



The Rationalist Association
of NSW Inc.

NEW LIBERATOR

Winter 2020



How many Royal Commissions, how much evidence of rape, sexual abuse and cover-ups by Catholic bishops - how many victims of crime - are required - before judges, magistrates, tribunal members, judicial registrars, court officials and barristers reconsider this covering public submission to the Catholic Church of Australia?

Below: 29 January 2020: St Patrick's Cathedral Melbourne, Care Leavers of Australia Network protesting against the Red Mass for the beginning of the Legal Year





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Journal of the Rationalist Association of NSW Inc.

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The aims and objectives of The Rationalist Association of New South Wales are to promote:

- a philosophical and scientific approach to life free from superstition and dogmatism;
- secular education in government schools; and
- the separation of church and state.

The title *New Liberator* was chosen in honour of Joseph Symes (1841–1906) a British secularist and publicist, who arrived in Melbourne in 1884. He published a weekly, the *Liberator*. The first publication of the *New Liberator* coincided with the centenary of Symes' death in 1906.

Articles published in this journal seek to promote discussion and understanding of cultural and political issues in Australia. It is not connected with any political party or sectarian group.

Articles up to 1,500 words are welcome. Please send in Word format to: nswrationalists@gmail.com

Opinions expressed in **NEW LIBERATOR** are those of the authors.

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AUSTRALIAN CHRISTIAN LOBBY (ACL) SUPPORTS APPEAL FROM DOCTOR'S SUSPENSION FOR STATEMENTS OF 'VIOLENCE'

Meg Wallace

Decades ago, when, as a student nurse at St Vincent's Hospital, Sydney, I was caring for a woman who was haemorrhaging from a botched abortion. A young doctor appeared with the blood she needed to receive. He held up the blood and said, 'If it was up to me, I wouldn't be giving you this'. In other words, 'I would prefer that you die.'

The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL) is demanding that doctors be permitted make public statements like this in reviving its promotion of the Religious Discrimination Bill. It is spearheading a massive push for the appeal of a decision quashing a doctor's right to practice for making similar comments to the ones I heard.

The Medical Board of Australia stripped Dr Jereth Kok of his right to practice in August 2019. They held he *'appeared to condone or call for violence and/or genocide towards racial and religious groups' on Facebook*. The suspension was upheld by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) in March this year.

VCAT found some of the posts:

- Denigrate, demean and slur doctors who provide abortions, endorse calls for their capital punishment and disparage those who treat gender dysphoria according to law;
- Endorse/call for violence and/or genocide toward racial and religious groups;
- Express and encourage demeaning views regarding LGBTQI persons that are contrary to accepted medical practice.

The Board identified 30 examples upon which it specifically relied in support of its decision.

Regarding those seeking an abortion, Dr Kok says it is against his moral beliefs: *'In a few instances I have attempted to talk [women] out of it. Yes, I'm breaking Victoria's new abortion laws, but I don't give a stuff ... if a woman dies on a quack abortionist's table, that's exactly what she deserved.'*

Behaviour that incites violence or encourages hatred, serious contempt, revulsion, or ridicule on the basis of one's race or religion is prohibited in Victoria. The Tribunal held that the postings may cause people to doubt Dr Kok could provide respectful care and was against the Medical Code of Conduct. *'We also have concerns about the level of respect he can bring to other*

members of his own profession with whom he may have to engage and/or refer patients to.' They held that it is in the public interest to deprive him of his right to practice.

While not specifically endorsing the content of Dr Kok's posts, the ACL has adopted Dr Kok's appeal from this decision as the latest step in its campaign for 'freedom of religion', to raise the pressure on Parliament. It has vowed to give him 'all the support that he needs' to appeal the decision. Martyn Iles, managing Director of ACL, stated that *'The Human Rights Law Alliance [created by ACL] would stand ready to ensure that can be done because it would be the right thing to do.'*

He claims there is a need to 'restore (*sic*) religious freedom when regular parliament resumes.'

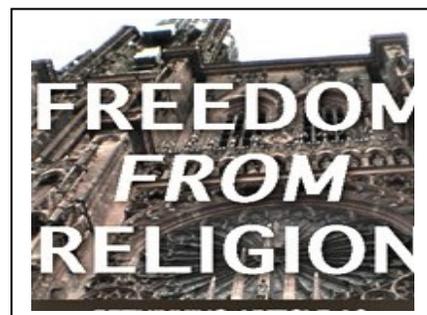
He described the call for what VCAT termed 'violence and/genocide' as *'simply saying something that some people do not like, without evidence of any harm.'*

If a woman dies on a quack abortionist's table, that's exactly what she deserved'

Once again, as with their defense of Israel Folau, the ACL demands that Christians can throw the integrity of their profession into doubt, be it medicine or sport, by ignoring the effects of this vitriol on both other members of their profession and the public.

Iles has stated on the ACL webpage that the reason religious freedom is the crucial political issue of our times is because it *'relates directly to Christ's call upon us to evangelise the world. It keeps the doors open for the gospel [the governing authorities cannot fulfil their] "servant of God" mandate unless they get out of the way, and let the truth be spread.'*

The Religious Discrimination Bill the ACL is promoting will encourage discriminatory action and comment. It will divide citizens according to their religious belief instead of encouraging a civil culture, be it in medicine or sport.



**DO FRENCH CLERICS CARRY ‘GET OUT OF JAIL FREE’ CARDS?
FRENCH LAW MUST BE REFORMED
TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM ABUSE**

Keith Porteous Wood

In March, a court in Lyon released former priest Bernard Preynat rather than imprison him despite finding him guilty of the sexual violence against minors on a huge scale over decades.

He had been sentenced to five years in prison but, extraordinarily, was released pending appeal.

Eighty-five victims testified, but using Preynat’s own admissions, he has abused around 2,000 victims since the 1960s; so thus far he has served just one day in prison for each victim. Having said that, many of the abuses fell outside the unacceptably short statutes of limitation.

Preynat has admitted the abuses and the sentence was materially less than the minimum of eight years recommended by the prosecutor. Even that certainly did not seem excessive, given the scale of Preynat’s abuse, and that he reportedly showed no contrition. Furthermore, the victims were scouts, and as a priest he was trusted as their scoutmaster, so Preynat also abused that trust and his power.

Preynat had friends in high places. He enjoyed the protection, in knowledge of his crimes, of the most senior Catholics in France. No less than five successive Cardinal Archbishops of Lyon: Renard, Decourtray, Balland, Billé and Barbarin.

Preynat’s case had already become a cause célèbre when Cardinal Barbarin was convicted of failing to report Preynat’s abuse under France’s mandatory reporting law. Preynat told the court that in both 2010 and 2014 he had disclosed his abuse to Barbarin. He was not however defrocked until 2019, over half a century after the Church first learned of his of abuse. Barbarin remains unrepentant about this or his failures to report, casting himself in the role of victim.

