For God and Country: Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics

Dr. Marion Maddox
1999 Australian Parliamentary Fellow
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Presiding Officers' Foreword

Established in 1971, the Australian Parliamentary Fellowship has provided an opportunity for an academic analysis of many aspects of Parliament and the work of Parliamentarians. The work of Dr Marion Maddox, the 1999 Fellow, has been the first to assess and set in context the religious influences felt by current and past Senators and Members as they pursue their parliamentary duties.

With two doctorates (in theology and political philosophy) Dr Maddox brought both fields together in her Fellowship project. In for For God and Country: Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics Dr Maddox explores religious influences and debate in and around the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments. While interviews with some 60 present and past Senators and Members form the centrepiece of her study, Dr Maddox has drawn on the Convention Debates of the 1890s, the Constitutional Convention of 1998 and landmark court cases on Indigenous religious/spiritual issues to present an insight into how attitudes to religion may have influenced the players and the issues in Australia.

Dr Maddox gives us an overview of ‘the sacred’s unruly incursions in the secular public sphere’ and sees the work she undertook during her Fellowship as both a complement to her previous work and as the starting point for further work. This is goal of the Australian Parliamentary Fellowship appointments and Dr Maddox has met this splendidly in this publication.

MARGARET REID
President of the Senate
September 2001

NEIL ANDREW
Speaker of the House of Representatives
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One of the themes of this study is the contested meaning of 'family values'. Much of my own teaching on that subject has come from Dorothy and Lawrence; I dedicate it to them.
Chapter One: Religion in the Corridors of Power

Dinner Tables and Street Corners

Modern Australia has been called 'the world’s most secular society'.\(^1\) While that claim may be disputed (for example, by New Zealand),\(^2\) religion is seldom regarded as a particularly revealing or interesting dimension of Australian national life. Ecclesiastical statements on political issues gain a measure of public attention, but church attendances are in decline. The much-vaunted growth of immigrant and 'new' religions in fact takes up only a tiny percentage of the slack. Sectarianism, once a defining feature of the Australian party system, has faded.

So, too, if one believes the 'Tweedledum-and-Tweedledee' school, has political passion. Opinion polls show declining public faith in political processes, decreasing party identification among voters and high levels of ignorance and misinformation about political players and institutions. Victorian etiquette is no longer needed to quarantine once incendiary topics: religion and politics have become the things no one would bother to discuss at the dinner table.\(^3\)

The academic world is scarcely more interested. Although Australia boasts substantial scholarship in both religion and politics, there is little sense of any noteworthy overlap.\(^4\) Australian scholars of religion have produced some impressive studies of the relationship between religious faith and
political positions on some recent and historical issues, but seldom attempted any more comprehensive synthesis. Political scientists and legal scholars have examined topics with religious significance, but seldom with the religious content in the foreground. We may read volumes on the Democratic Labor Party of Australia’s (DLP) efficacy in keeping the Australian Labor Party (ALP) out of office during the Menzies reign, for example, but less about its significance in debates within the Roman Catholic and wider Christian communities about the proper channels for pursuing social justice. Generally speaking, the consensus of Australian political scientists has been that, since the heady days of the 1951 referendum and the Labor split, there has been little to say about religion, and that little not very interesting. For example, since the DLP collapse, observers have not had to contend with a significant religious political party.

Some exceptions have occurred when religion has made it into legal controversy. Federally, the High Court cases Krygger v Williams, Adelaide Company of Jehovah’s Witnesses v the Commonwealth, Attorney-General (Vic) Ex rel Black v Commonwealth (the so-called 'DOGS' or 'State Aid' case) and Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Pay-roll Tax (Vict) (the 'Scientology' case) provide a skeleton case law which has drawn scholarly attention from time to time. Analysis of these instances, however, has tended to read their significance as lying in areas other than the religious. Only a modest literature examines the High Court cases from the angle of their significance for the protection of religious freedom.

Sporadic revisitations of the religion and politics overlap—for example, in attempts to correlate religious adherence and voting behaviour—only reinforce the impression of an issue whose time has gone. Indeed, the field reads like postsectarian, postpartisan Australia's collective sigh of relief at having left behind what Robert Alford, in 1963, called our 'politics of class and religion'.

Beyond the Split: Towards Thicker Description

A further reason for recent near-silence is the collapse of old categories of analysis. Sectarian history has bequeathed Australian studies the
assumption that discussion of religion and politics means Catholics in the ALP. Thus, David Kemp sums up the impact of religion over three decades (opening with the modern Liberal Party’s debut at the end of World War II and concluding immediately after the DLP’s electoral demise):

Sectarianism then has been identified as an element in two different aspects of mass political behaviour in Australia: (1) in the tendency of Catholics to support the Australian Labor Party rather than the largely protestant Liberal Party, and (2) in the élite conflicts within the Australian Labor Party and the consequent transfer of the voting support of a significant segment of Catholic Labor voters to the new Democratic Labor Party.14

Kemp is not alone: a wealth of historical research analyses the longstanding Catholic-Labor relationship, and the various stages of its demise.15 Much has been written about the respective roles of Catholic Action, the Movement and the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the rise of the DLP.16 Socioeconomic,17 ideological18 and (less frequently) theological19 factors have been taken into account.

