

# HUMANIST viewpoints



## WRITERS OF THE WORLD PROTEST MURDERS OF SECULAR BLOGGERS IN BANGLADESH

*"We, the undersigned writers, and PEN members, come together to condemn the horrific deaths of our colleagues Ananta Bijoy Das (or Dash), Washiqur Rahman Babu and Avijit Roy, three\* secular bloggers who have been brutally murdered on the streets of Bangladesh in the last three months. We urge Prime Minister Hasina Wajed and her government to do all in their power to ensure that the tragic events of the last three months are not repeated, and to bring the perpetrators to justice.*

*We were shocked and horrified by the murder of 32-year-old blogger and editor Ananta Bijoy Das, who was hacked to death on his way to work by a masked gang wielding machetes in the city of Sylhet on 12 May. Prior to his death, Das had reportedly received a number of death threats from Islamist militants, and his name had appeared in two assassination lists published in the Bangladeshi media, alongside those of other secular bloggers described as anti-Islamic and blasphemous.*

*Just months earlier, on 26 February, Avijit Roy, a fellow blogger and close friend of Das, was similarly killed. Roy and his wife, Rafida Ahmed Bonya, were viciously attacked by unknown assailants close to Dhaka University. Roy died soon afterwards and his wife was severely injured. A militant Islamist group has reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack.*

*A month later, on 29 March, blogger Washiqur Rahman Babu was murdered just 500 yards from his home in Begunbari, Dhaka. Police have claimed that the attackers targeted the 27-year-old blogger because they believed he had defamed Islam through his writings on websites, forums and social media. Two students from a madrassa (an Islamic school) have since been arrested in connection with Rahman's killing.*

*At least three other writers have been attacked or murdered in Bangladesh since 2013 and, although there have been several arrests, no one has been held to account for any of these attacks. We are gravely concerned by this escalating pattern of violence against writers and journalists who are peacefully expressing their views. Freedom of expression is a fundamental right under Bangladesh's constitution and under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.*

*We call on the Bangladeshi authorities to swiftly and impartially investigate Das's death as well as the murders of Roy and Babu, and ensure that the perpetrators are brought to justice in accordance with international fair trial standards. We also demand that the authorities do all in their power to provide protection and support to bloggers and other writers at risk in Bangladesh, in accordance with Bangladesh's obligations under national and international law."*

***LETTER SIGNED BY OVER 175 WORLD WRITERS SENT TO PRIME MINISTER OF BANGLADESH***

*\*the toll has since grown to the four men pictured –ed.*

**GO TO PAGES 6-7 FOR EVENTS IN OCTOBER-DECEMBER INCLUDING HUVAT AND END-OF-YEAR PARTY SATURDAY 5TH DEC**

**See p2 (Victor Bien), p4 (John August) and p8 (Peter Furness) for two-page articles based on their World Humanist Day talks**

**TURN TO PAGES 10-11 FOR REPORTS ON THE ACTIVISM MEETING AND OTHER ACTIVITIES FROM PRESIDENT IAN BRYCE**

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# ‘POLITICAL ORDER’ & ‘HUMANISM’

This article examines ‘Political order’ as a means of understanding ‘Humanism’. It is based on a talk I gave at the World Humanist Day celebration in June.

The concept and term ‘political order’ originates in the work of American political scientist Samuel Huntington. It was picked up by Francis Fukuyama as a central theme in his two volumes *The Origin of Political Order (2011)* & *Political Order and Political Decay (2014)*.

Fukuyama was known as a neocon when he wrote an earlier book *The End of History and the Last Man*, but the two volumes I'm discussing here can be read as documenting his repudiation of neo-conservatism. I understand that he and his erstwhile friend - and well known rabid neocon - Paul Wolfowitz, now no longer talk to each other.

For me at least, understanding how Humanism sits within a broad political context – under different ‘political orders’ - , provides better answers than we Humanists hitherto have been able to give on how values arise in ways not necessarily dependent on religious beliefs.

A major benefit is that the defensive stance that we have been put under by Christian protagonists - who assert that non-believers have no basis for values - can readily be shown to be unreasonable. We don't have to be defensive at all.

In the political debate about conservative or neo-conservative policies - generally opposed to the progressive stance of Humanists - , it can be shown, for example, that Margaret Thatcher's dictum, “there's no such thing as society” is outrageously false!

This new understanding also has action implications, such as giving context to define who we are and where Humanism comes from, and for policy stances we may wish to take.

I find Fukuyama's approach provides a more objective understanding of Western political order, democracy, rule-of-law, and accountable government - and how it came about - as well as a basis for understanding why other parts of the world haven't developed the same political structures, processes, or values.

Furthermore, we can get a handle on why their politics is the way it is, and why it is so difficult for them to get to the state of affairs of free (to varying extents!), democratic, politics - which prevails in the West.

This is sometime referred to as “how to get (politically) to Denmark” in a similar sense to the phrase “all roads lead to Rome”. Clearly this includes getting a general handle on the Islamic Middle East.

(Fukuyama also asserts we need to avoid a “Whig” view of history. Unfortunately, I'm unable to elaborate on this here).

Before I got onto this framework for understanding, I was rooting Humanism within the Enlightenment .

However I now believe the western ‘Age of Enlightenment’ could not itself have come about without a certain basic quality which inheres in the political order of the West, going back to before the time of Magna Carta.

I will still frame Humanism in the Enlightenment , but behind that is a deeper and wider view of history.

Following the emergence of humans from primate ancestors, political orders arose from our evolutionary past. The pattern of politics came firstly, and naturally, from segmentary lineage power relationships. These evolved to band level arrangements, then tribal groupings of bands, which merged, or were coerced, by various histories, into various large scale political orders.

Definable political orders, or regimes, or distinct human settlements are termed ‘states’ understood as ‘Leviathans’ - the term used by Thomas Hobbes.

It was early understood that such political orders needed to be ruled impersonally and be merit based. However this is a little like resisting gravity, which in this context is that from our biological evolutionary past.

We have a natural tendency to favour our ‘kith and kin’ over the impersonal, and merit-based, rules for objectively choosing people to share power and influence with.

