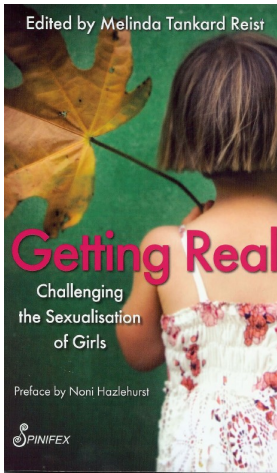


Book Review

Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls

Melinda Tankard Reist, an advocate, social commentator and director of Women’s Forum Australia, has for many years vocalised concerns about the cultural sexualisation of girls and women. In her latest publication: *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls* (Spinifex Press, 2009), she draws together like-minded advocates, academics and other writers who refuse to accept sex-saturation as the social norm.

The authors, which include Noni Hazelhurst, Steve Biddulph and comedian Julie Gale, expose the way that today's popular culture – often through the media – objectifies women and girls as sex objects 'from advertising and merchandising to Bratz and Voodoo Dolls to



(edited by Melinda Tankard Reist) as: 'a treasure trove of information [that] should be mandatory reading for all workers with young people in health, education and welfare.'

- Chelsea Pietsch

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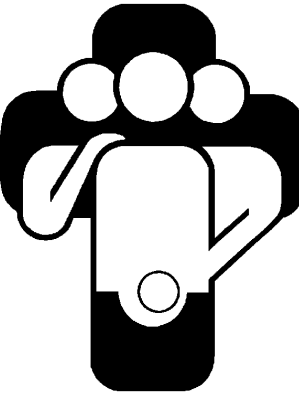
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Life News is the newsletter of Lutherans for Life Inc—Established in 1987 and sponsored by the Lutheran Church of Australia.

Print Post Approved
Periodical No.
PP442570/0006
ISSN 1033-7725

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Should Australia adopt a Bill of Rights?

This paper expresses my concerns that the current National Human Rights Consultation may endanger the freedom of expression and freedom of religion that we as a community currently enjoy throughout Australia. And to those of you who are thinking ‘What does this have to do with life issues?’, I intend to show there is a direct connection.

You may recall that the consultation committee includes Frank Brennan, Mary Kostakidis, Mick Palmer and Tammy Williams. Details of the consultation can be found on their website www.humanrightsconsultation.gov.au. The consultation is reported to have received a record 40,000 plus submissions. They submitted their report to our Federal Government on the 30th September 2009. The chair Father Frank Brennan is both a law professor and a Jesuit priest, and he appears to favour a “minimalist” charter which does not involve judges, but could require a federal parliamentary committee to scrutinise all bills to ensure they comply with their view of human rights. It will be interesting to see when and how our Federal Parliament chooses to act on the report.

In yesterday’s *The Australian* there was a letter to the editor from Warwick Airey of Claremont, WA – “I see that the Prime Minister is pushing ahead with his plan to lower the voting age to 16. While he’s at it he better lower the drinking age. Those kids are going to need a drink on election night when they realise we are ruled by idiots.” I thought this tongue-in-cheek letter was a robust example of the freedoms we enjoy in Australia. Sad to say, in many countries a letter like that would not be published, and the writer would be arrested and punished for his criticism.

The rights consultation can be seen in part as extending the issues raised in the discussion paper ‘Freedom of Religion and Belief in the 21st Century’ released by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC Race Discrimination Unit: Education and Partnerships Section) with this discussion continuing through 2009. My reading of that paper is that HREOC wishes to decrease our freedom of religion and freedom of expression in order to further their own conception of human rights and gender equality.

Differences are Necessary

Also at present there is a review in progress of the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995. The options paper looks at removing the exemptions granted to religious organisations. Invoking human rights, this paper seeks to make a distinction between ‘core’ and ‘peripheral’ functions in allowing future exemptions to religious organisations. In my submission I wrote that there are inherent differences in the beliefs of different religions, and we require the ability to maintain these differences. A Satanist group should not be compelled to employ a Christian cleaner, or vice versa, and an Islamic group should not be compelled to employ a Christian cook, or vice versa.