The public prosecutor had refused to bring Barbarin to trial, prompting victims to bring a private prosecution, at which the prosecutor opposed a guilty verdict. A powerful film about their struggle to achieve this is called *Grâce a Dieu*, a reference to reporters’ horror when Barbarin told them ‘by the grace of God, most of the offences fall beyond the statutes of limitation’.

Barbarin’s own conviction was overturned on appeal, however Preynat’s victims have appealed that ruling to France’s highest court.

Many of the victims/survivors will not feel they have been served well as citizens by French justice and deserve our deepest sympathy. First, they were abused by Preynat. Then the church hierarchy compounded the abuse by ignoring the continuing abuse, even though latterly the law and their own regulations required them to report it to the civil authorities. The clerics resisted all attempts by the victims to secure justice.

It pains me to question whether the judicial authorities have sufficiently considered the seriousness of the sexual abuse of minors by Preynat. Given the hundreds of children he assaulted, could they not have exercised their power to detain him to prevent any repetition? Even Cardinal Pell in Australia in broadly similar circumstances was incarcerated pending his appeal.

It would be far from surprising if Preynat, 74, reaches the end of his life without having spent a day in prison.

We hope that the French courts will hear Preynat’s appeal as speedily

“And when that law is changed it must be strictly enforced, which the unduly lenient current law is not”

as the present emergency permits.

Who else but a man of the cloth, so well connected, would be treated with such undeserved lenience? And not just French archbishops and French bishops, but the Church as an institution appear to have license to ignore the reporting law with impunity.

The Preynat/Barbarin affair is a symptom of a much graver dysfunction. A French television investigation revealed that 25 Catholic bishops had protected 32 accused clerical sex abusers in France over the past half century and often transferred them to other parishes or even other countries. Four of these bishops are still in office and Barbarin has only just stood down. None have ever been imprisoned for failure to report. Numerous others will have been aware of this widespread abuse, but presumably felt the Church would show no mercy if they disclosed it.

And when that law is changed it must be strictly enforced, which the unduly lenient current law is not. And, how many more ‘protecting’ bishops? That list excludes, for example, the Bishop of Bayeux and his two predecessors who had reportedly not disclosed to the authorities the multiple abuses by a priest called Roger Matassoli as they were required to under the law. Matassoli had been accused of a catalogue of abuses of minors spanning sixty years. There is a suggestion from the police that Matassoli had been protected.

We only know of this because of publicity generated by Matassoli being killed late in 2019. The suspect is a young man who the priest had allegedly abused, requiring him to perform housework naked. The young man’s father had been abused by the same priest and his grandfather had committed suicide when he learned about this. The young man reportedly has mental problems and is now in a prison hospital. Had the bishops reported the abuse, presumably the priest would not have met his death in this way, or the young man be in custody in connection with the priest’s death.

And that brings me to the complicit role of the Vatican, at the highest levels. The Committee for the Rights of the Child strongly criticised the Holy See (the Vatican) over “priests who have been congratulated for refusing to denounce child abusers”, in a 2001 letter authorised by Pope John Paul II. It hasn’t prevented the Vatican promoting the evasion of French laws that require *inter alia* suspected abusers to be reported. Cardinal Barbarin was advised in 2015 by the Vatican’s then Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to avoid scandal in defiance of the requirement of French law to report, advice Barbarin conveniently heeded.

Failing to report abuse is not a victimless crime. As demonstrated above, that failure has facilitated abuse to continue, often for many decades.

The time has surely come for an independent appraisal of the extent to which the French justice system has reverted to pre-laïcité days where the clergy, bishops and archbishops could flout the law with impunity.

Everyone should be equal before the law and I encourage everyone, the media included, to draw attention to any further religious exceptionalism/favouritism in the operation of justice.

I urge a major reform of mandatory reporting law in France. Without it, children cannot be adequately protected. Much more stringent penalties are required for failing to report the abuse of children in institutions. The statute of limitations for both abuse and failure to report such abuse should take into account that victims typically take 33 years to claim, and protection for whistleblowers is also essential. All are recommended by the pressure group MandateNow.

And when that law is changed it must be strictly enforced, which the unduly lenient current law is not.

Both the new law and its enforcement are also needed to ensure France’s conformity with Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: “... protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, ... including sexual abuse.”

Keith Porteous Wood is president of the UK National Secular Society.

‘GULLIBLE’ POLITICIANS BEING FOOLED BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH SAYS MALCOLM TURNBULL

Jean Ely

Since the introduction of State Aid and the ‘Needs’ policy in 1973 — the Whitlam Government’s attempt to ameliorate the ‘Catholic vote’ in the DLP, the Australian Catholic Church has gamed the school funding system. The Church hierarchy, as opposed to caring members of the faithful, have never cared about ‘poor’ children. After all, to quote Christ, himself, ‘the poor will always be with us’. The problem is — the wealthy will always be with us as well. And so will a wealthy Church which lusts after power, political influence, and taxpayers’ money. .

“The archbishop sighed. ‘I am afraid to say, on this occasion, the politician has a more idealised view of human nature than the archbishop’”

For sixty years the Defence Of Government Schools have attempted to expose the dissembling nature of State Aid for private church schools. But now, many billions of dollars later, a modicum of figures have become

available on the MySchools website, and there are calls for accountability. Finally, some politicians, themselves good Catholics, are fed up.

Malcolm Turnbull, an ex-Prime Minister and author, and Adrian Piccoli, the NSW ex-Minister of Education, turned director of the Gonski Institute, have blown the whistle. Malcolm Turnbull has called the Catholic Church ‘duplicious and

unaccountable in needs-based school funding'. Adrian-Piccoli agreed.

Quentin Dempster in the *New Daily* and John Menadue with his blog, *Pearls and Irritations* are to be congratulated for giving the matter oxygen. For half a century, the mainstream media have never given any coverage to the DOGS facts and figures exposing the shenanigans in the Church treasuries, although the research of Trevor Cobbold of *Save Our Schools* has been given recent coverage.

Government money is received by the Catholic system in one big cheque but, according to Mr Turnbull, is distributed, not on the basis of educational need, but to keep school fees lower in middle-class schools to enhance enrolments and maintain 'market share' against public and independent schools.

In his recently published memoir, *A Bigger Picture*, Malcolm Turnbull exposes the arrogance of the Catholic hierarchy when they are dealing with politicians.

He writes:

"Over the years Catholic bishops, like George Pell, had always insisted the virtue of funding the Catholic schools in one lump sum, as a system, was that they could cross-subsidise the poorer schools at the expense of those in the wealthier suburbs. And this claim seemed so plausible, given the church's mission, that none of us gullible politicians questioned it."