Consequently all politics have an ever present tendency to lapse into corruption, nepotism, granting of selective favours for votes, and such like.

Two other major factors are necessary for a satisfactory political order. These are the rule-of-law, as opposed to capricious despotic rule, and that rulers must be accountable, which implies amongst other things - ‘transparency’.

Now political science analysis has shown that the idea of the rule-of-law, required a religion with a supernatural concept of authority, to be in place - to allow the idea to take hold.

The Chinese, who attained a large scale state level political order some fifteen hundred years before the West, but who generally do not have a supernatural belief system, never achieved the idea of some rule-of-law.

To this day China is struggling to develop a political order based on a system of impersonal law.

As ever I hasten to say, that this *does not prove* that the religion of the West, Christianity, is true! It just turns out that the West, having that belief system, was able to come up with the rule-of-law which is essential for forming a satisfactory political order. It's an ‘after-the-fact’ recognition.

Advances in politics can come from a variety of sources - just as serendipity happens in science. In fact, speaking of science, ‘political order’ is a very useful framing of facts in the field of political science.

The Age of Enlightenment was kicked off by a general struggle over what is, or are, the legitimate source, or sources, of authority in political order.

The Thirty Years War, 1618-48 was a devastating period of history, where incredible, lethal battles were fought by different religious interests often over apparently trivial theological points of doctrine (see *'Tis all in Pieces*).

Well it was ‘incredible’ - until, in recent times, we again saw savagery erupt in the Middle East, driven by apparently minor theological differences between Sunni and Shiite Islamists.

To my eyes, having freshly steeped myself in the history of the Enlightenment, what hits me is seeing a new Thirty Years War - but this time in the Middle East - displaced by a few hundred years and a few time-zones.

There is, of course, also a very sad story of culpable Western colonialism, that left the Middle East, and other parts of the world, seriously damaged. But that is another story which can't be covered here.

What the Enlightenment resolved, is that authority comes from scientific and secular processes, and not from religion. This was a first step in progressive politics from that time on.

Many conservative religious interests, from that time to the present, clearly have never accepted that outcome.

As we know only too well, they have been ceaseless, and vigorous, in pushing the old idea that 'values' – what we should do - how we should conduct our lives - should be determined by religion of some stripe.

The very driven 'missionary orientated' Christians like the ACL (Australian Christian Lobby), Fred Nile, the 'low church' Sydney Anglicans, and their predecessors have for two hundred years been pushing the line that Australia is a "Christian" country.

Well readers should clearly note that it is not!

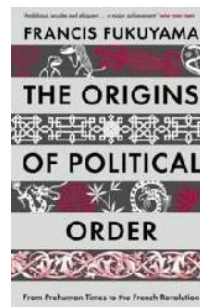
At our World Humanist Day event held in the previous year, 2014, a writer Chrys Stevenson from Queensland spoke about *Christian Nation? Nonsense on Stilts*.

Chrys exposed the history that the original specification for the Australian colony was written by the famous secular Enlightenment moral philosopher Jeremy Bentham. It was a deeply secular document!

Despite this beginning and origin, the religionists have succeeded in persuading the general Australian polity that we have Christian origins. This shows that there is an ongoing need for the secular moral voice, to which we belong, needed to countervail the Christian lobbyists.

## FURTHER READING:

Francis Fukuyama *The Origin of Political Order, From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution* New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011



Francis Fukuyama *Political Order and Political Decay From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy* New York Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014

Charles Blitzer *'Tis all in Pieces* Chapter 1 Age of Kings Great Ages of Man. Time Life, 1974.

*Christian Nation? Nonsense on Stilts.* <http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/articles/Bentham-ChrysStevenson.pdf>

## Victor Bien



### Consider Making a Donation or Bequest

This year, please consider making a donation of \$5, \$20, \$50 or whatever you can to protect and sustain the NSW Humanist Society. Your donation will sustain the diverse range of activities the Society undertakes. Please also remember us in your Will. All bequests contribute to the longevity of the Humanist Society of NSW and Humanism.

### Book Room & Library

Some of us have switched to e-books, while many continue to appreciate physical books. Either way, if you have any surplus books in your collection then consider donating them to the Society's Library or for sale in the Book Room. Thanks also to all the Book Room helpers.

### Member News

Thankyou to the majority of our members who have renewed their membership for 2015/16 ( due 1st July). Reminding those who have not yet renewed to send membership renewals in promptly. If unsure of membership status please ring membership secretary Angela 93614021 or email [abraxas@tpg.com.au](mailto:abraxas@tpg.com.au)

A warm welcome to new members Shaun Miller and Edward Neylan. Welcome back to member rejoining Barry Lees.

Thankyou for generous donations to renewing members including B Barnett, D&E Blair, L Crane, R Farmer, J Levack, M Peters, M Powell, D&R von Behrens, I Warwick, A Whittaker. Goodbye to retiring long term member T. Bostick and thankyou for an extremely generous final donation.

Vale. We regret to report the death of member Robert Sloan.

# A SECULAR HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA

This is Part One of a longer history on Australian secularism.

We in Australia have a rich history - but the struggle for secularism is often passed over by mainstream historians. They give a nod to Catholics within the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Democratic Labor Party (DLP), but there's a lot more to it than that.

Much of what I'll write about is not just 'lost history', but something whose shadow still reaches to the current day. I'll be making criticisms of the connections between Catholics and the ALP- but, I'll try to give credit where it is due, along the way. Later on, I may also make strong criticisms of the John Howard years. Some of it will be a series of titbits, but I'll try not to make it 'one damn fact after another', by adding context and interpretation along the way.

In 1869 Annie MacPherson founded the 'Home Children' child migration scheme, under which more than 100,000 children were sent to Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa from the United Kingdom. In Australia, such 'Child Migrant' children are part of a larger group known as the 'Forgotten Australians' - a term the Australian Senate used to describe the 500,000 odd children who were brought up in institutions - many suffered abuse at the hands of the Catholic Church.