The national president of the Lutheran Church of Australia, Rev Dr Mike Semmler, wrote in May 2009 – ‘Any legislation arising from the report should provide freedom for religion not from religion. Freedom for religion means that, whatever our

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Editorial

A happy new year to you all, and blessings as you prepare to enter this holy season of Lent.

Since our last edition *Lutherans for Life* has been active in two events—the annual Conference and a dinner for graduating Pastors. The *LFL Conference* was a resounding success, as we were treated to a number of insightful papers. Our feature article for this edition was delivered by Dr. Pollnitz—a paper that I’m sure you’ll agree demands our close attention—as well as a number of others that can be read about in Pastor Christian Fandrich’s report on the following page. A DVD of the conference is currently in the pipeline, so stay tuned for further information about ordering your copy.

Each year *LFL* puts on a dinner for the graduating class of pastors, as a time to introduce the work of *LFL*, and encourage them to cherish the gift of life in their parish work according to our Lord’s teaching. To this latter end, we were delighted to have Selena Ewing speak to us as we enjoyed dessert. Selena is a young mother of five who has authored and contributed to a number of



Selena with her youngest child, Morris

books on life issues. Indeed one of her articles appears in the recently published book *Getting Real*, reviewed on the last page of this edition. But I’m getting off track now. Selena masterfully exhorted us to reflect not only on the cultural devaluation of life ‘out there’, but also to look inwardly to our own consciences. She quoted the Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn who, in his *Gulag Archi-*



Some newly ordained Pastors listen over dessert

pelago, wrote of his times spent in a Siberian Gulag for writing a letter only moderately critical of the government. Despite the gross injustice meted out to him, he looked inward to his own sins.

Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts.

In a similar manner, Selena encouraged us to reflect on the ways that we have promoted myths of the ‘perfect family’ or preferenced our desires over our responsibilities, or selfishness over selflessness, and how this too contributes to the culture of death. Leading the way, she admitted her own need of repentance, and encouraged us to do the same.

On the theme of repentance, the season of Lent is now on the horizon. As you enter Lent, please remember to pray for the often unseen people who are victims of the culture of death. As God’s own children, we can bring their needs before our Father, whose mercies never cease.

On a final note, the *LFL* Council has decided to make all membership payments fall at the same time each year, at the beginning of June. More details will appear in our next edition of *Life News* in April, but in the meantime we ask for your prayers and support for the work of *Lutheran for Life* in the year to come.

We hope you enjoy this edition.

- Thomas Pietsch

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mental rights to judges, to committees of ex-lawyers who, when they disagree among themselves, get a vote. Just them. No one else.’ So moral issues like the limits on free speech, abortion, same-sex marriage, and euthanasia, will be decided by non-elected judges, maybe on a 4-3 vote. Yes, I appreciate that in theory parliament would remain in charge – but when you look at New Zealand and Britain and Canada, parliaments have chosen never to intervene in ‘rights’ decisions by their judges. There is the added concern of judicial activism, where instead of judges applying the existing law in a traditional manner some might see themselves as reformers able to drive their own agenda.

A Bill of Rights Does Not Guarantee Liberty

Similarly I would agree with the reported comments of SA MP Hon Robert Lawson QC – ‘A bill or charter of rights does not guarantee liberty. Many Eastern European countries under communist rule have eloquent bills of rights. These contain guarantees of freedom of expression, freedom of association, and freedom of religion, but these so-called freedoms are illusory. The citizens of these countries are among the most oppressed.’ Nazi Germany had a bill of rights which guaranteed ‘the dignified existence of all people.’

China has a bill of rights to ensure personal freedoms, and again this week there are reliable reports that the Chinese government continues to apply their one-child policy, with forced abortions up to nine months gestation and forced sterilisations. Zimbabwe has an elegant constitutional bill of rights, which among other things provides protections against inhuman treatment, deprivation of property, and discrimination – and you will be aware of how the human rights abuses of the Mugabe government totally ignore these provisions.