Mr Turnbull said he discerned from conversations and correspondence with Archbishop Fisher that the 'reverse was the case.'

He (Fisher) explained that 'the problem' with our needs-based model was that more funding would go to schools in 'the poorer outer suburbs of Sydney and country New South Wales'. I was astonished. 'But don't you do that now?' There was a long pause. 'Malcolm if your reforms go through, it would mean the fees of St Francis's school in Paddington, would have to go up. Mr Turnbull writes that parents of St Francis, with excellent education results in his Wentworth electorate, would be horrified to learn the church was doing that.

Mr Turnbull wrote that he explained that government funding would still come to the church in one cheque but transparency was required. 'If they wanted to

subsidise fees in posh areas at the expense of schools in poor areas, they were not free to do that. 'Oh, come on, Malcolm,' said Fisher. 'You know, once you tell people

how the government has assessed need and shown how much each school would get, we could never get away with it. People would say we were short-changing poor schools to benefit the rich ones.'

Turnbull said the exchanges with Archbishop Fisher were some of the most 'unedifying and disappointing' he had undertaken with a church leader.

'This was the fundamental issue: he was objecting to transparency and accountability and wasn't prepared publicly to defend how they moved government money around their school system'. Mr Turnbull concluded he could only assume that the objective of the Catholic system was to maintain enrolments in middle-class areas by keeping fees lower.

DOGS note that, historically, the Church, as in Medieval times sees itself as a State within a State, an *imperium in imperio*. The hierarchy regard themselves as 'Princes of the Church'. The Church itself is a monarchy, not a democracy.

When, in the nineteenth century Australian politicians like Henry Parkes and John Dunmore Lang had the guts to confront the Australian bishops and demanded accountability for education funds, the Australian bishops took their schools out from under the Government funding. They did not expect it, but it took 80 years before they gained enough political influence to have it returned - but on their terms. Turnbull should not be surprised by the behaviour of Archbishop Fisher.

Nor is there anything new about the current situation with Catholic and other church school funding. The only thing which has changed is the calibre of our politicians. They lack the will and the courage to call out the Church and its princes and princelings for their 'duplicitous' behaviour.

Hopefully, some might learn from Turnbull and Piccoli. He who pays the piper with citizen taxpayer moneys should also call the tune.

Jean Ely is on the council of Defence of Government Schools.

***'Oh, come on, Malcolm,' said Fisher.
'You know, once you tell people how the government has assessed need and shown how much each school would get, we could never get away with it.
People would say we were short-changing poor schools to benefit the rich ones'.***

THE HUGE LIE OF THE CANADIAN CIVIL LIBERTIES ASSOCIATION AND THE CANADIAN BAR ASSOCIATION

David Rand

Proposed *Bill 21* in Quebec prohibits the wearing of religious symbols by those in public service, such as government employees and those in the legal system, but opponents of *Bill 21*, including the National Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) oppose this rule as a breach of freedom of religion.

The *National Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA)* has joined the *National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)* in contesting *Bill 21*, an Act respecting the secular structure of the State, before the courts.

Now given that *Bill 21* implements (partially at least) State secularism in Quebec and extends civil liberties by stipulating that, “all persons have the right to lay parliamentary, government and judicial institutions, and to lay public services,” (where the word “lay” is a bad translation from the French « laïque » meaning “secular”), we have to wonder just why an association which claims to promote civil liberties would oppose that law.

Searching for an answer to that question, I recently visited the CCLA website where, on the page which presents the details of the CCLA’s court challenge, I found the following assertion:

‘*Bill 21*, of course, is the law that will ban Jews, Muslims, Sikhs and others who wear symbols of their faith from pursuing careers in numerous public sector jobs.’

The statement above is patently false. *Bill 21* does not prevent anyone from working in the public service. It simply states that, in certain jobs, the employee must abstain from wearing religious symbols during working hours. If the employee wears such a symbol while off the job, they only have to remove it at work, and then put it back on, if they so wish, when they leave at the end of their shift. This is necessary in order to respect the religious neutrality which is one of the conditions of employment in some civil service jobs.

Bill 21 does not discriminate against anyone. It targets no-one. On the contrary, the law targets certain behaviour; religious displays which are unacceptable in the civil service.

But according to the CCLA’s declaration, those who wear religious symbols are *excluded* from those jobs.

This is completely false. Such persons may indeed pursue a career in the civil service. *Bill 21* does not prevent

them from doing so. They simply have to respect the conditions of employment, including professional ethics.

How can this dissonance be explained? Is it impossible to remove a religious symbol? Is the symbol fused onto the body of the person wearing it? Does the person wear the symbol to bed? Does the wearer shower or bathe while still wearing the symbol? Is surgery required in order to separate the symbol from the person wearing it? It really is a very bizarre allegation to claim that anyone is excluded from the jobs to which *Bill 21* applies.

In the title of this blog, I use the word “lie.” I am saying, then, that the CCLA is lying. But am I wrong? Is it possible that the CCLA is not lying? Is it possible that the people of the CCLA are so half-witted that they are not even aware of their mistake? No, I do not think so.

I think it is far more likely that their assertion is the result of an assumption so preposterous that they dare not express it openly: the assumption that an individual’s religious affiliation is of such paramount importance, so essential to the person, that to remove a religious symbol, even for several hours a day for reasons of professional ethics, would be a horrific affront to their... their what? their privacy? Who can say?

At any rate, this would mean that the CCLA grants religion an enormous privilege, the privilege of being on a level of importance exceeding even the duties of a civil servant during working hours, a privilege which elevates reli-

gious practice above even the democratically adopted laws of the State.

By virtue of such logic, or rather illogic, if a Pastafarian were hired as civil servant, they would have to be allowed to wear a colander on their head, even at work. The consequences are downright laughable.

And now, we have just learned that the Canadian Bar Association (CBA) has adopted a similar policy. This association, meeting in the Chateau Laurier in Ottawa, adopted a resolution which denounces “any government policy which would deny equal treatment in the profession based on a lawyer’s religion.” Furthermore, the resolution also targets *Bill 21*.

Thus, the CBA is committing exactly the same error—or the same lie, depending on one’s interpretation of their bizarre resolution—by ascribing to *Bill 21* harmful consequences which that law absolutely does not have.

Bill 21 does not discriminate against anyone. It targets no-one. On the contrary, the law targets certain behaviour, that is, religious displays which are unacceptable in the civil service.

Both the CCLA and the CBA claim that *Bill 21* discriminates against persons having certain religious beliefs, but that is entirely false. On the contrary, *Bill 21* removes religious privileges by requiring that civil servants, regardless of their religion or irreligion, respect religious neutrality while on the job—just as the Public Service Act requires them to respect political neutrality.