This, in turn, has extended into a more general quest for relationships between denomination and voting behaviour. However, when applied to post-1960s Australia, these avenues prove insufficient. The 1960s brought, almost simultaneously (and of course, closely related), rapid secularisation and the near-death of sectarian bitterness. Church and Sunday school attendances, which climbed during the 1950s, peaked in the early 1960s. By the early 1970s, the percentage of Australians claiming to attend church weekly had dwindled close to the present mid-teens.20 The exhortatory power of churches as defenders of morals, and the willingness of political and media institutions to support and protect them, waned accordingly.21

The effect is summed up by Tim Prenzler:

Very broadly speaking, Protestantism and Catholicism have been part of a cultural reinforcement of differences between the ruling class and lower classes ... Overall, ecumenism and the decline of religion have reduced the divisive impact of religion.22

Consequently, the inherited tendency among political analysts to assume that the religion-politics nexus is best explored by correlating denomination
with voting behaviour became becalmed in a series of inconclusive fishing exercises. The problems in such attempts are spelled out by Rodney Smith, who warns:

The search for the electoral meanings of Australian religion goes on in fits and starts. Unless such a search is guided by better conceptual tools and evidence, it is likely to continue in the desert for another forty years.

The very inconclusiveness in such attempts, their continual stumbling on the same methodological and empirical problems, alerts us that new ground might need to be tilled.

Beyond the Catholic-Protestant Divide

An important first step towards laying sectarian history finally to rest is to become sensitive to religious divisions beyond and below the broad Catholic-Protestant categorisation. The need to do so is well illustrated by Ian McAllister's treatment of religion in relation to political behaviour. At a slightly higher level of detail than Kemp, McAllister divides the 'religious' world into 'Catholic', 'Anglican' and 'Other Protestant'. The division removes a methodological hurdle: the actual numbers within the 'Other Protestant' category are made up of the Uniting Church in Australia (about 7.5 per cent of respondents in the 1996 census) and numerous smaller groups. These include the Presbyterian denominations (the Presbyterian Church of Australia and other Reformed denominations, altogether 3.81 per cent of 1996 census respondents), Baptists (1.66 per cent), Lutherans (1.41 per cent), the various Pentecostal denominations (collectively, 0.98 per cent), the Churches of Christ and Salvation Army (each 0.42 per cent), and so on, each unlikely, on its own, to yield much statistical significance.

However, when we look beyond denominational adherence to positions on social and political issues, the general designation 'Other Protestant' obscures more than it reveals. It dilutes Lutheran vignerons with Salvation Army teetotallers. It couples Pentecostal male-headship proponents with Uniting Church feminists. It enrols Methodist trade unionists with Presbyterian entrepreneurs, and marches pacifist Quakers and Mennonites to the same drum as defence-conscious fundamentalists. Some of these divergences, such as differing positions on wine excises, would translate
into only the most limited electoral effects. Others, such as support for the Office of the Status of Women, affirmative action and equal opportunity legislation, would be more electorally significant. Nor is that the end of the story: the foregoing picture itself includes generalisations—omitting, for example, the small-business, conservative-voting strand of Methodism famously associated with Prime Minister John Howard. The numbers in minor denominations may add up to statistically significant totals, but the range of opinion thus contained makes any conclusions questionable. Beyond immediately psephological concerns, overlooking the variety of ways in which theological and political commitments interact risks a severely truncated understanding of how individuals form and maintain political commitments.

Moreover, sticking to the Catholic-Protestant categorisation overlooks other families of Christian faith, such as the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox. It also overlooks non-Christian religions. At one level, this is understandable, given that McAllister, and the authors of similar studies, place their main interest in the relationship between religious affiliation and voting behaviour. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and Hindus, between them a mere 3.09 per cent of the 1996 census population, do not account for a large part of the electorate. However, there is more to political impact than the votes cast by individual adherents. Some religious communities, notably Jews, have played a role in public life well beyond their numerical presence. Their contribution to Australian political culture is missed if census returns define significance.