Robert Lawson writes that – ‘The best guarantees of freedom are a vibrant political process, a free press and independent courts interpreting the law made by Parliament and the common law.’ Sir Harry Gibbs, a former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, has written – ‘If a society is tolerant and rational, it does not need a Bill of Rights. If it is not, no Bill of Rights will preserve it.’

Our own state of Victoria has a charter of rights, and this can be seen as having failed its first test, by not protecting medical doctors’ freedom of conscience in their new abortion law.

Differing Conceptions of ‘Rights’

Contrary to the Hippocratic tradition, that law sees doctors as mere service providers, obliged to refer any patient for abortion on request, on pain of deregistration, even though any woman can attend an abortion clinic without a referral. The putative right to abortion is considered to trump the right to medical judgement and to freedom of conscience. This left-wing secular agenda appears to see freedom of conscience and of religion as being rights of a second order.

This illustrates another concern about a charter or bill of rights, that it tends to empower “policy elites” who use the new rights to advance their so-called “progressive” agenda.

‘Zimbabwe has an elegant constitutional bill of rights, which among other things provides protections against inhuman treatment, deprivation of property, and discrimination.’

For example, in our state schools our children are being taught that all relationships are equal, with traditional Mum & Dad marriages having no special value, and that it is fine for them to begin sexual experimentation when they feel ready, with the school nurse providing contraception and referral for abortion without parental consent. And if they have (transient) feelings of same-sex attraction, they are welcome to join the gay and lesbian elite.

The current review of the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995 proposes that the Commission will have wide powers to investigate possible breaches of the Act, even in the absence of a complaint, in effect becoming both the prosecutor and the judge, all without being answerable to the Government. The review also proposes giving the Commission the power to search and seize and to compel people to attend. To quote an Editorial in *The Australian* of the 13th January 2009 – ‘In 2002, evangelical pastors John Scot and Danny Nalliah were brought before the Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal after Mr Scot quoted excerpts from the Koran that made his congregation laugh. A judge decided that they had incited religious hatred and ordered them to apologise in full-page press advertisements. It took a decidedly superior tribunal, the Victorian Court of Appeal, to overturn the ruling... (Victorian Attorney General) Mr Hulls should reject the proposals before him. Give the thought police an inch and they will take a light year.’ I believe that the legal costs of the two pastors were in excess of \$100,000.

Such Acts make it unlawful for a person to incite ‘hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule’ of a person or group. None of these terms are defined in the laws. It is not difficult to foresee an activist wishing to claim victim status for a minority making a complaint on very flimsy grounds, all in the name of ‘human rights’. I believe that all persons engaged in open social discussion (including religious persons) need to be free to debate the issues that confront us as a community without fear. Genuine freedom of speech and religion are long-established principles and deserve our protection.

- Dr Robert Pollnitz

Snippets from around the world

Spain leads the world in organ donation

For the 18th year in a row, Spain leads the world in the number of deceased organ donors per million people -- 34.3. This is a commonly used benchmark of the effectiveness of a donor system and other countries lag far behind. The average for the European Union is 18.1 and in the US it is 26.3. In the UK, the figure is 14.7 and in Australia 12.1 donors per million. The Spanish are particularly proud of their record, which was achieved despite a steady decrease in the number of traffic deaths, a major source of organs.

What is the secret of the Spanish system? Dedication and teamwork. In 1989 the government set up a national network of transplant coordinators. They work in all hospitals and closely monitor emergency wards to be aware of potential donors. When they learn of a death, they tactfully try to persuade relatives to allow the person's organs to be harvested. Only about 15% of families refuse consent nowadays, a huge drop from 40% before the system was set up. At a few hospitals the refusal rate is nearly zero. (bioedge.org)

Abortion laws hazardous to mothers' health

A new report from the World Economic Forum shows that countries with restrictive abortion laws are often the leaders in reducing maternal mortality, and those with permissive laws often lag.

Pro-Life Ireland ranks first in the survey with 1 death for every 100,000 live births. In the United States where there are virtually no restrictions on abortion, the maternal mortality ratio is 17 our of 100,000 live births.