In both cases, *Bill 21* and the *Public Service Act*, it is a matter of professional ethics.

And both the *Canadian Civil Liberties Association* and the *Canadian Bar Association* claim that *Bill 21* is

discriminatory. They are either deluding themselves, or else they are dishonestly promoting the maintaining of religious privileges within State institutions.

Bill 21 does not discriminate against anyone. It targets no-one. On the contrary, the law targets certain behaviour, that is, religious displays which are unacceptable in the civil service. That is all.

David Rand is President of the Atheist Freethinkers of Montreal.

MISREPRESENTATIONS, DISTORTIONS AND LIES IN THE ASSISTED DYING ARENA: THE MOTIVE THAT DARE NOT SPEAK ITS NAME

Martin Hanson

David Seymour's End of Life Choice Bill seeks to give New Zealanders what supporters believe to be a fundamental human right; the right to escape avoidable suffering by painless death, helped, if necessary, by a doctor.

But there is powerful opposition to the very idea of voluntary euthanasia. Among the groups campaigning against the Bill, arguably the most strident is the Catholic Church. Simon O'Connor, Catholic MP for Tamaki put it succinctly when he said in Parliament "there is no such thing as a right to die, only a right to life."

Most clergy know that this somewhat incautious statement does not resonate with the general public, and almost all the publicly articulated arguments against the bill are ostensibly secular. But there's little doubt that religion is a major motivating force in the opposition to the Seymour bill.

So, it's not surprising that two strands in Catholic doctrine are particularly offensive to non-believers:

1. One's life belongs to God, and only God can decide when it is time to die. Accordingly, voluntary euthanasia, being a form of suicide or "self-murder" is a mortal sin because it pre-empts God's will.
2. Christ suffered on the cross for us, and our suffering has value as redemption for our sins. As Saint Teresa of Calcutta put it so heart-warmingly, "suffering is a gift from God", or as Dr. Colin Harte put it even more grotesquely, speaking in Auckland in 2018, "suffering is not only a privilege, but it is the greatest privilege in this world" (*NZ Catholic*, December 21, 2018).

For the most part, journalists in New Zealand have so far drawn back from asking any questions that might elicit religious motives, seemingly following an unwritten rule that religion, unlike other institutions, is off-limits for criticism and must not be embarrassed.

It's fair to say that these core tenets of Catholic doctrine are rarely articulated in public campaigns against the Bill.

Such reticence is understandable; it is one thing to tell congregations that one's life is not one's own and that suffering on one's deathbed brings one closer to God; it is quite another to expect the laity to understand, let alone agree.

Even the most devout Catholic would balk at a literal interpretation of Item 1 above, since the whole of modern medicine is devoted to frustrating 'God's will' by extending people's lifespan! Scarcely any wonder, then, that Item 1 is interpreted selectively, the justification presumably being that 'God's will' is flexible, medicine being part of God's plan for humanity.

If that be the case, why can't 'God's plan' be flexible enough to incorporate voluntary assisted dying as a kindness to those who are suffering? But that would be in head-on collision with Item 2, the redemptive value of suffering.

With religious opposition to the Seymour Bill so riven with contradictions, it's no wonder that Euthanasia-Free New Zealand, Family First and other such groups strenuously keep their true beliefs well hidden. Instead, they resort to distortions, misrepresentations and in some cases, outright lies.

For the most part, journalists in New Zealand have so far drawn back from asking any questions that might elicit religious motives, seemingly following an unwritten rule that religion, unlike other institutions, is off-limits for criticism and must not be embarrassed.

So, it is left to individuals to try to get answers to simple, but potentially threatening questions that can reveal the motive that dare not speak its name.

I put one such question to Euthanasia-Free New Zealand (E-FNZ). It was about Tony Nicklinson, an Englishman who, in his early fifties, had a severe stroke that left him totally paralysed except for the ability to breathe, swallow, and blink. His only means of communication was to use special computer software to convert blinks into letters of the alphabet. After eight years of what he had termed a ‘living hell’, he appealed to the Supreme Court to be allowed to be helped to die. After the Court’s refusal, he took the only course open to him; he stopped eating and died.

My question was simple: aside from the fact that it would have been illegal, would it have been morally wrong for Mrs. Nicklinson to have helped him to die?

After repeated attempts, the nearest I could get to a straight answer was the following:

My view is that Tony Nicklinson wanted assistance in ending his life because of unresolved grief. I would advocate that people in his position receive psychological care to help them come to a stage of acceptance. Until people have come to the point of fully embracing life with their disability, I don't think they are in a place to make a fully informed decision to choose death. It is certainly possible to come to a stage of acceptance and have good quality of life, even with Locked-In-Syndrome.

This statement reveals more about the thought processes of E-FNZ than it does about Tony Nicklinson’s state of mind. Without ever meeting Nicklinson, E-FNZ felt qualified to diagnose his ‘unresolved grief’ as the cause of his desire to die, rather than his eight years of near total paralysis.

To say that until Nicklinson had ‘come to the point of fully embracing life with [his] disability, he couldn’t come to a fully informed decision to choose death’ implies that only when he had come to terms with his disability to the point where he no longer wanted to die, was he in a position to judge whether he wanted to die. Such circular logic strongly implies that E-FNZ considers that a desire to die, under any circumstances, is unacceptable – a sin in fact.

Worse, to say that Nicklinson needed psychiatric help implied that his feelings were not valid; a staggering

statement that is tantamount to denying Nicklinson’s right to his own feelings. The denial of his right to intellectual autonomy reeks of totalitarianism; views are evidently not ‘valid’ if they conflict with someone else’s orthodoxy.

But whose orthodoxy? Though E-FNZ has no hint of religion on its website, the apparent denial of Nicklinson’s right to his own thoughts is redolent of the theocratic suppression of thought centuries ago.

As a supposedly secular state, we in New Zealand like to think that those days are long gone. And so they have – almost. Vestiges are still with us in the unwritten and unspoken rule that one is not encouraged to criticise religion, and even less, any specific religion, such as Catholicism. Among the clergy, Bishops and Cardinals are accorded respect bordering on reverence, even when they make public statements that are clearly false.

For example, on 27 September 2013 the New Zealand Catholic Bioethics Centre put out a Catholic Bishops message, referring to an earlier Bill that sought to make voluntary euthanasia legal. It began:

The present attempt to make euthanasia and assisted-suicide legal in New Zealand is a matter of extremely serious concern. We want to encourage you to take the time to become fully informed about this very important issue.

There are many reasons why people object to legalising euthanasia and/or assisted-sui-

cide. While these can include religious and moral ones, our concern is to point out the social dangers of such a law change.

