

# FROM PLATO TO NATO TEACHING ABOUT GOOD AND EVIL IN AUSTRALASIAN SCHOOLS

## *Theological, Philosophical and Psychological perspectives*

*'Is God all powerful?  
Then he could get rid of evil.  
Is God wholly good?  
Then he would want to get rid of evil.  
Whence, then, is evil?'* (Epicurus)



After the events of 9/11 the question of evil has occupied people as never before. It is not always clear what evil is and some today explain evil entirely in psychological terms. Young people are aware of these issues and are very interested in them (they are likely to watch many videos and some play computer games which feature evil forces) yet seldom are they helped to think matters through in depth. The issues are also related to the practical question of what it is to live a fulfilled human life, what is it to be 'fully human', and these links will be explored in ways that contribute to an understanding of genetics, sexual morality and other issues.

This intense one-day, in-service teachers' conference will explore the issues involved in depth and every participant will be provided with a teaching CD containing Powerpoints™ for use in the classroom. This CD will also include two video interviews for use in the classroom - one with Rabbi Albert Friedlander on Jewish approaches to the Holocaust and one with Professor Ann Mortimer, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Hull in England, on psychiatric understandings of evil and their relation to theological understandings.

**The conference will be conducted by speakers who are well known in Australia and New Zealand having run conferences in every Australian State and throughout New Zealand:**

**Dr. Peter Vardy  
Julie Arliss**

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

**9.00 - 9.15: Protest Atheism.** The rejection of God based on the suffering of innocent children. The challenge of Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov in 'The Brothers Karamazov' will be explained. This is possibly the most compelling attack on God ever produced and has influenced many writers including Camus and modern theologians. Any attempt to address the problem of evil has to take this into account. It is a position with which many young people identify and yet they do not realise that carefully argued responses are available from within the Western intellectual tradition.

**9.15 - 10.00: The Augustinian and Thomist approaches to human goodness and evil.** St. Augustine put forward one of the most influential approaches to the problem of evil. Drawing on the Genesis creation story and the philosophy of Aristotle, he saw evil as a privation of goodness and all evil being due to the free actions of human beings or angels. St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13<sup>th</sup> century adapted Augustine's approach and his understanding of evil was to become generally accepted in the Catholic tradition.

Human beings can be either physically or morally defective. Downs Syndrome children, tendencies to certain forms of cancer, homosexuality or even hair loss are seen as physical defects. This has raised the issue of whether it is then morally right to 'correct genetic defects' at the foetal stage. The consequences of this view will be explored and the significance of moral evil related to the question of what it is to be fully human.

**10.00 - 10.30: The devil and evil in the Bible.** The Hebrew and Christian scriptures have unique understandings of evil and the role of suffering. From the temptation in the garden of Eden, through the wickedness which is portrayed as leading to the flood, the Psalms and the role of Satan in the book of Job to New Testament and Pauline accounts, these alternatives will be explored. The different interpretations placed on them by the Christian tradition will be explained through the use of great works of art.

**10.30 - 11.00: Islam and evil.** Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world and has a rich philosophic and theological history, particularly the approaches developed during the centuries immediately after the death of the prophet Mohammed. This session will explain the Islamic understanding of evil and will relate this to the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**11.00 - 11.25: Coffee**

**11.25 - 12.15: The Irenaean approach to the problem of evil and human fulfilment.** The main alternative to the Augustinian tradition is the so-called 'Irenaean approach' developed by John Hick. This poses significant challenges to the Augustinian model and has great appeal to a modern audience - the world is seen as a 'vale of soul making' in which human beings can progress towards or away from God.

**12.15 - 12.45: The Psychology of evil.** Why do some people turn bad against all predictions and why do some people become moral heroes even though they come from the most terrible backgrounds? Can the existence of evil be explained entirely in psychiatric or psychological terms? Psychiatry particularly examines abnormal brain states that may be able to explain behaviour that is called evil whilst psychology focuses more on examining reasons for such behaviour due, for instance, to childhood or family factors. Some psychiatrists and psychologists maintain that any theological explanation is irrelevant and that human beings are simply evolved animals. The strengths and weaknesses of this position will be evaluated.

**12.45 - 1.45: Lunch**

**1.45 - 2.30: Good and evil in literature and film.** From Faust to Frankenstein and from The Lord of the Rings to Harry Potter, the struggle between good and evil plays a major part in literature and film. Increasingly today's young people experience the world in visual terms - through film, television or computer games. Different ways of using these media to explore the issue of evil will be discussed and teaching strategies outlined.