Other regions of the world show similar trends. The African nation with the lowest maternal morality rate is Mauritius, a country with some of the continent's most protective laws for the unborn. On the other end of the spectrum, Ethiopia, which has decriminalized abortion, has a maternal death rate 48 times higher than in Mauritius. Chile, with constitutional protection for the unborn, outranks all other South American countries as the safest place for women to bear children. And in Asia, Sri Lanka, which has among the most restrictive abortion laws in the world, has the lowest maternal mortality rates. (www.c-fam.org)

Should Australia adopt a Bill of Rights?

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persuasion, we are able to say openly what we believe without fear of someone taking offence and taking us before a court of the land, where a judge may be called to rule on a matter of faith. If we Christians retain the opportunity to openly promote our faith, all other religions will be able to do the same. In nurturing our people we will need to point out the error of atheism and other religious/non-religious stances. We can expect other religions to explain to their adherents why they disagree with Christianity.'

Lutherans can claim to have a special interest in genuine religious freedom, since many of our ancestors migrated to Australia in the 1850s for exactly that reason. Until now Australia would have to be one of the freest nations in our world for the holding and expressing of religious beliefs. When I read of the oppressive restrictions on Christian worship in many other countries, I am very grateful to be an Australian.

Against Codifying a Vision of Society

This religious freedom can be harmed if we attempt to set in politically correct legislative concrete a certain vision of society and of the place of religion within it. That is, if a right is too closely defined it may be limited or abused. Surely part of our freedom is that we can disagree with each other -- with respect and without coercion, with persuasion and without incitement to hostility.

Discrimination is not an evil word -- it can imply wisdom or discernment. We discriminate both when we choose what food we wish to eat and what God we wish

'Discrimination is not an evil word—it can imply wisdom or discernment.'

to follow. For two thousand years the mainstream Christian churches have taught that Jesus is the one God, the one Way, the one Truth and the one Light. Others are free to disagree -- and they do, some of them vigorously. Christians in Australia have shown a remarkable degree of tolerance to expressions of ridicule and contempt, as evidenced in the 1997 display of the *Piss Christ* work of so-called art by Andres Serrano.

In general I would agree with the view that our current constitution and laws provide adequate protection of our human rights. I am concerned that a bill or charter of rights will remove power from an accountable parliament and entrust that power to unelected and unaccountable judges. To quote Professor James Allan in the March 2009 issue of Quadrant -- 'A bill of rights hands the power to declare what are and aren't your funda-

Continued on next page

Free to Live: Conference 2009

While most of Australia was focussing its attention on the MCG for the AFL Grand Final on Saturday September 26, a smaller but no less enthusiastic band of around 50 people gathered in Bethlehem House in the centre of Adelaide for the Lutherans for Life 2009 Annual Conference. The 2009 Conference was called *Free to live*, and those gathered heard from four guest speakers whose presentations addressed several diverse life issues. However, a common thread through all was the practical theme of how the Church corporately, and Christians individually can continue promoting the sanctity of life in the public arena.



Dr Greg Pike (pictured above), Director of the Southern Cross Bioethics Institute in Adelaide, updated us on stem cell research, highlighting the greater and more numerous practical advances made to date in adult compared with embryonic stem cell research. Paediatrician and Chair of the LCA's CSBQ Dr Rob Pollnitz presented the history of the recent push for a 'Bill of Rights' for Australia, and its implications for the Church and Christians (published in this edition of *Life News*). Marlene Pietsch gave an impassioned account of her participation in the Interfaith Ad Hoc Committee in Victoria as the Lutheran representative when it responded with a strong pro-life stand against the disturbing Victorian *Abortion Law Reform Bill*

2008. It was good to hear how just one 'ordinary' person can work with others to make a difference, and gave some of us more courage to write and speak to our politicians on critical life issues. Paul Russell, Senior Officer for Family and Life with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide, spoke on his experience in responding actively and creatively against the push for voluntary euthanasia in South Australia. The conference was surrounded by worship of the one true and living God in opening and closing services, and Pastor Simon Cooper preached God's Word by way of a reflection on the conference theme.