Many people from a variety of personal and professional backgrounds share our concern that a law change would introduce a new and dangerous dimension to our society.

The legalisation of euthanasia would:

- *send a message that the lives of some people are not worth living*
- *mean the sick, elderly, disabled and dying would too easily see themselves as a financial and/or emotional burden on their families and communities*
- *put further pressure on elderly people at a time when elder abuse is a growing problem*



- *send a mixed message about suicide when youth suicide remains at critical levels in New Zealand, well above all other countries in the OECD;*
- *undermine trust in the medical profession and put pressure on doctors and nurses to act against their consciences.*

Legalising euthanasia would place the lives of vulnerable people at risk, including those whom others might be tempted to think would be better off dead. For some people, it will undermine their choice to live. The mark of a good society is its ability and willingness to care for those who are most vulnerable. The current law offers people who are dying the best protection and provides the best motivation and conditions for quality palliative care.

We urge you to make your views known, especially to your local Member of Parliament.

Each one of the above is a serious misrepresentation of the intent of the Bill. Particularly egregious are 1 and 4, but the New Zealand media remained mute, allowing such gross intellectual dishonesty a free pass.

But in Australia, they are much more willing to call a spade a shovel. In the debate in the New South Wales Parliament on the Second Reading of the Rights Of The Terminally Ill Bill on May 9, 2013, Dr. John Kaye spoke bluntly about a letter by Cardinal George Pell on behalf of the Catholic bishops of New South Wales:

“The letter contains four substantial lies. It is a deliberate attempt by the cardinal to mislead the people of New South Wales and, in particular, to mislead his flock.”

The four lies to which Dr. Kaye was referring, followed by his rebuttals, were:

1. *“Despite talk of ‘dignified death’, dignity is not served by telling the old and dying, through our laws, that they would be better off dead, and we would be better off if they were dead.”*

Response: It is simply a lie to say that this bill tells anyone they would be better off dead. Granting people autonomy over their lives is not telling them that they would be better off dead. I remind Cardinal Pell of the eighth commandment—and for those who are Protestant the ninth commandment—which has a strict injunction against telling lies. In this case it is a sensationalist lie designed to create hysteria and not a reasoned response. It ill becomes a clerical and social leader in our society to go forth and promulgate lies which will mislead people about the intent of this bill.

2. *“Despite talk of ‘compassionate death’, compassion is not expressed by killing those who are suffering.”*

Response: It is a deeply misleading statement about this bill. The bill is not about killing people; it is about autonomy and the right of individuals to receive assistance when they have chosen to die. The cardinal and his bishops deliberately transform assisted self-termination into forced euthanasia. It is unfair, misleading and it is a lie. [Isn't euthanasia of a suffering pet an act of compassion?]

3. *“Despite talk of ‘patient autonomy’, legal euthanasia would bring pressure to bear upon vulnerable people to ‘volunteer’ for early death.”*

Response: That is untrue. No such pressure is brought to bear. The cardinal is well aware of, but chooses to ignore, that individuals who would have access to the provisions of this bill must be terminally ill. There is no such thing as early death in this bill; it is about people who would die anyway. [David Seymour's End of Life Choice bill is broader than the NSW bill in that it includes people who are suffering from a grievous and irremediable medical condition such as multiple sclerosis that is causing intolerable suffering.]

4. *“Depressed and vulnerable people would be more vulnerable under such laws.”*

Response: That is simply not true. Under the legislation a psychiatrist is required to assess depression so people who are depressed would be presumed to be unable to make that judgment. Cardinal Pell has not read this legislation or he is lying. I suggest he is lying to the people of New South Wales and he is lying to his flock. I remind Cardinal Pell of his obligations, particularly under James 1:26 not to tell a lie. In fact, he should reflect on James 1:26 very carefully, withdraw this missive, apologise and put out a correction.

Here in New Zealand, when politicians tell blatant lies, they are pounced on by the media, whereas the Catholic hierarchy seem to have protective covering.

It is high time they were subjected to more rigorous scrutiny on a level playing field.

Martin Hanson is a member of NZARH.

HOUSTON, WE HAVE A PROBLEM WITH YOU

Alec Smart, reproduced with permission from The Hub, Sydney, 17 October 2019.

Prime Minister Scott Morrison dismissed as ‘gossip’ but didn’t deny the report in the *Wall Street Journal* that he sought a visa for his spiritual mentor, Pentecostal minister Brian Houston, to accompany him on his visit to the USA on his jet – Shark One – for a state banquet with President Trump.

Houston himself tweeted via Twitter: “The story that is circulating in the media that Mr. Morrison wanted to invite me to the Whitehouse is completely false. The PM never contacted me about this, and I know nothing about it.”

In a further public statement, he said: “The PM never contacted me about this, and I know nothing about it. As far as I’m concerned this is a baseless rumour and totally false news.”

“Attempts to link this untrue story to the Royal Commission are unconscionable.”

[The Royal Commission Houston refers to is the 2013-announced Royal Commission on child sexual abuse and related matters that occurred in institutions, which reported on December 25, 2017.]

Pent-up Problem

Houston was investigated and censured by the Commission for covering up the paedophile past of his father, preacher Frank Houston, who molested at least nine boys, although he only publicly admitted one prior to his death in 2004.

The Commission’s findings would be grounds enough for Trump’s administration to permanently prevent Houston junior from setting foot on American soil, let alone this week with Scott Morrison.

The Commission’s report stated ‘We are satisfied that, in 1999 and 2000, Pastor Brian Houston and the national executive of the Assemblies of God in Australia did not refer the allegations of child abuse against Mr Frank Houston to the police.

“We consider that a conflict of interest first arose when Pastor Brian Houston decided to respond to the allegations by confronting his father while simultaneously maintaining his roles as national president (of the Assemblies of God in Australia) and a senior pastor .”

The Commissioners express the view that the NSW executive “failed to provide a contact person for the complainant, interview the complainant, have the state or national executive interview the alleged perpetrator, or record any of the steps it took.”

[Frank Houston, a Pentecostal pastor in the Assemblies of God Church in New Zealand and Australia, moved to Sydney and founded the Christian Life Centre in Darlinghurst, which expanded and eventually came under the leadership of his son Brian. In 1983 the revised Church in Baulkham Hills, was renamed the Hills Christian Life Centre, then became Hillsong Church].

Over the years, Frank Houston interfered with several young boys, one of whom, Brett Sengstock, told Chanel Nine’s 60 Minutes TV program he had been systematically groped and abused during a five-year period, between the ages of 7 and 12, which left him feeling “like he was murdered.”

