



VICTORIAN HUMANIST

Monthly newsletter of the Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.

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Tolerance

Mankind are greater gainers by suffering each other to live as seems good to themselves, than by compelling each to live as seems good to the rest.

John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, 1859

Tolerance of difference is an important virtue, and Australians, by world standards, are on the whole a tolerant people. We've learnt to live alongside people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, political inclinations, sexual preferences and a whole range of interests and pastimes. And as we saw late last year, we can change our governments without shedding blood or rioting, a positive many other countries can only envy.

One of the keys to Australia's success as a diverse, tolerant society is our general willingness to rub along together, especially once we have had personal contact with people who are different from ourselves. This usually arises through being neighbours, work mates, in the same sporting club, or through marriage or the services we use.

However, our record on tolerance of difference is not free from many incidents of intolerance and prejudice. Over the more than two hundred years of white settlement there has been all manner of racist attitudes and policies, especially towards people of indigenous ancestry, as well as others. Nearly all immigrant groups have suffered from varying degrees of prejudice. But as the generations have intermingled, much of the prejudice has diminished, and more of us feel we can trust others to behave justly and fairly. To achieve this requires, as Hugh Mackay writes in *Right & Wrong* (p. 176), 'some generosity of spirit'.

Humanists are committed to justice, equality, freedom and fairness, and if we take these seriously it is important that we have a generosity of spirit towards others, regardless of how they differ from ourselves. Prejudice in any form indicates that we are renegeing on our commitment to these four important principles. Recognising the great diversity of human backgrounds, beliefs, passions and interests, requires us to be non-judgmental, if no harm is done and people's human rights are not being violated. Mocking or denigrating the beliefs and pursuits of others indicate intolerance and a lack of respect for their autonomy or, as J. S. Mill writes, their desire 'to live as seems good to themselves'.

One prejudice that humanists and other freethinkers sometimes exhibit is to be derisory towards religion and those with religious beliefs. If we want to be considered open-minded and tolerant, we need to accept that others will want to lead a good life different from ourselves. And so long as no human rights are being violated, we need to tolerate these differences. However, such practices as slavery, child labour, bonded labour, honour killing, and discrimination based on gender, religion or ethnicity, are ones no humanist will tolerate. It against these practices where our energy and efforts should be aimed, rather than against harmless beliefs we view as deluded or lacking in evidence.

Rosslyn Ives, editor

Print Post Approved PP 335708/0019

Monthly HSV Public Lecture

TUESDAY
25 March
8.00pm

Balwyn Library Meeting Room
336 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn
(Melway map Ref. 46 E8)

Dr Tamas Pataki

(Philosophy Department),
University of Melbourne, author of
Against Religion,

on

'Humanism, psychology and religion.'

Inside

Diary Dates	2
Humanist News	3
Submission report	4
Rosslyn Ives	
Report on IHEU activities	4
Mary Bergin	
Motions for CAHS Convention	5
David Hicks's detention in	6
Australia, by Kurt Esser	
Quote from <i>The Human Story</i>	6
Robin Dunbar	
Letters	7
David Milan, Nigel Sinnott and	
Jean Menere.	

HSV DIARY DATES

HSV Public Lectures 8.00pm 4th Tuesday of the month
HSV Discussions 11.00am 2nd Sunday of the month

MARCH

- 4 Tuesday 8.00pm Existentialist Society. Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, 110 Grey St., East Melbourne.
Dr Rod Foster: *'Existentialism and Human Nature.'*
- 8 Saturday. International Women's Day
- 9 Sunday 9.15am **HSV committee meeting**
11am **Discussion** on motions to CAHS convention and. All members welcome. William Tresise Centre, NE corner of Munro & Bowler Sts, Hawthorn East (*Melway* map 45 G12); enter on Bowler St. Bring food to share.
- 11 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Unitarian Church, 110 Grey St, East Melbourne.
Paul Murchison: *'Are the Atheists too Evangelistic?'*
- 12 Wednesday 2.45– 4.30pm. Knox U3A. Enquiries: Tel 9752 2737.
Ken Young: *'Developing Happiness Strategies.'*
- 25 Tuesday 8.00pm **HSV Public Lecture**
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn.
Dr Tamas Pataki: *'Humanism, psychology and religion.'*