A new LFL council was also elected and then installed the next day at the 9am service at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Adelaide by SA/NT LCA District President Pastor Rob Voigt. The new council members are: Pastor Tim Kowald (President), Chelsea Pietsch (Secretary), Pastor Christian Fandrich (Treasurer), Pastor Tim Ebbs, Moira Ganner, Roslyn Zadow, and Joshua Pfeiffer.



It was a great conference, all who gathered were informed, disturbed and encouraged, and above all enjoyed the fellowship others who were eager to share, promote and protect God's gift of life. Look out for details of the 2010 Conference in the next edition of *Life News*.

- Pastor Christian Fandrich

Prayer and

Overseas students' alarming abortion rates in South Australia

ONE in three abortions at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide is performed on international students, University of Adelaide research has found. A paper by the Discipline of General Practice says the terminations are predominantly carried out on Chinese students.

The high abortion rate has prompted calls for comprehensive sex education for the tens of thousands of students who make South Australia their temporary home. Principal researcher Dr Adrienne Burchard found that international students had limited sexual knowledge, could become more sexually active while living in Australia, and did not always know how to access contraception information. *The Advertiser*

Australian Population Growth

Treasury projections suggest that Australia will reach a population of 35 million in 40 years – seven million more than previously expected. While birth-rates are in decline among many Western nations, Australia's birthrate has increased significantly in the past two years, from 1.79 to 1.93 children per woman, the highest level since the 1980s. Despite Greens leader Bob Brown labelling this growth 'a recipe for planetary exhaustion and a great human tragedy', analysts say this reflects a wider optimism about Australia's future and is a sign that women are finding it easier to balance motherhood with careers. Currently, Australians aged under 25 only make up about 20% of the population, a statistic that economists warn will cause significant fiscal problems. Treasury figures also project that the proportion of people older than 65 will rise from the present 13% to 22% in 2049. *The Australian*

South Australia's Great Escape

South Australia's upper house has only narrowly escaped passing a bill in support of euthanasia. The bill, introduced by Greens Party member Mark Parnell, came close to receiving the support required and would have reached that number had independent member Ann Bressington's amendments been carried. When they were defeated, she abstained from the vote, which looked like it would tie the vote. In this event, the casting vote would fall on the president of the Legislative Council, Bob Sneath (Labor), who had indicated support for the bill. At the eleventh hour, Liberal member David Ridgway, who had previously supported the bill, delivered a speech explaining events in his personal life over the last five days. His mother had died, and as a result of going through this process, he had decided to withdraw his support of the bill, which was subsequently defeated. With a state election due in March, and a number of pro-life MPs retiring, the outcome of the next vote on euthanasia is far from certain. *The Australian*

Action Points

Queensland Government Refuses to Decriminalize Abortion

The Queensland government has resisted a petition campaign requesting the decriminalization of abortion. Despite the law being rarely enforced, State Attorney-General Cameron Dick has issued an official response saying he would not remove abortion from the Criminal Code. 'The Premier has made clear that the government has no plans to undertake a wider review of the general abortion laws,' Dick wrote in *The Australian* newspaper. www.lifenews.com

New Zealand study links depression, abortion

Another study in a line of scientific reports has linked depression and anxiety with abortion. The study was done by New Zealand pro-abortion professor David Ferguson, who, according to *Anglicans for Life* president Georgette Forney, looks at the data and decides that it speaks for itself. "When you look at the medical history of over 500 women, they realized that abortion leads to significant distress and that some of that distress will manifest itself in mental health problems or physical problems," Forney says.

However, the current healthcare reform measure approved by the Senate includes government-funded abortion, which could ultimately lead to more abortions. The pro-life leader sees irony in that. "For a country that is seeking to prevent mental and physical health issues, and we're watching people who are overweight now and preventing diabetes and heart problems, here we are on the other side of it -- [and] because it's the issue of abortion, we can't touch it and it's okay that we're going to create additional health problems for women," the Anglicans for Life president contends.

The Silent No More Awareness campaign is trying to educate women about the health problems that accompany abortion and provide referrals for assistance. Forney adds that is because the pro-abortion groups refuse to recognize the harm and to help people deal with it. www.onenewsnow.com