In 1999, following a complaint by Sengstock’s mother that her son had been sexually abused, Hillsong Church

investigated the allegations, many of which took place whilst Frank Houston was the leader of the Assemblies of God Church in New Zealand between December 1965 and June 1977.

Brian Houston, now National President of Assemblies of God in Australia asked his father to resign – Frank confesses then retired on a pension – and despite investigations revealing further credible reports of Frank’s sexual abuse of at least eight other young boys, which Brian Houston and the Assemblies of God were obliged to report to police, they chose not to do so.

Another victim, known as AHA, reported to the Com-

NSW police recently confirmed that Pastor Brian Houston is still being investigated over his suppression of an unspecified number of sex crimes against boys committed by his father Frank Houston.

mission that Frank Houston, while staying with his family in 1970, would come into his room “nearly every night of the week” and sexually molest him.

The Commission heard that in 2000, when AHA confronted Frank about the abuse, he was offered \$10,000 in exchange for his signature on a dirty napkin at a

meeting with him and a Hillsong Church elder at Thornleigh McDonalds.

Hillsong church has historically close links to the Liberal Party. For example, in 1998, Brian Houston met with then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, and most of his cabinet in Canberra to conduct prayers. In 2002, Prime Minister John Howard reciprocated the friendship by opening a new Hillsong Convention Centre in Baulkham Hills. Following that, the Liberal Party Treasurer of Australia, Peter Costello, addressed its 2004 and 2005 conferences.

Hillsong Church, which declares the Bible as without error and the absolute authority in matters of faith,

believes wrongdoers can be forgiven for past evil if they repent and embrace their evangelical Protestantism.

Followers of which there are perhaps 100,000, embrace baptism, charismatic gifts, divine healing, miracles and speaking in tongues.

NSW police recently confirmed that Pastor Brian Houston is still being investigated over his suppression of an unspecified number of sex crimes against boys committed by his father Frank Houston.

ULTRACREPIDARIANISM - A LOAD OF OLD COBLERS

Chrys Stevenson

It's been a hell of a year. We're only half-way through 2020 and already Australians have battled bushfires of unprecedented scale and ferocity, watched a global pandemic kill hundreds of thousands and send countries and individuals into self-isolation. Now, we're looking on as America's tinderbox of racial and cultural polarisation begins to ignite.

Crisis brings out the best and the worst in us; it throws trends which have been bubbling along in the background into stark relief. One of those trends is not new, but perhaps more prevalent as politicians and populations grapple with how to understand and manage a tsunami of apocalyptic challenges.

There's an old saying, "Opinions are like arseholes - everyone has one." That's never been so true. Today, the unqualified, unfiltered, and often unwashed denizens of social media fill our news feeds with their self-confident, and often contrarian views on current affairs.

Lately, the world seems to be full of Renaissance men (and, to a lesser extent, women) who appear to have in-depth, expert knowledge on any subject you care to mention. As an American Facebooker recently observed:

"I think the coolest thing about this entire Coronavirus thing is realizing how many people I know have been secret expert virologists this entire time! Like, I know most experts are warning about the severity of the virus, but Johnny Drop Out over here says it's no big deal!"

What caused Australia's bushfires? Climate change? That's certainly the view of climate scientists and pyrologists. In November 2019, fire chiefs warned "the climate crisis was making bushfires deadlier and bushfire season longer." But, because that narrative didn't suit the Coalition and big business, the issue quickly became

politicised. Murdoch journalists, coalition politicians and right-wing commentators deflected attention from climate change by pointing the finger at arsonists. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence that this was not the case, people with no expertise in climate science or firefighting dug in.

What caused COVID-19? Virologists who examined the virus closely say it has none of the tell-tale signs of genetic manipulation. Yet social media buzzes with conspiracy theories that the virus is a Chinese biological weapon, deliberately released to bring down Western democracy. Some conspiracists argue that radiation from 5G phone networks has compromised our immune systems and that the virus is a ploy to introduce legislation for compulsory vaccination and inject us all with tracking chips. That this fear mongering directly contradicts the views of experts, matters very little. One in eight Australians now believe 5G is spreading Coronavirus and nearly half believe the virus came from a Chinese laboratory (Essential Poll, 2020).

Recently, when Professor Peter Doherty warned that Australians are becoming too relaxed about COVID-19, *The Australian's* economic journalist, Adam Creighton, responded, "I'm concerned people aren't relaxed enough!" Twitter wit, @DocMelbourne pondered:

"Hmmm. who to trust? One of Murdoch's lackeys or a Nobel Prize winning immunologist?"

For those of us who value expert opinion, scientific consensus and the importance of evidence, the world seems to have become a Huxleyan dystopia in which experts are untrustworthy no-nothings while @WuhanWarrior from Twitter, a high-school drop-out who works at the local Higgledy-Piggledy, knows the 'real truth' because he's 'done his own research.'

Fire and pestilence are not the only crises we are confronting this year - we have been afflicted with a plague of ultracrepidarians - people who give (usually contrarian) advice and opinions outside their own area of expertise.

While ultracrepidarianism is a contemporary issue, it is far from a modern affliction. The etymological roots of the word ‘ultracrepidarian’ come from the story of the artist, Apelles of Koa, recounted by Pliny the Elder around 4BC.

When Apelles put his art on show, the artist liked to hide behind his paintings in order to eavesdrop on people commenting about his skill. Apelles was a reasonable man. When a cobbler noted that Apelles’ rendering of a sandal was flawed, the artist recognised the man’s expertise and repainted it. Emboldened by the artist’s respect for his knowledge, the cobbler ventured to suggest the subject’s leg could also do with some correction. This was a step too far for Apelles who rebuked the cobbler, “*Sutor, ne ultra crepidam!*” -literally, “*Shoemaker! Not beyond the shoe!*”



Photo: *Apelles fresco by Giorgio Vasari, Casa Vasari, Florence*

Following Pliny, English satirist, William Hazlitt, recorded the word, ultracrepidarian, in 1819. In a put-down that would not be out of place in a Facebook flame war, Hazlitt railed at a newspaper editor:

“You have been well-called an Ultra-Crepidarian critic. From the difficulty you yourself have in constructing a sentence of common grammar, and your frequent failures, you instinctly (sic) presume that no author that comes under the lash of your pen can understand his mother-tongue ... There is an innate meanness and vulgarity in all you do.”

It should come as no surprise that, 200 years after Hazlitt, ultracrepidarianism is taking over the internet. After all,

the free world is now led by America’s ultracrepidarian-in-chief, President Donald Trump. Trump is the poster-child - the apotheosis - of ultracrepidarianism. Never, in the history of the world, has there been a greater ultracrepidarian! Trump (who lied about graduating first in his class), graduated from Wharton business school without honours. Six of his businesses were declared bankrupt between 1991 and 2009. Yet, he claims to have an almost super-human breadth and depth of superior knowledge. According to Trump:

“I think nobody knows more about taxes than I do, maybe in the history of the world.”