In 1994 Margaret Humphreys, a social worker from Nottingham, England published a book on the scheme called *Empty Cradles*, becoming the film *Oranges and Sunshine* in 2010. There was also the 1992 ABC miniseries *The Leaving of Liverpool*. Prime Minister Rudd made an official apology to the forgotten child migrants in November 2009.

In 1871 William Lorando Jones was imprisoned for Blasphemy in Parramatta - the only person to have been jailed in Australia, he was released after 4 weeks of a two year sentence - but the offence remains on the books.

On the 19th June 1890, a group of secularists stormed Melbourne's Hall of Science and barricaded themselves inside. Another group, led by the activist and publisher Joseph Symes, arrived and fought their way through the doors. Taking over, they posted armed guards. An accidental discharge from one of the defenders killed another a few days later. This was part of the fall out over battles over the opening of libraries on Sundays. It seems that Symes focused on the 'freedom to think' in the face of religion, while the Anti-Symes activists were broadly concerned about oppressive institutions in society, including the churches. Jeff Sparrow has compared Symes with our own provocateur Christopher Hitchens.

In 1891 Pope Leo XIII's encyclical condemned socialism - endorsing the right to private property underlined by natural law. Somewhat later, James Scullin a Labor Prime Minister in the late 1920s, himself of Irish Catholic background, endorsed socialism - in contravention of this earlier encyclical. When asked about state aid for Catholic Schools, he said it was not a federal matter, but wanted other interventions.

In 1942 heresy accusations were made against Rev. Samuel Angus by Presbyterians but finally abandoned, as were those in 1975, against the Rev Ted Noffs within the Methodist church. Parts of these churches later merged into today's Uniting Church.

State Aid to church schools has been a long running concern.

In 1825 a NSW Act establishes schools owned & controlled by the Church of England. Opposition from Catholics meant they developed their own denominational system. In NSW, in 1848 they realised the majority of children were not being educated, and instituted a state system with State Aid for church schools. State Aid was later withdrawn and SRI (Special Religious Education) allowed as a supplement at State schools. Andrew Inglis Clark in Tasmania fought against restoration of State Aid.

In March 1898 at a Constitutional Convention discussing the strength of the clause about religion in the Constitution, future prime minister Edmund Barton declared:

"I think that because we are a Christian community we ought to have advanced so much since the days of State Aid and the days of making a law for the establishment of a religion, since the days for imposing a religious observances or extracting a religious test as a qualification for any office of the State, as to render any such dangers practically impossible, and we are going a little too far if we attempt to load this constitution with a provision for dangers which are practically non-existent." In other words, he felt State Aid was so much in the past that there was no need to explicitly put a clause in the constitution against it!

But in 1962, Goulburn's seven Catholic schools went 'on strike', leaving 2,000 Catholic school children descending on six government schools across the town - where only 640 spots were available. This campaign pressured the Menzies government to commit to State Aid - also undermining the Australian Labor Party's Catholic base. In 1964, Menzies provided direct State Aid to religious schools for science blocks and libraries.

The DOGS (Defence of Government Schools) movement started out in 1956 as an attempt at High Court challenge on state aid to religious schools. In the 60s & 70s DOGS candidates stood for election. While people tried to criticise them, their 'middle class' background left critics unable to use traditional 'extreme hippie' taunts. Their candidates did quite well, outpolling the Democratic Labor Party in many cases. The energy and commitment shown by DOGS is an incredible thing to look back on. Before there were the Greens or the Democrats, there was an energetic 'third force' in politics, and a high court case that has also all but been lost to history. There's no reference to the DOGS case at the High Court buildings in Canberra - it was one of the last to be heard in Melbourne, before the High Court moved to the capital.

Along the way there were a lot of adventures and minor dramas. DOGS managed to get the Shadow Attorney General Lionel Murphy to turn up to Kogarah State School. They attempted to inspect Redfern Public School on open day, but the principal closed the school & the minister sent for police. But, in 1971 they managed to get Malcolm Fraser, Education Minister to visit Maroubra Junction Girls High, where he saw the neglect - he also met with a delegation in Tasmania.

There was a Sydney Town Hall meeting in 1969 against per capita grants (to do with 'needs', I think), where they met Gough Whitlam, who gave his assessment of their High Court initiative, in his loud booming voice : "It will fail".

In 1970, Frank Costigan tried to get an injunction against

DOGS people handing out election material. He visited the judge at home, using hooks into the legal system we can only dream about understanding. The judge, however, missed the first half of a game he liked on TV and denied the request. We don't know whether there was a real point of law, or the judge was just annoyed over missing his game.

There was also intimidation and physical violence against DOGS people - such as Kath Taylor and Ernie Tucker. Special Branch was also involved. Eventually, in 1973 the Victorian Attorney General granted fiat for DOGS case. In 1978 Religious school interests were admitted to DOGS case as 'friends of court'. In February 1979 the 'trial of facts' began. It was during this time that the Catholic Church was two faced - they claimed that their schools only provided a "generic non-religious education", but then it was pointed out that they promoted their schools as providing a "Catholic Education", which did not look good for them - but it seems the majority of judges saw this issue as irrelevant.

In Mar 80 the full DOGS hearing commenced, and in Feb 81 the DOGS Judgement was delivered. Unfortunately, it went against the DOGS people - even though Mr. Barton made his comment about the nature of the State Aid debate - with Lionel Murphy delivering a dissenting judgement. And, costs were awarded against the DOGS people. It seems that the religious interests were the ones that dragged the court into a 'trial of facts', which ultimately had little bearing on the overall judgement - but they were not held to account for their push on this expensive diversion.

Between 1973 and 1981 the legal costs for DOGS was half a million dollars. Opponents within the DLP claimed there were nefarious 'petro-dollars', but in fact they just could not comprehend that they were the finances of committed people, drawn from their own pockets, for a cause they believed in.

World War One, or the 'Great War', started on 28 July 1914, and the Gallipoli campaign ran from 1915-1916. The shadow of this war reaches to us even now; we now consider the significance of the wartime memory, as compared to regular religions, because war memorials and their associations have been called a 'civil religion'. K.S. Inglis wrote his book *Sacred Places* covering some of these themes.

