

Aldrich Ames and Robert Hanssen, 'men who compromised American intelligence operations, and whose actions led to the deaths of scores of Soviet agents who were prepared to risk their lives collaborating with Western intelligence agencies,' are both behind bars and books have been written about them, the historians point out. But in Australia the moles remain at large and unpunished. All the official historians offer us, however, is a question to which they know the answers: '...how extensive was the betrayal and how extensive was the damage?' They know, but ASIO has forbidden them to disclose the facts.

What possible justification is there for keeping these things classified? Five years ago, I put that question to Michael Cook himself, who now lives in retirement in London. He responded by email that:

*"...[Neither Paul] Keating, nor anybody else, told me or even suggested to me that I give my report a high security classification. That I decided on my own for what I thought, and still think, were good reasons, which is why... as you correctly recall, I would not do as you asked."*

He declined to disclose the reasons themselves. Given that the official history has now both confirmed the existence of the Cook Report and the existence of 'a handful' of moles (meaning four or five) inside ASIO, we might reasonably speculate about those reasons. It could be that the Keating government did not want what would have been a scandal far more explosive than anything else in ASIO's history. It therefore suppressed things that the public had

and has a right to know. It did this not for our sake, or for the sake of national security, but purely to spare itself embarrassment and vexatious trouble.

But in that case, why did the Howard government not release the Cook Report after 1996? There must be bipartisan reasons for the matter being kept secret. The most plausible is that what counter-intelligence sleuths see as compelling is not always what a court of law will find convincing. A consensus therefore arose that the whole thing was too messy to drag out into the light of the courts and the media. Yet the official historians say they know who the moles were, and that the evidence is clear enough to be shocking. So the argument about the evidence being inconclusive looks somewhat tenuous.

There may be another reason, but the official historians do not provide one and seem sceptical themselves about the decision. Given all that they have seen, that should itself be regarded as a compelling argument for the nonsense to end and for the Cook Report finally to be released. Until it is, we will know that ASIO failed in the Cold War, but we will have no grounds for believing that its old weaknesses have been remedied, rather than merely papered over in a Yes, Prime Minister kind of way. This is in an era of unprecedented Chinese penetration of Australian society and institutions. But that is a story for another time.

*- Paul Monk's latest books are Opinions and Reflections: A Free Mind at Work 1990-2015 and Credo and Twelve Poems: A Cosmological Manifesto, available at [www.echobooks.com.au](http://www.echobooks.com.au)*

## 'Tis an end devoutly to be wished

*An examination of how we think about dying.*

By Ian Wood

After reading my letter to *The Catholic Weekly*, Brisbane, strongly arguing against their published views condemning assisted dying choice, your President, Dr Meredith Doig, kindly asked if I would submit an article on Christian support for the *Australian Rationalist*.

I have perused the RSA 10 point Plan, and find I agree essentially with every point, however I particularly wish to comment on Point 10: 'Guaranteed control over one's own body, free from religious interference, when facing the end of life.'

Note that I prefer the terminology of voluntary assisted dying, or medical assistance in dying, rather than physician assisted suicide, so as to omit the negative connotations of suicide. We want the right for a rational person to make a choice, not between life and death, but between two ways of dying.

It may surprise members of the RSA, but the majority of

Australians who designate themselves as Christian, support Point 10. A 2012 Newspoll found nearly 9 out of 10 Anglicans, and over 3 out of 4 Catholics, support assisted dying reform. Indeed, this is the reason why the group, Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia, was formed in 2009, with Rev Trevor Bensch and myself as co-founders. Our aim is to counter the "religious interference", that is, the opposition of the conservative or fundamentalist Christians and a vocal church hierarchy to assisted dying choice.

Why do our Christian Group members support assisted dying? Essentially for the same reason as members of RSA. None of us wish to die in horrific ways such as uncontrollable vomiting of blood and faecal material due to an inoperable blocked bowel, fungating tumours where the body is rotting from the inside, or drowning in your own saliva from MND, to list just three examples.

Former Archbishop Desmond Tutu, one of the most respected

religious leaders, speaking in support of the Falconer Bill in UK, said: "I have been fortunate to spend my life working for dignity for the living. Now I wish to apply my mind to the issue of dignity for the dying. I revere the sanctity of life - but not at any cost."

All members of my group would agree that the terminally ill need to be treated with compassion and care, supported by family, friends and the community, and treated as precious members of the human family.

numerous examples of Biblical killing apparently approved or authorised by God. (For example, the story of Noah, or the genocide of the Midianites in Num. 31.7-9 & 17-18).

Legislation for assisted dying choice should be based on the facts, and not religious dogma. The recent Victorian Parliament *Inquiry into End of Life Choice Report* included Recommendation 49: the legalisation of assisted dying. It found no evidence of abuse in the jurisdictions studied. Numerous studies in Canada also came

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We also believe that palliative care (PC) provides an essential service for the dying. However we know that the facts show even the best PC does not provide adequate relief to many of those dying. Palliative Care Outcomes Collaboration's own analysis of approximately 90 PC facilities shows that one in six patients report moderate to severe distress from pain during the terminal phase of their terminal illness.

The last resort in palliative care, when all else fails, is to put the person into a medically induced coma, known as terminal sedation, where they gradually starve or dehydrate to death, a circumstance that family and the nursing and medical staff can find extremely distressing to watch.

Terminal sedation is accepted by the medical profession and the Catholic Church as an appropriate and religiously ethical last resort, as the stated intention is 'to relieve suffering'. No reporting is involved, and the patient need not even be asked.

Yet if the dying patient requested, "Rather than starve me to death in a coma, with the trauma of having my family watch this slow death, please give me the next few days medication in a single dose", this would be illegal.

As Christians we ask why it is morally acceptable that the slow death procedure should be legal but not the other alternative? I feel sure RSA members would question this too.

It is surely hypocritical for a Church that has endorsed the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the burning of 'heretics' who simply disagree with church doctrine, to pontificate on the sanctity of life! Many want nothing to do with a God described as loving who would also require them to die in agony with futile suffering.

In recent years the trend for religious opposition is to use the alleged 'slippery slope' and the alleged coercion of the elderly and vulnerable, rather than the 'sanctity of life' and the 'Thou shalt not Kill' arguments in previous years. This is presumably because the 'Thou shalt not Kill', which is more accurately 'Thou shalt not murder', (that is kill with malice), is easily rebutted by citing the

out strongly in support of assisted dying choice, as did the Supreme Court of Canada, which led to Canadian Parliament legislation giving all adult Canadians this option under strict guidelines and limitations. Notably the Canadian Medical Association has endorsed this legislation; the Australian Medical Association lags well behind in accepting this need for change.

We are all aware that the Northern Territory was the first jurisdiction in the world to have assisted dying in 1996, until this



was overturned by Kevin Andrews in a Catholic-led clique during the Howard Government. Oregon in USA passed legislation in 1997, again after fierce Catholic opposition. Oregon has since been joined by Washington State, Vermont, Washington DC, California, Colorado and Montana.

I believe a statement by UK Anglican Canon Rosie Harper sums up very eloquently what we would all prefer in an end of life situation. She described the assisted death of her uncle with Dignitas in Switzerland. "My uncle had a beautiful death, with his family around him - good music, good wine, and a pain-free end. The days that would have followed as he struggled through the end stage of a brain tumour would have been terrible. He had no choice about dying. He did have choice about the manner of his death."

- Ian Wood was a community pharmacist in Port Pirie, South Australia, before retiring in 2000.