**2.30 - 3.15: Institutional evil.** Possibly the greatest evils in the modern world are not performed by individual men and women but are built into the structures of society. The nature of structural injustice and institutional evil in the world today will be outlined as well as their place in modern global economies. The effects of such injustice on developing countries will be explored.

## CONFERENCE DATES

The conference will be held at the following centres on the dates shown:

<b>AUCKLAND</b>	- June 14, 2004.	Carmel College
<b>WELLINGTON</b>	- June 16, 2004.	Victoria University
<b>CHRISTCHURCH</b>	- June 17, 2004.	St. Thomas of Canterbury College
<b>LAUNCESTON</b>	- July 22, 2004.	St. Patrick's School
<b>MELBOURNE</b>	- August 3, 2004.	Lauriston Girls School
<b>ADELAIDE</b>	- August 5, 2004.	Cabra Dominican College
<b>NEWCASTLE</b>	- August 9, 2004.	Bishop Tyrrell Anglican College
<b>SYDNEY</b>	- August 10, 2004.	Newington College
<b>CANBERRA</b>	- August 11, 2004.	Merici College
<b>PERTH</b>	- August 13, 2004.	Presbyterian Ladies College
<b>TOWNSVILLE</b>	- August 16, 2004.	Catholic Education Office
<b>BRISBANE</b>	- August 18, 2004.	St. Rita's College

Reservations will be on a first come first served basis. Please contact the relevant school in your city to make a booking. The contact details are provided on a letter attached to this programme. Should these contact details be lost, contact [wombateducation@hotmail.com](mailto:wombateducation@hotmail.com) and they will supply the necessary local contact details.

Full notes will be provided on the CD supplied to all who attend together with Powerpoints™ for use in the classroom. This CD will ONLY be available to those attending the conference. Coffee on arrival and mid morning as well as lunch will be provided. Please notify the school concerned of any special dietary requirements or if disabled access is required at the time of booking.

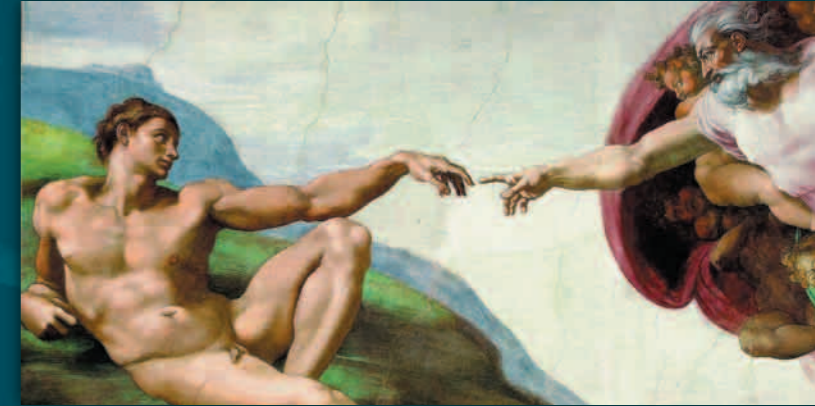


## SPEAKERS



**Dr. Peter Vardy** is Vice-Principal of Heythrop College, University of London and is one of the leading British academics concerned with Religious and Values education in schools. He is a former Chair of the Board of Theology of the University of London, the advisor to the BBC series on Sex and Religion (2001) and to Channel 4's series on Evil (autumn 2002). Peter is the author of the best selling 'Puzzle' series of books and produced the series of videos on arguments for the existence of God for Dialogue Videos. He gave the 1999 New College lectures in Sydney and in 2003 the Hockerill lecture at Kings College, London. He regularly lectures to head teachers across Britain. His latest book, published in 2003, is 'Being Human'. Peter visits Australia and New Zealand three times a year to help with the introduction of the 'Five Strands' approach to Religious and Values education which is now being widely used by schools across the region. Peter Vardy will conduct the whole conference in New Zealand centres and in Canberra and Perth.

**Julie Arliss** lectures in Theology and Philosophy at Richard Huish College and has conducted in service training for teachers at the University of Manchester and the Institute of Education, London. In July/August 2003 she conducted a tour of 14 centres in Australia training teachers and in September 2003 ran a conference on 'New Approaches to Religious Education' with Professor the Lord Stewart Sutherland in Glasgow (former chief inspector of schools in England). She was a leading contributor to the Channel 4 TV series on Evil and is joint author of the newly published 'The Thinker's Guide to Evil' and 'The Thinker's Guide to God'. Julie was the joint author of the article on 'The Matrix' and St. John's Gospel and the author of 'The kingdom of God' in recent issues of 'DIALOGUE'.



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A one day intensive in-service conference in all major cities in Australia and New Zealand

**June to August 2004**

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