Indeed, restricting the scope of analysis to major Christian categories excludes some of the very data which might throw more interesting light on the questions which those who address issues of religion and politics have so far found intractable. For example, Prenzler invokes in passing what he sees as the conservative tendencies of immigrant religious traditions, especially Islam. Exploring the actual political profile of non-Christian immigrant communities would reveal, by contrast, the longstanding tendency of Australian Muslims to vote Labor. Attention to actual Muslim communities could also soften Prenzler’s warning that ‘feminism in Australia now faces a new religious enemy’, by drawing attention to the presence in Australia (as in other Muslim communities) of Muslim
That, in turn, would open up the important question of how religious concerns interact with other group-related components of a person’s identity (such as sex, class, race and so on) in the formation of political commitments. Such intersections surface repeatedly in the present study, as when South Australian Labor Senator Rosemary Crowley reports, ‘For me, being a Catholic is a bit like being an Australian, it’s the country that I was born in and grew up in’.

Beyond the Religion-Conservatism Nexus

The inadequacy of the Catholic-ALP relationship as the explanatory vehicle of religion-politics connections in Australia is particularly evident when analysts turn to the relationship between religious practice and conservatism. Although Catholicism historically correlates with Labor partisanship, modern churchgoing Catholics, like churchgoing Protestants, are more likely to support the conservative parties than their less diligent coreligionists. Thus, Kemp finds a general correlation between what he calls ‘integration into church networks’ (defined largely by regularity of attendance at public worship) and political conservatism:

> Among voters who belong to the Church of England, for example, ALP support among non-churchgoers is more than double, and L-CP support less than half, the level among regular weekly attenders at church, and a relationship in the same direction is evident among both Presbyterians and Methodists. Even among Catholics there is a much greater tendency for those who never attend church to support the ALP than there is among regular churchgoers.

Kemp offers two speculative explanations. The first is that churches may tend to attract people whose personalities and general inclinations predispose them to a hierarchically-structured and traditionalist world view. The second is that the ‘messages’ conveyed by churches may promote conservative attitudes. He further proposes that these explanations are not mutually exclusive and may, indeed, be mutually reinforcing: a church which attracted the conservative, especially to positions of authority, would be likely thereafter to produce increasingly conservative ‘messages’, thereby making it still more attractive to the conservatively inclined and either alienating or conservatising any more left-wing members. However, Kemp
judges the available data inadequate to take either or both explanations beyond speculation.

In fact, such data as there are tend to refute both explanations. Whether the index is liturgy, ecclesiastical organisation or theology, Australia's Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches would have to feature as traditionalist par excellence. Priests are accorded high authority in the communities; worship is most likely to be in traditional languages rather than the vernacular; and questions such as the ordination of women, which have proved so divisive in other denominations, are less likely to be discussed. Yet members of these intensely traditionalist and hierarchically-ordered denominations are the most consistently Labor-voting of any religious group, out-doing even no-religionists.34

Similar empirical difficulties attend the 'conservative messages' explanation. On that account, minimal levels of church attendance are enough to produce a significant drift to the right. Thus Smith dryly observes: 'Messages received for an hour or so once or twice every year must be extraordinarily powerful to consistently affect electoral behaviour'.35 He proposes instead an image borrowed from John Bodycomb. Adapting terms from medieval town structure, Bodycomb imagines four degrees of church involvement:

Those in the cloister are well-integrated into church life. Those outside the cloister but in the close have some contact with the church. On the common, the church is a vaguer presence for those who maintain a merely nominal adherence to a denomination. For those out in the countryside, the church rarely if ever intrudes into their lives.36

Smith finds this model promising because:

Most attempts at conceptual explanation of the churches' impact on electoral behaviour focus on those within the cloister walls, but much of the churches' electoral effect can in fact be found on people who inhabit the close and the common.37

The model thus, for Smith, raises various explanatory possibilities, each going 'well beyond the standard Australian conceptualisations of ... the main elements allegedly doing the political work within the cloisters'.38
However, even this more detailed picture runs aground on the data. The architectural model describes only laity; but if closeness to the sanctuary produces greater conservatism, then presumably the clergy, who breathe its air daily, should be most conservative of all. (This is just the pattern assumed by purveyors of the ‘conservative messages’ thesis, who portray a conservative hierarchy ever dragging its followers to the right.) In fact, while church leaders may tend to promote conservative positions on some specific issues, overall they lean politically to the left of those in their pews.\textsuperscript{39}

One explanation of clerical progressivism might be that recent trends in theological education attract and produce more radical clergy. This is, for example, the assumption underlying an initiative of Sydney-based rightwing think tank the Centre for Independent Studies (CIS). Its Religion and the Free Society Program, launched in 1999, departs from the ‘conservative messages’ view of church political interventions so far that its stated objective is to alter a church consensus ‘dominated by state-welfarist and interventionist’ economics. The program aims to re-educate ‘clergy, theologians and lay church workers’ so as, ‘at a minimum’, to foster ‘religious thinking … that rejects welfarist/interventionist models’.\textsuperscript{40} It justifies its selection of clerical ‘target audiences’ with the claim that: ‘if one can shape the thinking of leaders and intellectuals, then one is more than halfway towards changing the ideas of their communities and institutions’.\textsuperscript{41}