APRIL

- 1 Tuesday 8.00pm Existentialist Society. Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, 110 Grey St., East Melbourne. Assoc. Prof. Stan van Hoof: *'How Can We Live in a World of Global Injustice?'*
- 8 Tuesday 8pm Atheist Society. Unitarian Peace Memorial Church, 110 Grey St., East Melbourne.
Robert Bender: *'The Jehovah Witnesses and Evolution.'*
- 9 Wednesday 2.45– 4.30pm. Knox U3A. Enquiries: Tel 9752 2737.
Harry Gardner: *'Humanist Ethical Education.'*
- 13 Sunday 9.15am **HSV committee meeting**
11am **Discussion** on latest submission. All members welcome. William Tresise Centre, NE corner of Munro & Bowler Sts, Hawthorn East (*Melway* map 45 G12); enter on Bowler St. Bring finger food to share.
- 22 Tuesday 8.00pm **HSV Public Lecture**
Balwyn Library, 336 Whitehorse Rd, Balwyn.
T. B. A.

Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.

(Reg. No. A0020272M)

A non-profit educational organisation.

The **Humanist Society of Victoria** works to build a more civilised society fostering ethics based on human values. It considers that reason, free inquiry and a scientific approach enable us to understand our universe and our place in it. It defends freedom and democracy and provides a positive alternative to religious and dogmatic creeds. It supports separation of church and state, and secular education.

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Monthly newsletter of the
Humanist Society of Victoria Inc.

Editor	Rosslyn Ives
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Mailout	HSV Volunteers

Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent the considered views of the Society.

For Humanist news and updates

HSV website

<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~humanist>

HUMANIST NEWS

Annual HSV membership Renewals due 1 October 2007

For those who have not renewed, please use yellow renewal form from last *VH* or send in the appropriate fee as listed on page 8.

Many thanks to those who have already renewed.

Annual Financial Report

Unfortunately the wrong document was distributed last month, and the correct one is enclosed here. If you wish to examine the full audited report of 12 pages, please contact the treasurer, David Fotheringham.

Correction

In Feb *VH*, page 6, footnote to column 1, for Avoidable Morality, read Avoidable Mortality.

Darwin Day barbecue

For the second time we celebrated Darwin's birthday, 12 February, with a banner-and barbecue, picnic on the Yarra bank, by the Botanical Gardens. The turn-up was slightly less than last year, but it was a prime opportunity to socialise with Atheists and Skeptics. We thank Andrew Rawlings for organising this event.

February public lecture

Due to family illness, Prof. Geoffrey McFadden who was to speak on 'Evolution under the microscope' was unable to be present. Rosslyn Ives was a last-minute substitute on the related topic of 'Why Charles Darwin matters.' Much thanks to Rosslyn.

Hopefully Prof. McFadden will be able to give his lecture at a later date.

Sunday 9 March Discussion

11am Topic: CAHS Convention motions see page 5. All members welcome.

William Tresise Centre, NE corner of Munro & Bowler Sts, Hawthorn East (*Melway* map 45 G12); enter on Bowler St. Bring food to share for lunch.

Found property

A pair of spectacles, in a case, were found after the meeting on 10 February in the Tresise Centre.

Phone Stephen Stuart, 9857 8318

NB: Change of day for public lectures

For 2008 HSV public lectures will be on the fourth **TUESDAY** of each month February to November at 8.00pm in Balwyn Library meeting room.

Transport to meetings

The venue for Sunday meetings, the William Tresise Centre, is a 700 m walk from Auburn railway station. Members resident in the following suburbs have declared their willingness to share their car to attend HSV meetings.

Alphington 3078: Rudi Anders.

Bundoora 3083: David Miller.

Mount Waverley 3149: Valerie Yule.

If you want transport or can reciprocate, tell them. If you can offer transport and want to be added to this list, contact secretary, Mary Bergin.

Steve Guest Day

Dying With Dignity Victoria (DWDV) are organising a 'Steve Guest Day' on the steps of Parliament House, Spring Street, Melbourne, on 16th April 2008. Arrive at 12.30pm for a 1pm start.

DWDV were very appreciative of the support from the HSV members that attended the 'Steve Guest Day' in 2007, so please put this date in your diary.

43rd Annual CAHS Convention

The 2008 Convention will be held in Sydney, 2-4 May. Venues are Humanist house in Chippendale, Rydge's Hotel in Camperdown, and Sydney Mechanics School of Arts for the public sessions discussing 'Humanism and Feminism: how fully compatible are they?' Enquiries to Secretary, Mary Bergin.

Can you help us?

The viability of any organisation rests on the activity of its members. The HSV needs people willing to

- manage the HSV webpage,
- keep the HSV library in order,
- place public meeting posters in local libraries and community centres,
- help with *VH* & *AH* mailouts,
- write letters to media on behalf of HSV.