CEW Bean, who was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian War Memorial, wrote in 1943 that "Most nations practice, beside their formally acknowledged religion, the cult of some ideal of manhood or womanhood". Rousseau defined a civil religion as "a body of social sentiments without which no man can be either a good citizen or a faithful subject". Five foundations for this civil religion have been identified: Military endeavour in shadow of nationalism (King and Country); early death of so many young; the inability of Christian faith to provide consolation; equal courage on the part of the colonies to the mother country; the more noble willing sacrifice of volunteers as compared to conscripts.

Memorials do have a religious feel to them, but a notable lack of crosses. When there was talk about charging admission to the war memorial, the RSL asked "would you charge admission to a church". But this 'Civil Religion' is held in contrast to the ideas of survival in paradise with God after death. It seems this was not sufficient consolation. The idea of being 'remembered' for your noble sacrifice seems to provide more consolation than the thought of what has happened to

the soul after death. The words are "lest we forget" and "we will remember them". The memory of them and their deeds are emphasised for us now, rather than a concern for the destination of their soul.

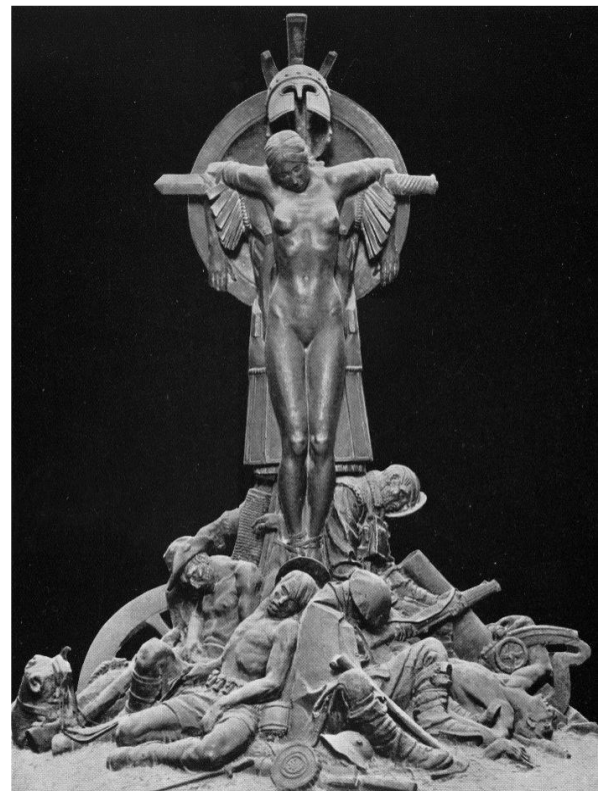
At times Christians have found this competition uncomfortable, seeing competition and a pagan influence. But, with the passing of decades, clerics have been willing to embrace the Anzac Day ceremonies.

There is some perhaps valid argument that national identity was forged at Gallipoli, there was some increase in unity, but also division as well.

The 1920s were a volatile period of right and left - accusations of "Bolshevik" and "Red" were flung at Catholic Laborites like Jack Lang - the extremely Protestant anti-Catholic NSW government of George Fuller after 1923. Masons and Orange Lodge groups were counteracted by a group called Catholic Knights of the Southern Cross. A third of Labor were Catholic - business elites were mostly Protestant.

In spite of the 'unification of Gallipoli', there were still deep divisions in Australia, which continued for some time. In the wake of the Great War and Gallipoli 'bringing us all together', religious affiliation held more sway than party grouping.

In 1932, there was a controversy over the Rayner Hoff sculpture *Crucifixion of Civilisation* proposed for Sydney War Memorial, with Catholics uniformly critical, and some Protestants objecting as well.



This sculpture depicted a naked woman on a cross; ultimately, it was not installed on the memorial.

I shall be continuing this history in a future issue of Viewpoints.

**John August**



# CALENDAR FOR OCT-DEC 2015

**The HuVAT for Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> October 2015 at 4.00 for 4.30 p.m.** will be John August, back again to talk about the very human subject of Economics. John gave his first talk on economics a few years back, and he's continued to develop his understanding of this complex but interesting field.

"Economics is in tension between a *normative* approach - one which has a lot of values leaking - celebrating freedom and competition as good things - and *descriptive* economics - which does not try to impose values. A lot of economic debate has normative elements, however the values adopted are usually selective. We pick some particular economic group and criticise them for not pulling their weight. We celebrate the virtues of individualism and freedom but ignore manipulation and addiction, or the reality that people struggle to do things like lose weight, with a tension between what they desire and how they behave. In fact, psychology has shone a spotlight on many problems with economic perspective, and how it imagines people behave as compared to how they actually behave. Many other problems with the economic approach have become apparent. For example, the economy can be effectively viewed as a complex non-deterministic system, with outcomes reflecting chance and luck rather than the economy selecting for the 'best' outcome in any meaningful way.

In spite of all these problems, the classical economic approach does have some applicability. The issue is when it is considered to have a universal applicability, and in particular when prescriptions - often prescriptions with a moral tinge - are derived from this perspective. So - the question is - yes economic theory has imperfections - but what is the significance of those imperfections? What are practical issues in our economy - the nature of growth, GDP, productivity, resource & energy use and sustainability - and why economic growth is normally sought after to maintain employment?"

AS ALWAYS PLEASE STAY AFTER EACH HUVAT FOR OUR SHARED MEAL AND HUMANISTIC CONVERSATION AT 6 PM

## **NSW Humanists Meetup event 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' at 3-6PM on Sunday 25th October 2015**

will look at the concept of '**Freedom of Religion**' and how it relates to 'Freedom from Religion'. The words Freedom and Liberty mean a lot to those who find Humanism appealing but are there dangers in developing new 'rights' in Australia that empower narrow interests. We will try to find ways to reconcile competing aspirations for the society we want in the 21st century.

