationalist conferences, first at Cowes and later at Warburton.

Lois suffered from dementia during her later years and so was not able to enjoy a period as a respected elder in the movement, and many current rationalists missed out on the opportunity to know her. She lived into her nineties and her contribution to rationalism when she was at the height of her powers was substantial, sustained and dedicated. We bid her a fond farewell.

David McKenzie and Ian Robinson

A History of the RSA Library Collection

At the 2012 AGM, librarian Mark Armstrong-Roper gave a talk about the history of the RSA library collection. Below are some pictures he provided, showing some of the amazing works that have managed to be preserved within the RSA collection.



These works are available for viewing at the Special Collections Room, Footscray Park Campus of Victoria University. More information about the works included in the collection can be found online at library.vu.edu.au. Mark discussed the possibility of these works being made available online in e-book form, if funding to do the laborious job of turning the books into suitable electronic format could be found.

Communication Survey—Results

The Rationalist Society undertook a survey of the members to identify what is the best communications strategy. The results were mixed.

Sixty five per cent of members consider a quarterly newsletter to be sufficient regular information. The remaining members would especially prefer more newsletters and more articles on the web site.

The RSA is revamping its web site but only 17 per cent of members indicated that they would be checking it regularly. Forty three per cent said they would “sometimes” look at it, mainly depending on the issues at the time. Thirty five per cent say they would “hardly ever” look at the site.

The RSA has produced a hard copy quarterly journal for many years, the cost of which far exceeds membership fees. It has been suspended due to the retirement of the editor and cost pressures, but members strongly indicated that it was important to them. Just over half the members indicated that it is “very important” to them and that they read it fully. Just under half describe it as “fairly important” and that they read some of it. About a third of members are prepared to pay \$10 or \$20 per issue to ensure they continue receiving the journal.

Members’ preferences for modes of delivery varied. Just over two fifths prefer to receive their communications in hard copy. Just over a third prefer to receive their communications electronically. A quarter prefer a combination of electronic and hard copy.

Your feedback will be discussed at the next RSA Committee Meeting to help direct future communications.