

## **TCFNews JUN 2012 Vol 55 No. 3**

### **Lest we forget**

In recent years, our media has recognised a new interest in Australian society in the celebration of Anzac Day. With increased international travel, the remembrance ceremonies at the site of the original Anzac landing in Turkey have grown into a huge event with some Australians wanting to make the trip there just like Muslims want to make the trip, once in their lifetime, to Mecca. It is an interest that apparently has its foundation mainly in generations X and Y. Younger Australians, in particular, but not exclusively, are finding new meaning and significance in the celebration of Anzac Day. Why?

#### An educational perspective

In investigating this phenomenon, the media has missed an educational perspective that results from the increasing importance since the early 1900s given to teaching Australian history in the curriculum of each state and territory. Led by NSW, and following the publication of the Government's White Paper Excellence and Equity, NSW made the study of Australian history compulsory from 1990 when the NSW Board of Studies was formed. Although not mandated, schools preferred to teach the compulsory Australian history and geography in Years 7 and 8 to allow students to choose a compulsory Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) subject in Years 9 and 10 and some schools provided a choice of history or geography only. From this point, students received some in depth teaching about Anzac Day and World War 1 and some of these students went onto study Modern History in Years 11 and 12 where the compulsory study was, and still is, World War 1.

A new generation of graduates emerged with greater understanding of Australian history than previously was the case. This emphasis was further backed up in the 2000 HSIE K-6 Syllabus where teaching and celebrating Anzac Day were mandatory content. And if that wasn't enough, the changes to the School Certificate that were implemented after the 1998 review of the Higher School Certificate would require the mandatory Australian history and geography to be tested through a state-wide test of Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics and Citizenship. This requirement meant that the Australian history would be moved into Stage 5 (Years 9 and 10) and would be high stakes curriculum because it was to be tested. The emphasis on Anzac day only increased.

While this was happening in NSW, other states and territories were increasing their focus mainly through the inclusion into the curriculum of more civics and citizenship education. Then in the last decade, the Howard Government provided schools with incentives to implement a renewed focus on values education in which celebrations like Anzac Day would receive special recognition.

Is it therefore not a surprise that those currently in the 18 to 38 age bracket have a new interest in Anzac Day?

#### Secularisation of Australian society

But what many in the media have focussed on, and needs further investigation, is the desire of many of these Australians and others to make one of our greatest defeats almost sacred. In this regard, some spiritual as well as educational perspective is helpful.

The decline of Christianity, represented by regular church attendance and declarations on census forms, has highlighted a community shift towards secularism. More and more Australians support secular positions as opposed to long establish religious positions on a range of social issues. The push in NSW for secular ethics classes as an alternative to Special

Religious Education (SRE) is but one example. Now these classes are legitimised under the Education Act as an alternative that can be provided during time set aside for SRE.

The secularisation of Australian society is one to be watched carefully and opposed as needed. It is supported by some who wish to remove any religious education and celebration from public life, whether it is SRE in schools, prayers in parliament or non-payment of council rates by churches. Their vulnerability is their lack of understanding of Australian law in which there is not the separation of church and state as per the United States, but a different historical base and relationship that allows non-denominational Christianity to be part of our institutions including public schools. It is this matter that could do with much more investigation by both Christians and secularists.

Secularism, with its often situational ethics, has left many Australians in a spiritual void, although some secularists even deny a spiritual side to life. At one extreme, the emotional fanaticism of Dawkins fires up people to atheism, but for most Australians the search for the good life allows secular values to side in and replace traditional religious viewpoints. Why not allow same sex marriage, we all deserve a fair go?

#### The contribution of Christianity

The problem for Australian society is that most Australians don't understand the Christian beliefs that underpin our society and provide the freedom and laws that bind us together as a nation. How important is it to understand the implications of a belief that every individual is unique and loved by God? Where do our views of freedom and the foundations of our laws come from? It is not a belief in the goodness of humans, you only need to read today's paper to cast that theory aside, but it is the goodness of God and our relationship with him. In rejecting institutionalised Christianity, Australians are becoming susceptible to a society confused about values in which pluralism and relativism may well turn over to anarchy and be eventually controlled by repressive governments. Some consideration of the decline in civil society in other countries could well be a disturbing reminder of this slide.

The spiritualisation of Anzac Day is most probably a sincere yearning for the values that underpin Christianity but without the Christian belief. They want recognition of sacrifice for the common good. They want a better society where mateship allows people to communicate and relate better. They want to believe in something, not the nothing the atheists project. It is the horrendous sacrifice of that first Anzac Day that stirs their spirits and commits them to a set of values that they want for Australia. While such searching is to be commended and encouraged for the sake of a civil society, it still manages to omit a greater sacrifice where God himself sent his only son to die a painful death on a cross as a sacrifice for the sins of all. It is this God who calls believers to action to promote a better and more satisfying way than secularism can provide. He calls for a life of obedience and faithfulness, irrespective of the gains that secularism might be making into present day Australia. It is a life that might involve sacrifice as materialism and hedonism are displaced by service and the values of the Gospel are promoted. It is Christ's sacrifice that changed the world and can change Australia - lest we forget.

John Gore