## **Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November 3.00-5.00 p.m. will be the Activism Meeting for the last quarter of the year.**

At these meetings we get together with guests who share our concerns and hear about projects, views and ideas towards progress regarding the values and issues that disturb and inspire us. We'll be inviting some people from student groups, the Rationalists, Black Rose and also the Cult Information and Family Support group. We can have a less full meeting than we've had in the past without so many high profile guest speakers, in order to allow more time for participation and discussion. This means more scope for members' contributions, but we'll also have some ideas to put forward for discussion, such as - ethics education in schools - Australian Human Rights Commission roundtable on Religious Freedom - how we might criticise believers' claims that either Australia "is a Christian Nation", or how believers claim prevailing good moral ideas originate with Jesus (with in our own alternatives along the way) - critiquing the historicity of Jesus - engaging with international religious based human rights abuses - how we might engage with the prevailing flow of ideas in society, giving more credence to Secular ideas and changing the world to be the fairer and open world we envisage.

REMEMBER IT'S 3-5PM FOR THE ACTIVISM MEETINGS—THOSE WHO WISH WILL GO ON TO 'THE STONED CROW' FOR A MEAL

## **NSW Humanists Meetup event 'New Humanists Sunday Open House' at 3-6PM on Sunday 22nd November 2015**

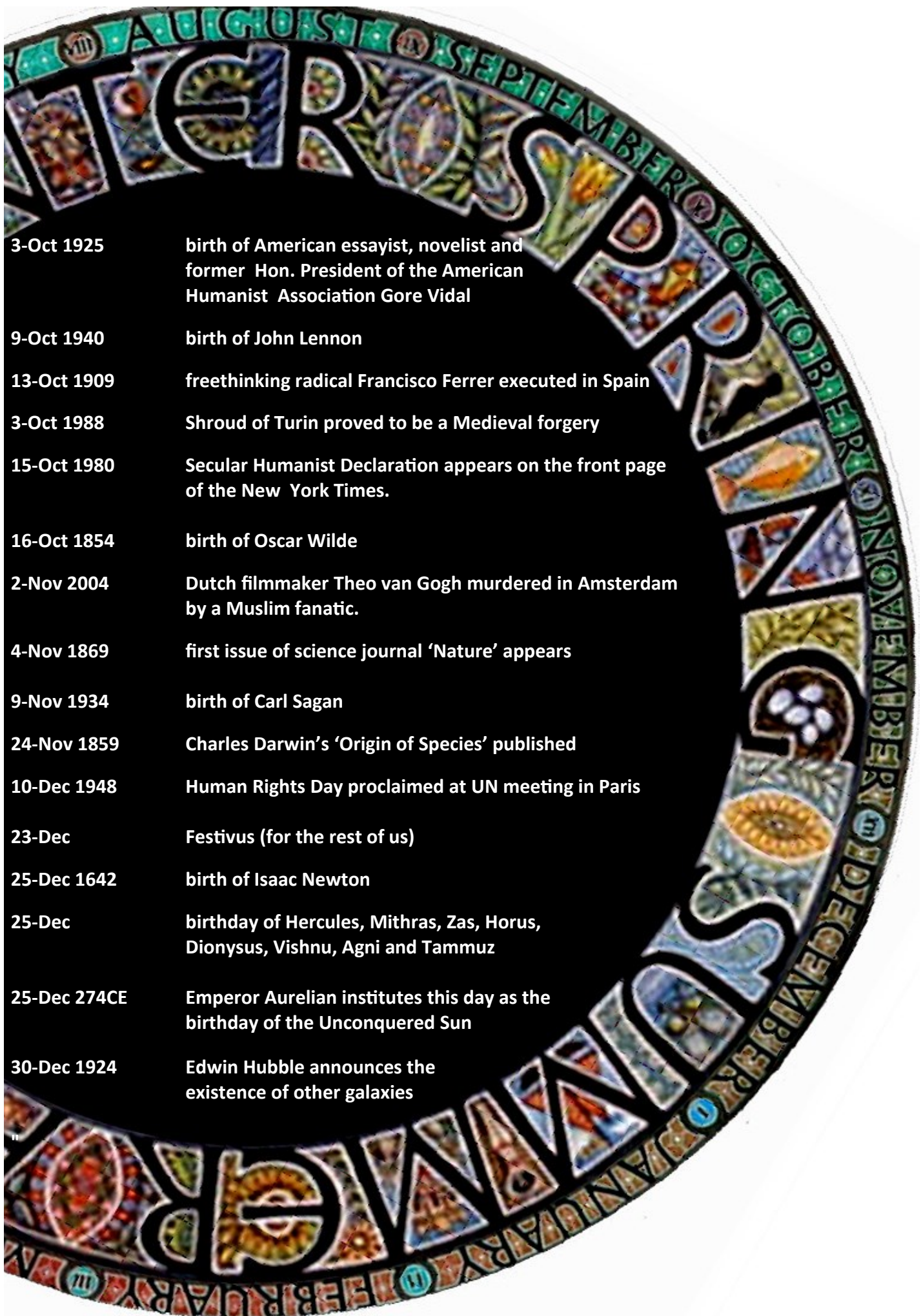
will reclaim for humanism the fundament of '**Motherhood**' from those other fundamentalists. Guest Speaker, 'motherhugger' blogger Catherine Walsh, will show how motherhood is different in different times and places - motherhood is a social construction not to be essentialised as biologically or traditionally determined. We can, and should, consciously change it, now and in the future. And we'll have Q&A and other participation by those attending.

## **Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> December 5.30 for 6.00 p.m. End-of-Year Triviaganza (note change to SATURDAY NIGHT)**

The end-of-year entertainment for 2015 will be in the style of a trivia night but just for fun with token prizes. Most of the questions will come from the *Baby Boomer* edition of *Trivial Pursuit*. We'll organize teams on the night. The questions will be chosen with enjoyment in mind. We might find the answer to whether those who 'remember the sixties' were really there, or not! We hope the change to Saturday night will be refreshing to members, and encourage them to come out and share the zeitgeist of the solstice season with their humanist fellowship. If you need help to get there let other members know - we might be able to pool transport. And parking might be easier late on Saturdays. John August has promised some intermissional entertainments - "looking at a Sydney activist contemplating his end-of-life options - a poem about activism - and a comedy on how things go wrong in the world around us plus a political retrospective on Keating, Hewson and Howard". We might have time for some guessing games too, so keep one hand on your head and one on your backside for that!