However, the phenomenon of comparatively left-wing clergy leading comparatively conservative congregations seems, on the available evidence, to be a fairly constant feature of Australian Christianity, rather than a sign of recent ideological drift. To take one touchstone issue of the period spanned by Kemp, although churchgoers of all denominations were more likely than non-attenders to support Menzies’ referendum proposal to ban the Communist Party,\textsuperscript{42} Protestant leaders by and large remained publicly neutral or, in some instances, campaigned for the ‘no’ case. Some, to be sure, did so on sectarian grounds, seeing in the referendum an attempt by the Roman Catholic hierarchy to gain a hold on affairs of state. However, others did so out of a concern for civil liberties, fearing, with the ten denominational leaders who signed a statement published by the Sydney
Morning Herald in September 1951, that the bill could prove ‘to the
detriment of the liberty of the human person, whether he is in fact a
Communist or not’.43

The admittedly patchy available evidence suggests continuity rather than
occasional outbreaks of clerical leftism. For example, a 1969 survey of
Victorian Protestant clergy found majorities of Congregational, Methodist
and Presbyterian ministers supporting the ALP.44 In its own way,
Parliament, too, bears out the observation that clergy, if they are politically
active, are likely to lean to the left. While the Parliamentary Christian
Fellowship attracts lay Christians predominantly from the Coalition parties
(a phenomenon which I explore in chapter three), the clergy who have sat in
Parliament, at least in recent years, have tended towards the political left.
Recent examples include former Australian Democrat Senator for
Queensland Rev. John Woodley and former ALP Deputy Prime Minister
Rev. Brian Howe. Former Senator for Tasmania and ALP Justice Minister
Michael Tate came to Parliament with a masters degree in theology, and
was ordained into the Roman Catholic priesthood after his parliamentary
and diplomatic careers. Other clergy and ex-clergy in Labor history include
Gil Duthie, who in 1946 had to resign from the Methodist ministry in order
to begin his 29-year service as Member for Wilmot (Tas.).

Contrary both to Kemp’s view of conservative institutions attracting and
promoting conservative leaders and to the CIS’s view of church leaders
mired in economic ignorance, anecdotal evidence suggests that the
experience of ministry itself radicalises those who progress from
Bodycomb’s cloister into the sanctuary. Two prominent examples in recent
Australian public life exemplify a host of similar accounts. One is Rev. Tim
Costello, whose autobiography describes how an overriding preoccupation
with personal piety was challenged by his Swiss theological training but
received its coup-de-grace through ministry in down-at-heel St Kilda. He
developed instead a vocation for ‘politicking on behalf of the powerless’.45 In
a similar vein, Rev. John Woodley’s first speech in Parliament records his
radicalisation through Methodist ministry in a poor Queensland Aboriginal
community:

In 1962 I was a Methodist home missionary in Mitchell. There were two
townships—the black camp, called the Yumba, and the white township—
on opposite sides of the river. My theologically conservative evangelical Methodism offered none of the answers I thought were important or fitted the situation. I’d never been taught even to ask the questions: Why do people live in these conditions? Whose fault is it? What can you do about it? I rediscovered the scriptures, the fact that Jesus chose to be with the people at the edges.46

In contrast to Kemp’s model, where higher levels of church authority should have had a conservatising effect, Rev. John Woodley reported that his drift to the left was 'sharpened by my election as Director for Social Responsibility for the Uniting Church in Queensland'.47 Neither did becoming President of the Baptist Union of Australia blunt Costello’s critique of business and government. In contrast to CIS’s view that clerical leftism results from 'misunderstandings—and often ignorance—of the principles and workings of the free economy',48 both clergy attribute their ideological shift in part to increasing first-hand observation of that economy’s operations.

As soon as description of the relationship between religion and politics thickens to take in more detail than a broad Catholic-Protestant divide or religion-conservatism nexus, the analytical models so far used by Australian political scientists lack explanatory force. One way forward for studies of the relationship between religion and politics in Australia would be to undertake substantial qualitative work, going beneath and beyond the broad categorisations which have shaped the bulk of inquiry until now. Greater attention to the detail of how theological and political considerations fit together in the social consciousness of people from a wide variety of Christian and non-Christian traditions would provide a body of information which could then be drawn on to develop the tools needed to move Australian political science’s understanding of religion beyond what Smith calls its present ‘conceptual under-development, implausibility and contradiction’.49 The qualitative findings from the present study offer one such approach.
Secular Nation, Spiritual Politics?

