Abstract

On the 14th of April, 1901, John Norton, politician and proprietor of the broadsheet *Truth* penned an open letter to the Catholic community of New South Wales. In it he claimed that the Catholic clergy of the Colony had conducted a scurrilous campaign against him which cost him his seat in the New South Wales Legislature of 1901. Unlike these priests he stated that he would never hide behind the facade of 'Mental Reservation' and that he had encouraged his journalists to be fair in their reportage of both trials. He deplored the behaviour of these individuals as he believed their leadership would see "the scotched sectarian snake raise again its baleful head within the social and political arena".

Norton was referring to how *Truth* had reported on both trials involving Arthur and Alice Coningham against the Vicar General of St. Mary's Cathedral, Fr, Denis O'Haran, D.D. O'Haran was named by Arthur as the adulterer who had corrupted his wife Alice. In petitioning for divorce, Norton argued that *Truth* had been one of the few papers which had allowed Alice to tell her story. The charge of adultery against O'Haran was thrown out during the second trial.

This paper intends to examine the newspaper coverage of events before and after the trials. It will analyse their input in order to ascertain whether or not they reported from a sectarian standpoint. It will further explore the level of interest the cases generated both locally and nationally. Finally it will address Norton's accusation that his seat was lost due to an orchestrated attack on him by the Catholic clergy of New South Wales.

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