Phone (03) 9857 8318 or E-mail snstuart@msn.com to register your interest.

HSV public lecture program

Suggestions for invited speakers and topics are most welcome. Contact Stephen Stuart, lecture program co-ordinator, phone 9857 8318 or E-mail SNStuart@msn.com.

VH contributions welcome

Send to editor by 20th of the month.

E-mail rosslyn@netspace.net.au

or post to GPO Box 1555, Melbourne VIC 3001.

Submission Report

Draft submission to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) on the 'religion' question in Census 2011.

- We urge ABS to place the 'No religion' option at the top of the list, instead of at the bottom. This would bring this question into line with several other questions, which we cite, where the negative response is the first choice offered to respondents.
- We recommend that the question be rephrased as, 'Does the person have a religion?' rather than the current, 'What is the person's religion?' which presumes that all people have a religion, ABS just wants to know what it is.
- We also suggest that a supplementary question be asked, 'Is the person an active religious participant?' With a choice of the following responses, Weekly, Monthly, Occasionally or Never.
- We argued that the question as currently asked inflates the numbers of Christians and under-estimates the number of those with no religion. We cited several sample surveys and other social indicators that show a sizable minority (around 40%) of Australians to have no religious affiliation.

The closing date for this submission is 31 March 2008.

There is still one unresolved issue with the form of the 'religion' question. It currently includes in the question instructions for 'Other, please write in', 'Humanism' as an example. For most people this implies that ABS considers Humanism to be a religion. However, that is not the case: Humanism is categorised as Non-religion.

HSV still needs to decide whether we want to request that Humanism as an example of an answer to a question which asks 'What is the person's religion?', should be removed.

Rosslyn Ives

Religion in Australia

The figures below are taken from a table following Tim Colebatch's article, 'The Way We Live', *The Age*, 8 February 2008 (p. 11), and are apparently derived from *2008 Year Book Australia* (778 pp.; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 7 Feb. 2008).

RELIGION (data from 2006 Census)

- 20% of adults between March and July 2006 participated in religious or spiritual groups.
- 36% of Australians are Catholic, 19% Anglican, and 19% other Christian denominations.
- 2.1% are Buddhist, 1.7% identified as Muslim, 0.8% stated religion was Hinduism and 0.5% identified as Jewish.
- 18.7% stated they had no religion, up 27.5% from 2001 Census.

International Humanist & Ethical Union (IHEU)

The 17th IHEU World Humanist Congress and General Assembly (GA) will be held in Washington, 5–8 June 2008 with extra activities on 4 and 9 June. The Congress theme is 'Reclaiming Humanist Values'. The International Humanist and Ethical Youth Organisation General Assembly will take place 4–8 June, alongside IHEU Congress and GA. The American Humanist Assoc. Board meeting will be held on the afternoon of 4 June. For further details including registration papers, see <http://www.iheu.org/node/2893> and www.americanhumanist.org/conference.

CAHS delegate at the Congress and GA will be Zelda Bailey, HSQ President. Dick Clifford, HSSA Vice-president and editor of *SA Humanist Post*, will also attend.

Current IHEU human rights campaigns are aimed at

- Freedom of expression,
- Untouchability,
- Separation of religion and state,
- Victims of religious persecution,
- Human rights in general.

The IHEU delegates to UN are now facing an uphill battle in the struggle for human rights as they work to maintain the supremacy of the UN Declaration of Human Rights over other codes such as sharia law.

At the end of 2007 the IHEU delegates and four other NGOs made a plea to the UN Human Rights Council over the plight of refugees and displaced persons in Darfur. They succeeded in obtaining renewal of the UN Special Rapporteurs' terms there, but these people are given no co-operation from the Sudanese government.

IHEU and other bodies have been successful in avoiding the insertion of laws against blasphemy into the European Union.

The Purple Economy by Dr Max Wallace, a member of HSV, has been reviewed with extracts on IHEU web-site.

IHEU is campaigning strongly to defend victims of human rights abuses particularly when these are due to offences against religion.

In South Asia and Africa IHEU is waging a campaign to raise the standard of living and dignity of the oppressed by establishing schools and health services. Education is aimed at freeing the people from the superstition which contributes to their oppression.

Mary Bergin

Ref. <http://www.iheu.org/>

Motions for CAHS Convention 2008

Bring these along for discussion by members on
Sunday 9 March.