Against the aridity of available technical explanations, popular sources during the late 1990s suggested some directions a quest for thicker description could go, by documenting some subterranean rumblings in the superficially settled relationship between state and religion. One such source was the proliferation of 'personality profile' journalism focusing on politicians' religious convictions.50 Much of the attention focused on backbenchers and a prominent Independent. An exception was the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) religious affairs television program Compass, which marked the 1998 election campaign with a program entitled 'What Our Leaders Believe'. It showed all five party heads entering that contest had some degree of religious faith. Three—National Party Leader Tim Fischer, Labor's Kim Beazley and Democrat Meg Lees—confessed to regular church attendance. To US audiences, these revelations would have been no shock; indeed, it would be more surprising to come across a major political figure without prominent religious affiliations. Australian electorates, imbued with cultural traditions of larrikin secularity, are more used to party Leaders whose theological commitments range from the Hawke-Hayden style of overt atheism51 through former Prime Minister Paul Keating's cultural Catholicism52 to the unobtrusive, establishment religiosity of older-style Liberals such as former Leaders Malcolm Fraser and Alexander Downer. The centrality of religion which Compass found in the majority of 1998 Leaders' testimonies marked a substantial departure—if not in the fact that such religiously-committed people were climbing to the top of party structures in a profession widely regarded as morally corrupt and corrupting, then at least in their willingness to 'come out' as religious to sceptically secular voters.

Reflecting the ideological differences between the parties, their Leaders' religiosity did not share a common form. For Kim Beazley, the Split formed a key theme not only in his party but also in his personal history, due to his father's53 ALP marginalisation as a suspected 'Grouper'.54 Outside the party organisation, religion-politics connections also bore on the family's fortunes:

I became aware of the possibilities of an intense relationship between religion and politics, basically because the split in the Labor Party in
1954–55 lived very strongly in the minds of my family. I can remember my father saying that he’d win Fremantle by either 5000 or 10 000 and he’d know the week before because he’d send his organisers around the Catholic churches. If it was a Social Justice Sunday he’d win by 10 000, if it was an anti-Communist Sunday, he’d win by 5.55

Perhaps the younger Mr Beazley’s early involvement in Moral Rearmament,56 with its controversial fascist associations,57 was another source of caution. At all events, he entered public life chary of attempts to draw direct connections between theology and politics:

I have great respect for the many in the Christian churches who take an activist political stance extending from their basic religious commitments … [But] my social justice position comes not from that but from a Labor Party commitment. A classic, conventional, if you like, social democrat ideology is what I possess. For me, religion, the religious part of my life, the spirituality, is actually a thing apart. It probably ought not to be—but for me [conversion] is much more a refuge. Therefore, I don’t draw from that to statements about political life.58

Subsequently, his biography revealed him as the embodiment of Labor ecumenism, contemplating a shift from the Anglicanism of his birth:

Beazley was now a man who had married two Catholic women; had raised two Catholic daughters and was now raising another in that faith. He had received official Catholic blessing to dissolve one marriage. It was all enough for Bob Ellis to pen in his book, Goodbye Jerusalem, that the Catholic Church had long been Beazley’s ‘moral destination’. Beazley does not disavow the notion. ‘I think I’ve always been interested in that possibility,’ he says frankly. ‘There’s no question about that. I’m not sure, because I also get a lot of refreshment and renewal out of the Anglican Church so I suspect I will stay there for a bit … it is a definite possibility, yes’.59

The Democrat Leader entered specifics so far as to announce to Compass viewers not only her denomination and parish but also that she belongs to a particular, theologically and politically progressive congregation (‘the 9:30 community at Pilgrim’ Uniting Church in central Adelaide). Her blend of spiritual and social justice commitments (and those of other prominent Democrats, such as former Senator Rev. John Woodley, evangelical
Anglican former Senator for NSW Karin Sowada and former National President Heather Southcott) contrasts with the party's conventional characterisation as significantly secular. Indeed, Senator Lees's comments to Compass fitted better with journalist David Marr's (pre-Goods and Services Tax) characterisation: 'for most intents and purposes the Democrats today are the political wing of the Uniting Church'.

The National Party Leader who earned the media appellation 'Two-Minute Tim' summed up his faith to Compass with typical brevity and matter-of-factness: 'Well, obviously, there is a superior power, there is a God, and I'm very comfortable with that'. His Jesuit education meshed with other aspects of his upbringing:

I guess a combination of family, Jesuits and the army has greatly helped me to reach the position which I regard as an honour to hold, as the Minister for Trade, Leader of the National Party, Deputy Prime Minister of this country.

Prime Minister John Howard, who took office in 1996 promising to govern for 'all Australians', was also ready to worship with them. Although convinced he retained a 'Methodist deposit', the Liberal Leader's present practice was ecumenical:

When I go, I tend to go to an Anglican church ... but it matters not to me. I would just as easily go to another Christian church, right across the religious spectrum ... certainly within what I would call the Protestant-Catholic-Anglican traditions it wouldn't make any difference to me. I would just as easily go to a Catholic mass, and their liturgy is not all that different, now, is it?