PLEASE BRING A \$10 DONATION TO COVER A MEAL AND EXPENSES - N.B. IT'S ON THE FIRST SATURDAY NIGHT IN DECEMBER

**'Open Forum' continues to meet each Wednesday night at Humanist House 8.00pm as it has done for many years. Open Forum has a diversity of speakers and does not represent the views of the Society.**



- 3-Oct 1925 birth of American essayist, novelist and former Hon. President of the American Humanist Association Gore Vidal
- 9-Oct 1940 birth of John Lennon
- 13-Oct 1909 freethinking radical Francisco Ferrer executed in Spain
- 3-Oct 1988 Shroud of Turin proved to be a Medieval forgery
- 15-Oct 1980 Secular Humanist Declaration appears on the front page of the New York Times.
- 16-Oct 1854 birth of Oscar Wilde
- 2-Nov 2004 Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh murdered in Amsterdam by a Muslim fanatic.
- 4-Nov 1869 first issue of science journal 'Nature' appears
- 9-Nov 1934 birth of Carl Sagan
- 24-Nov 1859 Charles Darwin's 'Origin of Species' published
- 10-Dec 1948 Human Rights Day proclaimed at UN meeting in Paris
- 23-Dec Festivus (for the rest of us)
- 25-Dec 1642 birth of Isaac Newton
- 25-Dec birthday of Hercules, Mithras, Zoroaster, Horus, Dionysus, Vishnu, Agni and Tammuz
- 25-Dec 274CE Emperor Aurelian institutes this day as the birthday of the Unconquered Sun
- 30-Dec 1924 Edwin Hubble announces the existence of other galaxies

# AIDING HUMANIST SCHOOLS IN UGANDA

Humanist Aid began in 2013 as a group of friends in Sydney wanting to make a positive difference to the lives of others. Managed by a small board, we are registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). We raise funds for secular charities and encourage and enable fellow humanists and others to contribute.

We started out with modest aims and wanted to keep any activities enjoyable. Donations are forwarded in full to the charities we support, because any expenses are covered by our board members. We initially set up a public ancillary fund, which allowed us to issue tax deductible receipts, but limited us to forwarding donations to certain registered Australian charities. It also required an expensive annual audit. For these reasons, we wound up the fund and are not able to issue tax deductible receipts – for the moment.

The change has freed us up to fund a British charity which supports three humanist schools in Uganda, namely the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UHST). Earlier this year, the UHST organised a visit to the schools for supporters. Visitors would have to pay all travel and other expenses themselves, but I still jumped at the opportunity to join them.

The Uganda Humanist Association (UHASSO) had been formed about fifteen years ago by a group of students at Makerere University, in the capital Kampala. In 2004, they invited the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) to host a 'Humanist Visions for Africa' conference in Uganda.

It was at this conference that it was decided to establish humanist schools in rural Uganda, which would provide free or subsidised access to a proportion of children unable to otherwise obtain an education. The three schools we support in partnership with the Uganda Humanist Schools Trust are:

- \*Mustard Seed Secondary (Secular) School, Eastern Uganda
- \*Isaac Newton Secondary School, Masaka, Central Uganda
- \*The Kasese Humanist Primary School, western Uganda

In June 2015 I visited the first two of these schools along with Ed Schmidt of St Louis Ethical Society, Trisha Rogers of the British Humanist Assoc., and Steve & Hilary Hurd of UHST.

I was aware Uganda was a particularly religious country, but not prepared for just how religious. Almost every shop, school, taxi, boda-boda, etc, has a religious name, from *Faith's Blessed Beauty Salon* to the *God is Great Convenience Store*. Everyday language is utterly filled with references to God, thanking him for everything good that might happen to you, such as a safe journey or even a tasty breakfast. Driving through Kampala, we were hollered at by pastors holding up their bibles when stopped at intersections or whilst stationary in congested traffic seeking new followers for their churches.

I was thus very pleased to be visiting non-religious schools and to offer support, and solidarity, to fellow humanists. I remember, however, feeling depressed on the first night after visiting the first school in Kamuli. The dormitories for the boarding students seemed incredibly crowded to my Australian eyes, and the scale of the poverty I'd seen whilst travelling through the country had been quite overwhelming.

But my mood changed on the second day. The students, who had been somewhat reserved the previous day, quickly lost their shyness and enjoyed having their photos taken – in fact, began continually requesting more – and keen to tell us about

their own lives, their schooling and ambitions for their futures and were very curious about many different aspects of life in Europe, America and Australia.

About half of the students at each school are boarding students. Also, about half are sponsored and the other half pay their own school fees. The UHST in Britain arranges these sponsorships costing around AU\$300 per year for day students, which includes tuition, lunch, uniforms, stationery, and AU\$600 per year for boarders, which also includes all meals plus accommodation.

The schools do not discriminate on the basis of religious belief. Many students will identify as Catholic, Protestant, Born Again (Evangelical) or Muslim. When I asked a class of 140 students how many had no religion, about a third raised their hands.

I found this, at first, a little challenging given that I was there to support a non-religious, humanist school. But these schools are different from almost all schools in Uganda which very clearly cater for specific religious groups.

The students are very much aware of this, and the older ones take real pride in being accepting of those with different beliefs to their own. There is a clear sense that being a human being is more important than what religion you may identify with and that having no religion is also OK.

I remember a discussion with three young teachers at Isaac Newton School who said that two of them were humanists but one was still a Catholic. He, half jokingly, said it was more difficult to stop being a Catholic than it was for the other two, who had been Protestants (Church of Uganda) and anyway, he was mostly this way for the sake of his mother.

But the overwhelming sense I received from the students was that they were keen to study and succeed and curious about everything. This delighted me and filled me with optimism.

There is also an appreciation of having connections with the international community as a humanist school, and I received many questions about what Australians think of Ugandans, which were not always easy to answer.