Humanist Society of NSW

1) That as we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, we seek a balance between men and women to promote the principles of humanism. We recommend that the objective of achieving a gender balance be kept in mind when choosing the AHOY.
Rationale: The present state of affairs results in women who have made outstanding contributions in the field of humanism and humanitarian work being overlooked. As a result of low visibility many people of goodwill are unaware of these contributions and achievements. This has resulted in an overwhelming majority of AHOY awards going to men in recent years. Such a situation is not only unjust it also inhibits the growth of the humanist movement. When both men and women achieve equal recognition for their work, the objects of humanism will be more effectively carried forward into the future.

2) That an Australian Humanist Man of the Year award and an Australian Humanist Woman of the Year award be awarded each year.
Rationale: That a structure be put in place to achieve gender balance due to the past overwhelming incidence of male AHOYs.

3) That each State Society put forward one nomination for every award of Australian Humanist of the Year and Humanist Achiever that is to be made.
Rationale: To protect nominees from embarrassment their names are not made public and negotiations among the state committees take place in secret. A state may decide to 'nominate' someone who is also nominated by another state. This motion is designed to expand negotiations among the state committees parallel with any expansion in the number of awards. (A. Young)

4) That State selectors give added weight to female nominees for AHOY depending on the number of years that males have dominated the awards.
Rationale: Another strategy we want considered to address the gender imbalance amongst the AHOYs awarded in the previous years.

Humanist Society of Queensland

1) That CAHS agrees that if Humanism is to be advanced in this country Humanist Societies need to identify the most important on-going areas and/or changes they want to promote *nationally* and deal with them as 'key' issues at CAHS.

Rationale: Humanist Societies in general have few resources or assets. CAHS can be viewed as the most important occasion for us to pool our energies in the pursuit of what is of greatest significance to us all. CAHS has not served us well in this regard as we do not have any current programs of joint action operating at this time, despite there being many issues of concern to Humanists in Australia.

This should *not* be read as an attempt to restrict any of the activities of individual States or limit the issues or interests of members in the Societies. It relates solely to joint action agreed to at CAHS.

2) That CAHS write to the Federal Minister of Education expressing its alarm at the discriminatory and exclusionary processes involved in chaplaincy appointments in public schools, and emphasising the essentially secular and inclusive nature of public education.

Rationale: In Queensland we have been closely following these developments in the Dept of Ed., in schools and in the literature of the employing authorities and, together with others who are observing similar developments in their states, are appalled by these anti-educational and socially unjust processes.

3) That CAHS agrees that the distinguishing feature of Secular Humanism that sets it apart from religion(s) is that it does not accept supernatural views of reality.

Rationale: In Australia, governments consider the key feature of religion to be 'belief in a supernatural Being, Thing or Principle'. They embed this view in legislation which is used to preferential enhance the social, cultural and economic status of religion and religious groups. This motion does *not* try to define Humanism in a broad sense, as it is deliberately worded to (1) show the key feature that distinguishes us from religionists and (2) point out the sole characteristic that is used to validate or justify the constant and increasing discrimination against us by governments.

Since no other characteristic of Humanism *distinguishes it in this way*, we need to recognise that the non-acceptance of supernatural views of reality is the defining feature of Secular Humanism. Given this understanding, we should give full weight to it in the course of planning future programs.

4) That CAHS recommends to the member Societies that they make it a condition for future membership that applicants declare that they are not members of religious organisations.

Rationale: Since Humanism is a non-religious system of belief that represents the interests and needs of non-religious people, it does not appear practical to have as members of Humanist Societies people who are already members of religious organisations. In Australia, religious organisations are enjoying unparalleled benefits from all levels of government and are not at all interested in the separation of religion and state. In addition, people who have religious attachments must inevitably experience some conflict of interest within the secular context (whether they are, or are not, conscious of it), and could be expected to have particular difficulties with the rejection of supernaturalism in all its forms. Having a solidly secular Humanist membership would go a long way to resolving the conflict that has arisen over what are the core issues/concerns/principles of Humanism and the critical business of CAHS.

5) That CAHS agrees to set as a priority issue and activity for 2008/9 the separation of religion and state and resolves to establish a working party with reps from all member societies to advance this on-going project.

Rationale: In recent years the intersection of church and state has strengthened in ways that are unprecedented in this country. There is such a convergence of the two that it is becoming impossible to guarantee that the local public school, the local public hospital, the local employment centre, the local child care centre or even the food you buy from the supermarket is not managed, governed and/or owned by a religious body of one kind or another. Moreover, they are all, to a greater or lesser degree being paid, subsidised, contracted or in others ways assisted by the public purse to inculcate their religious values in the public arena. In allowing this process to continue we are losing the secular fabric of our civil society, and while we continue to avoid this issue and fail to act strategically we are allowing these developments to escalate further.