One Nation's Pauline Hanson, though not herself a churchgoer, was emphatic that 'we are a Christian nation' with 'Christian values' to which newcomers should conform, while enjoying freedom for their own beliefs.

The media provide other helpful pointers to politicians' religiosity in passing. A recent newspaper survey found sixteen per cent of Australian federal Senators and Members attended church 'regularly'. The report takes the figure as evidence of the stress of a political life, announcing it in the same breath as respondents' low participation in recreational activities, sleep and their children's birthdays. In fact, given the reported demands on
politicians' time, the sixteen per cent figure is, if anything, quite high when compared with church attendance patterns in the general population and balanced for other demographic factors. The report did not define 'regular' attendance, so it is difficult to know whether the MPs' attendance should be compared with the thirteen per cent of the general population who go to church at least weekly, or with the twenty-three per cent who go monthly or more.65 However, we may also question whether the general population is really the best measure. Demographic factors, such as sex and working hours, have a bearing on church attendance. Church attenders are more likely to be women and less likely to work full time than non-attenders. A building full of overworked people, most of them men,66 should yield many fewer pew-sitters than the general population. Add to that the pace and peripatetic nature of a parliamentary schedule and the fact that Sunday mornings are likely to be one of the few times when a Senator or Member might hope to snatch a moment with his or her family (or even some extra sleep), and we may find ourselves wondering, not why so few go to church, but how (and why) so many manage it.

Some surveys of politicians' religiosity are open to the charge that respondents are likely to inflate their participation in a publicly-approved activity. The fact that the *Australian* was investigating the personal strains and lifestyle restrictions which Senators' and Members' careers impose on them makes the survey a particularly valuable resource. It is unlikely that respondents, answering a survey specifically framed against the background of a public perception of politicians as lazy and self-indulgent and seeking confirmation of the heavy demands on their time, would inflate any extra-parliamentary activities.

Nor does church attendance tell the whole story of Senators' and Members' religiosity. The Parliamentary Christian Fellowship (PCF), which meets fortnightly when Parliament is sitting, claims around sixty—more than a quarter—of the two hundred and twenty-four Senators and Members. Moreover, as I discuss in chapter four, the PCF does not account for all of the religiously-committed. Members of non-Christian religious traditions are, of course, excluded by definition (the current Parliament, with a sole Jewish Member, Mr Michael Danby, Labor Member for Melbourne Ports, departs from earlier patterns of substantial Jewish representation). Even
within the Christian fold, as I discuss in chapter three, a number of regular churchgoers avoid the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship. Beyond that, some who attend neither church nor the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship nevertheless report regular prayer and a vibrant personal spiritual life. Some who claim no present faith commitments nevertheless see their parliamentary career as a natural outcome of earlier religious influences. For example, One Nation Leader Pauline Hanson recalled on Compass:

I was taught the work ethic. I was taught to stand up and be responsible for myself and my actions. And all these things through life have taught me an understanding of people who may not be as fortunate as what I am today. I'll never forget my background ... Mum was a practicing Catholic and she believed in the Catholic religion and we were brought up with those values, but a lot of it came from religious instruction at school, which I totally believe in ... And although Dad was a Protestant, going to church wasn't a thing that we did every weekend, by no means. But I think it's just in your family values and what you're brought up with that you find a belief there.\(^67\)

With a few exceptions,\(^68\) journalistic treatments of Senators' and Members' religiosity tended in the 1990s to remain at a fairly superficial level; but that does not discount them as indicators of issues deserving more sustained attention. As a point of comparison, a number of studies exist of the religious persuasions of the founders of our political systems.\(^69\) Analysts have managed to sift through the available data to achieve credible speculations about the relationship between the founders' religious and political views. Similarly, a number of instances in Australia's more recent political past have drawn detailed analysis about the relationship between religious convictions and political leanings.\(^70\) Extending such treatment to the present helps develop a fuller picture of the subterranean pull of religion-politics dynamics in modern Australia.

As the media spotlight moved closer to politicians' faith through the 1990s, other pointers also suggested a bigger story waiting to be told. One straw in the wind was words like 'spiritual' and 'the sacred' appearing more frequently in political discourse, and not only from politicians. To take a couple of instances, journalist Paul Kelly diagnosed a 'spiritual void' at the
heart of the pre-Hawke political ‘settlement’ between government and business. The 1998 Constitutional Convention recommended constitutional recognition of Australians’ ‘spiritual wealth’. Looking back over his Prime Ministership, Labor elder Paul Keating declared the tasks of the office to include ‘nurturing the spirituality of the nation’. In the public soul-searching about ‘national identity’ which characterised the lead-up to the republic referendum and the Centenary of Federation, strictly secular political language seemed to strain when required to contain modern Australia’s ideas of nationhood and collective experience.