Uganda has six years of primary education and six years of secondary, broken into four years to achieve O levels, and two for A levels. Primary education is now compulsory as part of the Millennium Development Goals and as terms of the UK's debt forgiveness for the country, although it is recognised that, in reality, not all children receive this education. There are also concerns about the quality of the education being provided.

Only about a quarter of Uganda's young people obtain a secondary education and gaining this level of education can literally be life changing for those involved.

Such a small amount can make a complete difference to a young person's life. I felt utterly fortunate to see this first hand for myself. Often, I suspect, people donate money to (large) charities but are never quite aware of just what impact that donation will actually make. Meeting the people who benefit from our efforts has moved me quite deeply and I feel very much motivated to do more.

Humanist Aid Australia is looking forward to continuing to work in partnership with the Ugandan humanist schools and supporting organisations.

**Peter Furness**



Humanist Aid board member and author of this article, Peter Furness , with two of the students at The Mustard Seed School in Kamuli.



Boarding girls show us their dormitory at The Mustard Seed Secondary School



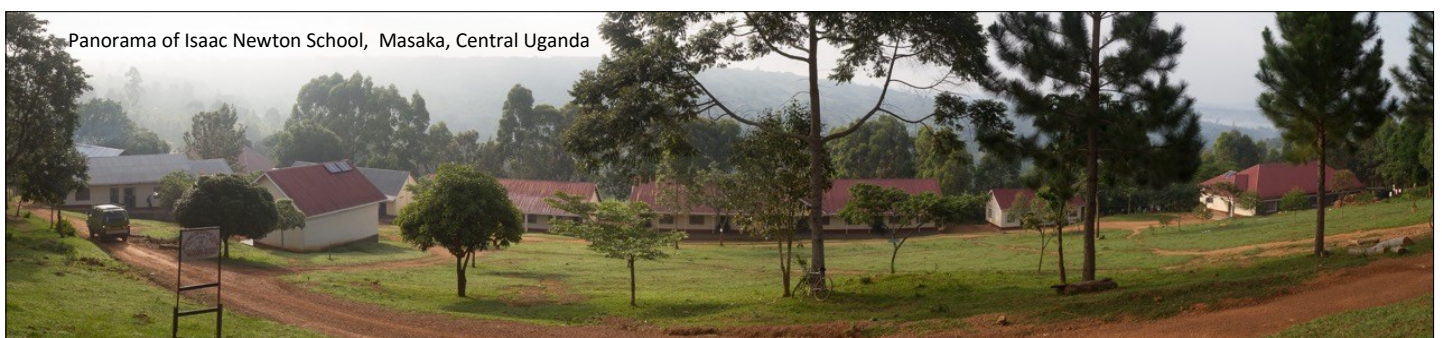
Dinner time at the Mustard Seed Secondary (Secular) School at Kamuli in Eastern Uganda. Approximately half of the students board. All students doing their A levels (the last two senior years) are required to board, as it is considered more practical for them to focus on study whilst boarding rather than at home.



We were welcomed to the Isaac Newton School by dancing and drums by the students.



Some of the science equipment at the Isaac Newton Secondary School



Panorama of Isaac Newton School, Masaka, Central Uganda

# 9 AUGUST 2015 ACTIVISM MEETING

John August spoke about reading A C Grayling's *The Good Book*. "It prompted me to reflect - where does wisdom come from, and how can you improve your life from it? Does the Bible contain wisdom, separately to its false theology? The Bible promises eternal life - something the Good Book does not try to do - but nevertheless, there is some overlap with the notion of developing good ethics and an effective approach to life."

Max Wallace spoke about separation of church and state issues in Fiji, NZ. DOGS, High Court Challenge. The USA does not fund religious schools, but Australia does. Australia even funded World Youth Day. There was a challenge in the High Court, but the Catholic judged killed it.

Jacob Vardy reported on his experiences of the 'Reclaim ...' events in which protesters in Western countries want to reclaim freedoms they see as lost because of Islamic immigration, with an overlap between Christians and the extreme right. This did not happen previously with Fred Nile, as there was less common ground.

There was some confusion of whether these protests were "classically racist", because Islam is not a race. You could call it a sectarian issue, but they could be termed 'racists' in that there is a negative assessment towards a larger group. In fact it can be argued there are no races, because genetic diversity within a race is greater than between races.

Steve Maxwell said the term Islamophobia (used against Reclaim Australia and others), is a misnomer because phobia means unjustified fear, whereas fear of Islam may well be extremely justified. The issue is whether such fear is 'justifiable' or not, and what it is exactly that is feared.

Nicky Danesh said she turned anti-Islam because they hate women, and they cut off her brother's hand. She outlined that under Islam, a childless woman is worthless, a woman bearing daughters is medium, and a woman bearing sons is highly regarded. Following a man's death, the wife gets 1/8 or 1/16 while the sons and husband's family get the rest. But there are enlightened groups within Iran, paying little regard to the Koran, and where women have power within the family.

Peshmerga are leftist, secular, feminist Kurdish resistance fighters, but they are under attack from both Turkey and ISIS, while world leaders do nothing to help.

Meg Wallace described her new book *Freedom from Religion: Rethinking Article 18*. This is article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights concerning individual right to thought, conscience and religion and to manifest belief in practice. This provision is widely misunderstood and used to give unfair privileges and exemptions to religions.

Gay marriage was discussed, following from Tony Abbott successfully blocking a conscience vote for Liberal Party MPs, and proposing a plebiscite. Ian Bryce said that a so-called conscience vote would be better, as some Lib MPs would vote in favor – but it is still defective because MP's would vote according to their own consciences, which are heavily pro-Christian. The House of Representatives is so called because members are supposed to *represent* their constituents. Chandran pointed out their constituents' consciences are clearly pro marriage equality - according to polls. Meg Wallace said conscience votes are not good enough – votes should be based on universal human rights, which clearly require allowing all couples to choose freely.

John Kaye (Greens MP) described the secular history of Australia, including a battle between Bishop Roger Vaughan and Henry Parkes.