“Nobody in the history of this country has ever known so much about infrastructure as Donald Trump.”

“I know more about renewables than any human being on Earth.”

“I know more about ISIS than the generals do. Believe me.”

“There’s nobody bigger or better at the military than I am.”

“Nobody knows banking better than I do.”

“I understand the power of Facebook maybe better than almost anybody.”

“Nobody knows more about debt.” (That just might be true!)

Omnisciently, Trump even claims:

“I know more about Cory [Booker] than he knows about himself.”

Completely undeterred by his lack of medical training, President Trump recently astonished his medical advisers when he suggested that ingesting or injecting household bleach might be a good way to treat COVID-19. Why not? It works on your kitchen benches! “I’m not a doctor,” the President admitted, but (pointing to his head), “... I’m, like, a person that has a good you-know-what.”

While Trump clearly values his own expertise, he is not a fan of it in others. “You know,” he said at a 2016 rally, “I’ve always wanted to say this ... the experts are terrible!”

This anti-intellectualism is not confined to Trump. Climate-change denier, Myron Ebell, director of an American libertarian activist group, has derisively dubbed climate change scientists “the expertariate.” Ebell has a Master’s degree in political theory from the London School of Economics, but no expertise in climate science. Yet, he says:

“The people of America have rejected the expertariate, and I think with good reason because I think the

expertariat have been wrong about one thing after another, including climate policy.”

For ideologues, hampered by the fact that science doesn't support their views, inflating the frequency of scientific error in order to damage the prestige of (and public trust in) scientific institutions is a common strategy.

Anti-intellectualism is not a purely American phenomenon. In 2016, when ten Nobel prize-winning economists warned about the dire economic and social consequences of Brexit, conservative British politician, Michael Gove, replied that “people in this country have had enough of experts with organisations from acronyms saying that they know what is best and getting it consistently wrong.” And it seems, Gove, who has no economic credentials (he read English at Oxford), was right. The nation's leading economists were derided as ‘Chicken Littles’ and Britain voted to leave the EU - 52 to 48 per cent.

Anti-intellectualism flourishes in a world that has embraced a bastardised version of ‘cultural democracy.’ As Salon's cultural critic, David Masciotra explains:

“The true villain in a cultural democracy is the intellectual. The intellectual insists on standards of evidence, reason and logic when attempting to reach a conclusion regarding a matter of social import. She undermines the dogma that all nonsense is created equal, which renders her (or indeed him) unfit for participation in the increasingly masochistic rituals of liberty.”

Ironically, the blurring of class barriers and the democratisation of education and knowledge has not led to a greater respect for expertise. Instead, says Professor Tom Nichols, author of the book *The Death of Expertise*, democratisation has fostered:

“... the growth of an irrational conviction among Americans that everyone is as smart as everyone else.”

This is not a position of intellectual snobbery. The argument is not that experts are smart while everyone else is dumb. Nor is it an argument that people should not seek out information and voice opinions. The problem is not that people are stupid or uneducated, but that people have been encouraged to believe that having a degree, or professional expertise in any area, qualifies them to advance contrarian views beyond their own specialisation. Vocational education bears some responsibility for this compartmentalisation of knowledge. Now, students are educated to be specialists rather than receiving a broad-based education in humanities. An Arts degrees is widely viewed as worthless because “it won't get you a job.”

On Facebook, recently, I was put in my place by an anti-vaccination advocate:

“A confirmed sheeple indeed! You would do well to re-search before making such ignorant statements!!! You've been blind-sided by incedious [sic] manipulation. As a Natural Health Practitioner, I have been directly involved with the victims of vaccines.”

I am not a scientist, but I am an academically-trained, professional researcher, with 10 years' experience, researching and debunking vaccination myths. I have done my own research.

“Do you own research” is the last resort of the online ultracrepidarian. The problem is that many have no idea how to do their own research and have no appreciation of research as a career in its own right, requiring years of training and professional experience. As Professor Tom Nichols says:

“I fear we are witnessing ... a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laypeople, students and teachers, knowers and wonderers—in other words, between those of any achievement in an area and those with none at all.”

This will resonate with those who recently heard celebrity chef and self-appointed ‘wellness guru’, Pete Evans, opine that “doctors don't know much about biology” while defending his promotion of a machine that flashes coloured lights as a cure for COVID-19. Palpably ‘fed up to pussy's bow’ with ultracrepidarians like Evans, Michael Vagg, a clinical associate professor at Deakin University School of Medicine says:

*“Of all the weasel words immunisation deniers use, I get most infuriated by the ‘do your own research’ trope. You don't need to. Unless you're a senior research scientist with your own lab, a posse of postdocs and serious wad of cash, we don't need your help” (Vagg, *The Conversation*, 2017).*

When people say, ‘do your own research’, says Vagg, they want average people to be allowed to disagree with decades of rigorous, serious scientific effort. But, he warns, when relying on the internet:

“The average person with high-school knowledge and healthy faith in human decency has no chance [of distinguishing fact from fiction].”

What drives people, with no relevant expertise, to dissent from the consensus opinions of those who have spent a lifetime gaining academic and professional credentials in their field? Research confirms Aristotle's maxim: “The more you know, the more you know you don't know.”

Similarly, psychology has identified the Dunning Kruger effect: “The less you know, the more you think you know.” Like the cobbler in Pliny’s story, when someone is confident in, or recognised for, specialist knowledge they do have, they tend to become hubristic about areas beyond their expertise. Psychologists call this ‘over-claiming.’

Learning new information makes us feel good. Thinking that we’re smart gives us a buzz. But having our opinions or beliefs challenged makes us feel bad. Psychology suggests humans have an innate need to think highly of ourselves - even if this requires a breathtaking level of self-deception.

For example, someone can be as dumb as a post and still feel justified in pointing to their head to claim, “I’m like a person who has a good you-know-what.” This is called ‘belief-superiority’ - the conviction that your preconceptions are right, even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. And don’t be feeling smug! Who among us hasn’t stood on a bathroom scale, exclaimed, “That can’t be right!”, weighed ourselves again (maybe repeatedly), then insisted, “This scale must be broken!”

Belief superiority is nicely illustrated in the Netflix documentary, *Beyond the Curve*. When proponents of the ‘flat earth’ theory invested a substantial amount of time and money into experiments to support their hypothesis that the world is both flat and static, every experiment they conducted proved the opposite. The flat-earthers acknowledged the findings but said, “We obviously were not willing to accept that.” If their scientific experiment had proved their assertion, they would have crowed about being right. But when repeated experiments proved they were wrong, they insisted either the equipment or their methodology must have been at fault.