Another pointer to religion-politics connections beyond the ALP-Catholic nexus was the intense public and parliamentary scrutiny given during the 1990s to disputed Indigenous heritage claims involving protection of restricted sacred sites. From Coronation Hill in the far north to Hindmarsh Island on the South Australian coast, via the red centre’s Junction Waterhole, the religious claims of Indigenous peoples were becoming an increasingly fraught component of Australians' political geography. The intensity of non-Indigenous public feeling such cases generated was not matched by much conceptual sophistication in how they were debated, either in Parliament or on the streets. Secular Australia, religiously naive and philosophically oriented to liberal separation between religion and the state, seemed ill-equipped to do much more than speculate or scoff. Yet tools exist by which a more productive understanding could be reached.

Talking about Religion in the Corridors of Power

To move beyond the limitations of earlier analysis, this volume examines five instances in which religious questions have had a bearing on national politics. Chapter two examines the debate over God’s inclusion in any new constitutional Preamble, finding in it illumination of broader issues of national identity and political consciousness. The irruption of religious discourse into the apparently settled secularity of public discourse sets a pattern which we shall see repeated in each subsequent case study. The parliamentary presence of religious ritual, such as swearing-in, and quasi-official religious bodies, such as the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, raise questions about the comprehensiveness of church-state separation in
Australia; I explore their ramifications in chapter three. Related questions of church-state interpenetration arise from the history of church involvement in policy formation, and more recently, implementation, considered in chapter four. Chapter five examines the more intimate interpenetration alleged to exist as a 'Christian faction' within the federal Coalition. The first five chapters paint Australian secularism as less thoroughgoing, institutionally and culturally, than either conventional wisdom or recent scholarship supposes. Chapter six examines the relationship of the (supposedly) secular state to Indigenous religious tradition, finding that the incognito religiosity explored in the earlier chapters erects seldom-acknowledged barriers in the way of heritage protection and land rights processes.

Each case can be clarified by a historical perspective. Many of the issues examined here were debated, in distinctive but recognisably comparable forms, at Federation. Comparing modern Australian soul-searching with the founders’ deliberations recorded in the proceedings of the Australasian Conventions and the First Parliament allows a mapping of changes and continuities both in how Australians have perceived important aspects of the religion-politics nexus and in more general matters of national identity.

In each case study, some dimensions concern the nature and operation of our political institutions. The Parliamentary Library provided an unparalleled resource for exploring these. For perspectives not available from written sources, I interviewed a number of church and community leaders.

The role of religion in Senators’ and Members’ political lives also bears upon each case study, in varying ways. Consequently, a substantial part of the research involved interviewing Senators and Members, whose generosity with time and willingness to discuss topics beyond the parameters of conventional political interviews made the analysis possible.

My original intention was to seek interviews with fifty-six Senators and Members, whom I had identified as having expressed public opinions about matters of religion. I also intended to seek interviews with a smaller number of former Senators and Members who had expressed related views. Both past and sitting Senators and Members were located through Hansard.
and media searches. The list of sitting Senators and Members came out approximately representative of the parties' respective strengths in the Parliament as it then was.\textsuperscript{74}

I did not set out to balance the sample between those professing personal religious convictions and those professing atheist or agnostic convictions.\textsuperscript{75} Religious adherence can be less clear-cut than, say, party membership. Individuals' levels of conviction fluctuate, as Mr Beazley made clear:

\begin{quote}
I think anybody who has any form of religious upbringing and a continuing religious commitment is always aware of falling in and out of belief. People may try and kid themselves that they don’t, but that is the reality. There are times in your life that you feel a more intense sense of faith than at other times.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

As traditional patterns of church attendance decline, increasing numbers of people, like Prime Minister John Howard, profess deep religious convictions without the need for more than occasional religious practice or strong denominational allegiance. (The 'swinging parishioner' remains a much less-studied figure than the swinging voter). Members of Parliament, needing to identify with an electorate more than a denomination, may be particularly likely to 'swing' religiously, so that attendance at a religious event does not necessarily indicate conviction. Thus, Labor Member for Grayndler (NSW) Anthony Albanese reported:

\begin{quote}
In an electorate like mine, I go to the Mosque regularly, I go to the Catholic church, Uniting, Anglican, et cetera ... If you're going to represent everyone—I mean, Australia isn't a Christian nation any more. It's a nation made up of many different religions, of which Buddhism is the fastest growing. And politics should reflect that, rather than reflect a single view.\textsuperscript{77}
\end{quote}