Ethics classes are still under threat. Premier Baird has agreed to leave info on ethics classes off the enrolment form, in exchange for Fred Nile's support for privatising the electrical 'poles & wires' infrastructure. Churches treat schools as mission fields. Ian Bryce said "all beliefs are not equal – the rational view of the world should never be compromised".

FIRIS (Fairness In Religions In School) continue to undermine RI (Religious Instruction, aka 'Scripture') exposing Anglican homophobic and sexist stances in schools material. The Greens now agree that ethics classes and RI should both be removed, and replaced with ethics in the core curriculum. Ian Bryce, as an ethics teacher of 5 years, was alarmed. "There's a large and successful program in place - why close it down and start something new whose funding is never guaranteed?"

Alysia Blayse of *White Shield Appeal* described the Salvation Army's record of child abuse and cover up. Max Wallace told us about the New Zealand Salvation Army's immense wealth (\$425M property and \$70M cash), which they sit on while 25% of children live in poverty.

Ian Bryce described the increasing human rights abuses around the world, caused by mostly Islam. In Bangladesh, freethought writers have been forced into silence, forced to leave their country, or been hacked to death by gangs (with police taking little action). 54 countries now have blasphemy laws, and all of us here would suffer that fate. In the UN HRC (Human Rights Council), discussion of human rights is repeatedly blocked while free speech is suppressed by the growing Muslim contingent. Murray Love said we need to be realistic about what Australian humanists can do for other countries. We need to consider how to act. Other comments suggested we need to identify some real actions which can help, and organise groups to carry them out.



[www.humanistaid.org.au](http://www.humanistaid.org.au)

*If you'd like to donate to Humanist Aid to assist their efforts in Uganda (see pages 8-9) here are the details. They can't offer tax deductibility but all funds donated go to help the students in Uganda because all administrative costs are covered by board members.*

**Direct Deposit: Account Name:** Humanist Aid Inc. **Bank:** Westpac **BSB:** 032249 **Account Number:** 321308

Or address a **Cheque** to **Humanist Aid** at PO Box 1154, Broadway NSW 2007

If you have **Internet** go to <http://www.humanistaid.org.au/donate> for secure credit card payment and **Paypal**

(50% of donations go to Cathy Freeman Foundation or specify you want 100% to go to Uganda Humanist Schools Trust)

# QUARTERLY PRESIDENT'S REPORT

## Hall rental

A room at Humanist House is rented out to the United Nations Association of Australia. The rental agreement has been renewed. Our facilities continue to be hired to many like-minded organisations, which provides us with an income stream, and fosters good relations.

## HuVAT talks

Our June Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk was presented by Brian Edwards, on State Aid (government money to religious schools). In July, John August spoke on the History of Secularism. In August, our HUVAT was replaced by our regular Activism meeting. It was well attended, with wide-ranging discussions.

## Open Forum

This series of often-controversial talks each Wednesday, included the history of Iraq, Synchronicity, Vanuatu, Global warming, China, and The Origin of Mass. A highlight was the plight of the Rojava people – a secular, pro-rights group of Kurds, who are under attack from both ISIS and Turkey. Why is the West silent?

## Sale of artworks

Please consider buying a painting from the display on our walls. They are by artist and composer Humanist Dennis Morris, in a variety of media. Proceeds go to our Society. The dramatic landscapes and animals depicted are in Africa and Western Australia are identified on the back.

## AHOY nominations

It is time for Humanist Societies to start considering AHOY 2016 (Outstanding Humanist Achiever of the Year). There is now a Young AHOY as well. If you have some ideas, please let our Committee know.

## New CAHS arrangements

As reported previously, the new management of Council of Australian Humanist Societies is initiating some changes. The new Executive includes a representative from each member Society, and meets every month by Google Hangout, which includes video. They intend to complement our journal Australian Humanist with an online version, which will allow frequent updates and greater variety of media.

## Other events

Sydney Atheists hosted two talks by agnostics who fled Egypt under religious persecution – one Coptic and one Muslim. Several Humanists attended. These contacts help us to understand the processes of intervention, deconversion, and deradicalisation, which may help in building a better secular society.

Three of our Committee (and a dog) spent three days at Newnes, a remote mining ghost town in Wollemi National Park. The comfortable cabins are in an idyllic setting.

Some members attended a Debate – that Voluntary Euthanasia should be legalised, between Peter Singer and Cardinal Fisher. Singer reported the successful programs in several countries (where the sky has not fallen in as alarmists suggested), while Fisher relied on the sanctity of God-given life no matter what.

## Religious Freedoms Submission

The Human Rights Commissions recently called for submissions on the topic of Religious Freedoms, as part of a Roundtable of public consultation. The President of HNSW made a submission, which included several points (each with a rationale, available on the web site):

- Children's right not to be indoctrinated into a religion.
- Anyone has the right to leave a religion, (without incurring coercion or sanctions).
- Universal human rights not parochial 'Australian' values.

The HRC, apparently bending over backwards to be politically correct, published some *guiding principles*, some of which we disagree with:

*Religious freedoms should be treated equally to all other human rights*—no, basic human rights, freedoms and laws must **take precedence over** religious freedoms.

*Faith is as legitimate a basis for civic affairs as any other*—no, the laws of Australia (such as not committing murder) should **take precedence over** all religious tenets (such as stoning women to death for adultery).

The banner of *religious freedom* was criticised, as being used to perpetrate and cover up many crimes. For example:

- child abuse by clergy claiming religious authority;
- failing to report child abuse under church privilege where everyone else would have to report it;
- charging money for Halal certification, which then flows to expanding Islam;
- holding school breakfasts which are really proselyting sessions.

So-called *religious freedom* is often used to facilitate bad conduct by religious authorities rather than to benefit individuals. It needs to be limited not broadened.

(Murray Love also made a private submission, which further explained that 'Freedom of Religion' is a danger to all the other freedoms.)

**Ian Bryce**



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### **Dorothy Buckland-Fuller AM, MBE**

*Mother, feminist, bilingual sociologist, peace activist. Dorothy is also an environmentalist, and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. A founder of the Ethnic Communities Council, Dorothy was, and is still, a vital influence in the ethnic communities.*

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