David Hicks's detention in Australia

By Kurt Esser

Of all the legislative instruments passed by the Howard government, perhaps the most offensive to human rights and to the rule of law, were the legislation and regulations that combined to force David Hicks behind bars in Yatala prison.

Why is the legislation offensive? Because it breaches the fundamental values of fairness and due process most Australians would suppose attach to our criminal justice system.

Most Australians, if asked, would readily agree that our system works this way: to be imprisoned, one must first be convicted of a crime. For there to be a conviction, the crime must be known to the law, the trial must occur in a court and the person charged must have a fair chance to confront the prosecution's evidence. Findings of guilt can only be made by a fully independent judge, jury or magistrate who must observe the countless, established rules and protocols of procedure to ensure that both sides are treated fairly – what we have come to know as 'natural justice' and 'due process'. If at any stage the system works an injustice to the person charged, the system provides redress in the form of a court of appeal empowered to quash a conviction and let the defendant go free.

None of these niceties attended David Hicks's imprisonment in Australia.

Most importantly, the criminal justice process, from start to finish, should be completely independent of politics and government interference. Criminal trials and sentencing should operate entirely within the jurisdiction of the courts, i.e. judges.

It is a fundamental tenet of our system that any person is free to challenge in court the legal validity of the laws that purport to be used to imprison him or her.

Hicks was imprisoned in Australia not because he was convicted by a court having the jurisdiction to hear the trial of a person charged with a crime known to the law. Rather, in consultation with the Australian and US governments, Hicks did a deal. 'Plead guilty

with strings attached, or remain in legal "no man's land" until whenever.' One of the strings attached to this unsavory bargain was Hicks's covenant not to challenge his imprisonment in Australia. These laws, which were specially passed to cover Hicks's case, required him to spend 9 months in Yatala.

One would expect that the covenant not to challenge these laws is capable of being set aside under the law of duress. The agreement not to challenge, in the context of when and where the deal was struck, was hardly an act of free choice. Any court would be reluctant to see its doors closed to Hicks, given the extreme pressure Hicks was under to end his on-going detention in Guantánamo Bay.

At no stage has Hicks, or his sentence, been dealt with by the courts, judges or indeed the criminal justice system of Australia or the US. Hicks himself is probably a completely broken man, incapable and unwilling to challenge these highly questionable laws himself.

This is a low point in the proud history of criminal procedure in this country: the Howard government was free to, and did, put behind bars a person who did not come close to receiving due process, and in fact, was totally disconnected from the legal process of either Australia or the US.

Lawyers in Australia should feel sufficiently affronted to do whatever is within their power to ensure that these grotesque laws are challenged – including in court. In the place of Hicks, any organization that has standing, should deploy the law of duress to unlock the door of the courts to open such a challenge.

Hopefully once the laws are closely scrutinized in a court of competent jurisdiction, they will be found to be unenforceable, and then consigned to the scrap-heap of Australian legal history.

Kurt Esser, is a barrister and co-ordinator of The Justice Project (TJP). kurt@thejusticeproject.com.au

Worth pondering

'It is sobering to remember just how strange these times we

live in actually are: the 28,000-year period since the Neanderthals died out is unique in the five-million year history of the human lineage in that there has been only one living species of hominid during it. Hitherto, there has probably been no time period when there have not been at least two (and sometimes as many as five) species of hominid wandering the byways of the world at the same time – bumping warily into each other from time to time. This was brought into stark relief in 2004 with the discovery of a new dwarf hominid, *Homo floresiensis*, on the island of Flores in eastern Indonesia. This tiny three-foot-high descendent of *Homo erectus* was still alive as recently as 18,000 years ago and may account for modern folk tales from the area that tell of little forest people.

The oddity of recent times has tended to exaggerate our apparent uniqueness and has perhaps been responsible for giving us a false sense of our own importance. Like all single children born late in their parents' lives, we humans have proved more than just a handful to our ageing

relatives. We invariably assume that we deserve special attention.'

Source: Robin Dunbar, *The Human Story*, Faber & Faber, 2004, p.40

Letters

Defending 'medically-assisted suicide'

C.G. Burgoyne's plea (*VH, Feb.*) that I, *inter alia*, should desist from using the title 'Medically-assisted Suicide' was earnestly argued. However the problem will immediately arise as to agreeing on a more effective, less malodorous term.