As journalist, David McRaney (2011), says on his “You’re Not as Smart as You Think” blog:

“When your deepest convictions are challenged by contradictory evidence, your beliefs get stronger.”

Because of the ‘buzz’ we get from validation, people tend to seek out a ‘tribe’ that shares their views. The internet has facilitated that task. People with belief superiority congregate in groups that feed their confirmation bias. The result is the extreme polarisation we are witnessing in today’s ‘culture wars.’

Statistics show that, in America at least, fewer and fewer voters and politicians identify as moderates. The middle-ground is disappearing as people scream at each other across a deepening chasm; each side intransigently convinced they are right - often in absolute ignorance or contradiction of reliable data and evidence.

So, what is one to do when confronted with an ultracrepidarian in the wild? While it’s true it’s almost impossible to sway the opinion of the person you’re arguing with, there is a good chance you might influence the bystanders.

“Fight for the crowd” is a strategy which dates back to the gladiators in the Roman Colosseum. You are not fighting to win against your opponent, but to convince the audience that your argument deserves a ‘thumbs up.’ Argue to persuade the jury, not the person whose position is clearly entrenched. You almost certainly won’t convince them - but you might just persuade the onlookers that the online ultracrepidarian is talking a load of old cobbles.

Chrys Stevenson is a freelance writer, professional researcher and member of the Rationalist Assn of NSW.

NEWS

DON’T DIVIDE US

The NSW Rationalists have joined the *Rationalist Society of Australia*, the ex-Jehovah’s Witnesses group *SaySorry.Org.*, the *Australian Foundation of Atheists*, and the *Sydney Atheists* in supporting the **Don’t Divide Us** campaign to oppose the proposed Religious Discrimination Bill. Please sign the petition at <https://dontdivideus.com.au/>

JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES HIDE MONEY

News Corp has revealed that since the Royal Commission on child abuse, JW has restructured its legal charities and entities. It has created 836 separate small basic religious charities with the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) site. Small basic religious charities are not required to provide financial information.

JW is now has one charity supplying financial reports to ACNC. While this charity reported \$150 million in income

from 2014-2019, it loaned and donated at least over \$100M. However, it reported a loss of \$1.9M deficit in 2019 and \$1.2 million 2018. Whistleblowers allege it sold off more than \$24 million in related properties since 2012. *The Advertiser* June 16, 2020.

US: HOLE IN ‘WALL OF SEPARATION’

US Supreme Court for the first time in its history has ruled that religious private schools cannot be barred from accessing government funding through vouchers. Supposedly this funding does not distinguish between religious and non-religious schools, but most private schools are religious. This puts a big hole in the Constitutional principle of a ‘wall of separation’ between religion and the state’ in the US, thanks to President’s Trump’s appointees to the Court.

The Last Word

ANGELICA DIVINE

Loyal readers, I write to you today from a luxury apartment overlooking St Peter's Square at the Vatican!

I arrived here early February for a conference to discuss the concerns always at the heart of Catholic philosophy: how to oppose abortion in all countries, especially by buying up hospitals; how to oppose 'voluntary' euthanasia, especially by leaning on politicians with thin margins in their seats; how to oppose those ghastly procedures to allow two women to have children through so-called 'IVF'; how to exclude homosexuals and similar from our schools and other institutions; how to complain when our free speech is interfered with when we try to tell the truth about these unfortunate sinners.

The Vatican's public relations firm also spelt out their program designed to deal effectively with all the unfair criticism concerning the global sexual abuse matter. That was in a closed session, of course.

I am proud to say the Vatican made my *Abortion Is Murder*, one of the keynote speeches. I got a standing ovation! With applause ringing in my ears I hurriedly exited the stage for the ladies' loo, as I guess I got a bit excited during my speech, which I delivered with great passion.

Unfortunately, as I strode out of the loo, I collided with a highly dressed cleric coming out of the men's loo. I say unfortunately, because I was wearing my Gucci high heels that I bought in Rome for this special occasion. I trod on the right big toe of what I thought was an Archbishop.

I regret to say, it was His Holiness, the Pope. He let out a piercing cry of pain as my super sharp high heel came down hard and square on his right big toe. I also heard what I assume was an expletive, in Latin.

Now, I was Dux of my year in Latin at Loreto, Kirribilli, but this was a word I did not recognize. (I later texted George asking him what it meant. He said he would prefer not to say).

Of course, I was extremely embarrassed when I recognized him, but after he recovered, he made light of the incident saying that these things are often happening to him because Satan is everywhere, and he, being the Pope, is the No.1 target.

He suspects his prostate problem, which is giving him Hell, caused him to go to the loo just when I did. It was another one of Satan's set-ups.

Well, having recounted that unfortunate incident, the Coronavirus struck before my flight back to Australia was due to leave Rome. So, thanks to the Chinese Communist Party, I am marooned as a guest of the Vatican. An amazing stroke of luck.

His Holiness made sure I had one of the Vatican's luxury apartments (free of course) when he found out that I could not travel. Nuns bring me delicious breakfasts and lunches, should I require them, and I join them in the very chic dining room for the exquisite evening meals prepared by the Pope's professional chefs.

The nuns are charming. All the conversation is in Latin, and it was a delight to pick it up again after all these years. It is very touching to witness how affectionate they are with each other, and how, after dinner, they go hand in hand, two by two, back to their lodgings.

They gave me a tour of the Secret Archives where Catholic scholars familiar with ancient languages are poring over the Vatican's holdings to check for anything that might embarrass God. The nuns are working the shredding machines 24/7, except for Mass and holy days. They are up to the 13thC.

As I was here, I took the opportunity to visit Australia's Embassy to the Holy See. I was delighted to see the pictures on the walls: Tony with the Pope, George with the Pope, Tony and George with the Pope. For a lark, the staff have a dart board with Geoffrey Robertson's image on it.

Of course, back in Australia, the High Court released George in a 7-0 decision just as I had predicted. That, of course, will not be the end of the matter. The best solicitors will be employed to ensure all the ridiculous civil claims of the disgruntled are stymied as much as possible, with a final offer of modest sums to make them go away with a minimum of publicity.

Finally, as to the Coronavirus issue that has me stranded. While I am appalled at the Pentecostal prime minister handing out free money for people to pay their rent and mortgages, when they should be left to their own devices, which should be the case in a free society, I appreciate that the real culprit in all this is the Godlessness of the atheist Chinese Communist Party. However, socialist policies as above should *never* have been entertained. This is a slippery slope which must be corrected to end this crazy giveaway.

My prayers, supercharged by my proximity to His Holiness, are directed to you all.

My prayers, supercharged by my proximity to His Holiness, are directed to you all.

