

Pilgrim Uniting Church  
As I See It

### ***An Atheist PM***

Before the last State election I received a scurrilous anonymous letter from “Christian friends”. It sought to denigrate and malign Michelle O’Byrne for being a supporter of EMILY’s List.

EMILY’s List is an organisation that has sought for a number of years to ensure that at least 35% of women are preselected to winnable ALP seats. On the face of it I thought that such a modest target was something worth pursuing given that our population is 50% female. So I was non-plussed and a little angry to receive this anonymous epistle from “Christian friends,” and suspected their motives.

Well my letter writing friends must be ropeable, with the accession of Julia Gillard to the top job in the land, and all the more so because when asked if she believed in God she replied “No.”

An Atheist and a woman! Now there’s a powerful combination. So I ask, have we anything to worry about? And does anyone care (outside a group of Christian conservatives)?

And of course the answer to both questions is no. This is not the United States where it is almost compulsory to be seen as a “believer” if you aspire to high office. I like to think that Australians are a bit more sophisticated when it comes to religious belief. After all, we live in a country that is becoming more and more secular and that increasingly accepts that Christianity is but one of the many religions of our lands, albeit historically the dominant one.

And I find it rather telling that the matter of PM Gillard’s atheism was raised at all by the media. After all we’ve had other PMs, notably Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke, whose closeness to God was never questioned. I find it significant that these two “atheists” were instrumental in bringing about key social reforms that reflected some of Jesus’ teachings on the poor. I guess the point I’m making is that Ms. Gillard’s lack of religious credentials is irrelevant to how she will lead this nation. She’s here to lead the whole nation, not just the various vested interests, one of which is the church.

**As I See It**, this is how it should be, unless you fancy living in a theocracy – I mention Iran as an example. Because one professes non-belief in God does not mean that they will not be for social reform that is very much at the heart of Christian belief. Indeed Ms. Gillard was raised a Baptist and at an early age would have been exposed to the Christian values that, given her track record, she continues to hold. She says she admires those who genuinely hold Christian beliefs but regrets she cannot share those beliefs. I believe she should be praised for her honesty, and encouraged to work for all Australia.

And if we are serious about our belief that God is in everything, surely God can be found, even in an atheist!

*Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article.*

*Rev Tony Duncan*

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