In general usage, the word 'euthanasia' has, unhappily, attracted a negative connotation, despite the presence of the all-important word 'voluntary' as its essential qualifier. What could be more accurate, concise and less emotive than 'medically-assisted suicide', or, in my view, its recent successor, 'physician-assisted suicide'?

A person who wilfully chooses to end his/her own life, with or without a physician's assistance, commits suicide: there is neither room nor need of semantics here. Personally, I believe the public image of the world-wide 'Right to Die' movement will be sympathetically enhanced by unashamedly, honestly and simply telling it how it is – I suggest that 'physician-assisted suicide' does exactly that.

David Milan, Wodonga.

Medically-assisted suicide

I strongly disagree with C. G. Burgoyne's request (Letter, February *VH*) to David Milan and others not to use the expression 'medically assisted suicide'.

Burgoyne says the word suicide implies 'an evil thing', and was associated with 'police investigations', but this strikes me as perpetuating a stigma against suicide as 'unmentionable', which it should certainly not be. Suicide may at times (or even often) be a tragedy, but in other circumstances it may be a wise means of relief. I am a chronic depressive, and have had to live with suicidal thoughts and feelings for half a century; and I once tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent a grandmother of mine committing suicide in 1968. *I adamantly refuse to regard suicide as something unmentionable or shameful!*

I strongly support voluntary, well-informed euthanasia (with appropriate safeguards) for humane reasons. And as voluntary euthanasia with medical advice is indeed medically-assisted suicide, we should not be ashamed, coy or squeamish about saying so, loud and clear.

Nigel Sinnott, Sunshine West

Sorry day

February 13 was a beautiful day. However to hear Noel Pearson claim it as a Christian celebration I found insulting.

Among the line up of former Prime Ministers were non-believers and if I were a betting woman I would

wager there wasn't a member of the Humanist, Rationalist or Skeptic societies who would not have joined most of the Parliament in saying 'Sorry'. And among my immediate friends there was no Jew, Muslim, Agnostic or Atheist who would not have offered a heartfelt apology.

Jean Menere, Albury NSW

Atheists aren't to blame

I share the irritation of your correspondent Len Bergin (*VH, Feb.*) at Cardinal George Pell's cavalier treatment of history during his turgid Christmas address to 'the faithful.'

So miffed was I that I despatched the following letter to our regional daily, *The Border Mail*, which risking the wrath of the godly, published it on 31 December. My epistle below created quite a flutter, and was a satisfying example of 'Members in Print.'

ATHEISTS AREN'T TO BLAME

Cardinal George Pell's reading of history is highly selective when he defends Christianity's role in religious warfare (BM 24 December). He rightly condemns the atheists Stalin (he did train for the priesthood first!), Lenin and Pol Pot for their crimes against humanity.

To include Hitler in this motley crew is problematic. Adolph was a baptised Catholic who considered himself to be under the 'guiding hand of Providence'. He was honoured by the Church which ordered thanksgiving masses to be celebrated all over Germany in 1944 after the Führer miraculously survived yet another assassination attempt. (Providence?)

But let's turn to the page carelessly overlooked by the worthy Cardinal. What about the murderous regimes of the dictators Mussolini and Generals Pinochet and Franco? Mean and cruels despots, but loyal sons of the Church.

Atheists didn't institute the wanton slaughter of the Crusades, nor were they party to the Christian mobs as they massacred thousands of Jews whilst en route to the Holy Land. It wasn't an atheist who blessed the infamous Inquisition where torture was refined to a work of art. Atheists didn't order good people to be carted to the gallows for having professed contrary theological opinions. Atheists didn't set the fires around the legs of innocent women and girls falsely charged with 'witchcraft'.

Atheists didn't promote the public burning of books deemed unacceptable by the Church. Atheists denounced the anti-Semitism and oppression practised by the Church for which the Pope has since meekly apologised, nor were they party to the extermination of thousands of French Protestant Huguenots on St Bartholomew's Day in 1572.

Protestants and Catholics, not atheists, kill each other in Northern Ireland. Orthodox Christians, Catholics, and Muslims still perpetuate the hatred which fuelled the recent Balkans war. Atheists are barred from the K.K.K. as those hooded racists carry out their callous lynchings in America's Christian south.

So, when Cardinal Pell argues his case, he should remember that the historical coin has two sides. Objectivity is essential for the historian, as it is for Cardinals, to offend otherwise is to irreparably damage one's credibility.

David Milan, Wodonga