Given the complexity of religious belief, it was never part of my research design to compile statistics on the incidence of religious conviction or of particular views on religious debate. Instead, the interview component of my research set out to explore various sets of motivations—of those who see direct connections between their religious and political positions, of those who hold avowed religious convictions but endeavour to separate them from political deliberation, and of those who profess no religious commitments.
Chapter One: Religion in the Corridors of Power

The interviews were therefore designed to let Senators and Members describe their own levels of religious or other commitment. My list of potential interviewees included both those who had expressed a personal religious conviction and those (with or without professed religious convictions) who had expressed opinions about the proper place of religion in public debate. The latter category, indeed, included some of the Parliament’s most articulate atheists and agnostics. It also included some—religiously committed and otherwise—of the strongest critics of what might be perceived as an overt Christian presence in Parliament.

The overwhelming majority (over ninety per cent) of those I approached were happy to participate. A small number of those on the list were not available for interview; but a more significant variable entered the research design from another angle. The Parliamentary Library’s letter of introduction, inviting Senators and Members to participate in the research, was sent to all two hundred and twenty-four Senators and Members. In response to that letter, I received a substantial number of offers to contribute from Senators and Members who had not been on my initial list. This widened my field of research considerably, and also entailed changes to my planned method. I had envisaged that interviews would be structured around the interviewees’ comments on the public record. This method was called into question when it became apparent, before I had conducted any interviews, that numbers would volunteer who did not fall into either of my target groups. I developed a set of standard questions which I used both with those from my initial list and with volunteers. In each case, interviews incorporated additional, open-ended questions and tailored questions picking up points the interviewee had made either on the public record or during the interview. A table of interviewees appears as Appendix One.

Religion on the Barricades

In addition to empirical data the quest to understand the relationship between religion and political behaviour is helped by the work of some Christian theologians. In 1978, James Gustafson published a study of lines of convergence and divergence between Protestant and Roman Catholic teaching on ethics. 'Ethics', for Gustafson and those he discusses, includes
such questions as what makes a society just, how much inequality is acceptable, how society should best care for people with disabilities, the status of women, racism, the proper treatment of prisoners and environmental concerns. Beyond day-to-day policy, social ethics covers such broader questions as whether war is ever morally justifiable, the conditions which might justify civil disobedience, and so on. There is thus a substantial overlap between Gustafson’s category of ‘ethics’ and the kinds of attitudes that political scientists might measure and which are relevant to voters’ stances on a range of political questions.

Gustafson finds that denomination is not a very good predictor of people’s substantive positions. Factors such as class and ethnic identity are likely to have more immediate bearing on the political positions one supports or opposes than religious identification does. ‘Pious Protestants’, he finds, ‘can be virulent racists or civil right activists. They can be militarists or pacifists, socialists or defenders of the free-market system, regardless of what church agencies teach about these matters’. The same is true (although for different reasons) of Roman Catholics, so that:

Some Roman Catholics have more in common in theological ethics with some Protestants than they do with other Catholics; some Protestants have more in common with some Roman Catholics than they do with other Protestants.

However, Gustafson does not on that account want to abandon any analysis of connections between religious affiliation and political stance. Denomination is significant, less in the conclusions reached, than in how people from the various traditions arrive at their moral conclusions. Roman Catholic and Protestant defenders of the free market arrive at compatible conclusions which allow them to stand shoulder-to-shoulder in opposition to Protestant and Roman Catholic socialists; but they come to their respective positions by consistent, denominationally-specific routes. Both Roman Catholic socialists and Roman Catholic free-marketeers are likely to argue their cases on the basis of Natural Law. Protestant socialists and Protestant capitalists agree on a combination of Biblical and existential bases for moral reasoning, even as they disagree on the policy to which those sources point.
Gustafson’s book is primarily about the work of professional moral theologians and, to a lesser extent, official church agencies (such as social justice commissions). Only in passing does he discuss how lay people make moral decisions. From a political science perspective, his approach may seem unpromising: professional moral theologians, after all, are hardly an electorally significant voting block, while as for church agencies, Gustafson himself is quick to point out that:

> When the teachings, even though theologically and biblically grounded and ‘pronounced’ by official church bodies or leaders, diverge too far from the prevailing moral opinions of church members, the members either do not listen or become hostile.  

However, at least four points in Gustafson’s analysis are suggestive for a study of the wider relationship between religion and political commitment. First, Gustafson’s account helps explain the inconclusive results so far attending those political scientists who try to draw connections between religious denomination and political behaviour. If denomination does not produce consistent political alignments even among a tradition’s official guardians, diversity is surely even more to be expected among lay people.

Second, Gustafson’s discussion throws into relief the tendency of political accounts, with some exceptions, to overlook divergence within religious communities. From an outsider’s point of view, it may be tempting to assume that there is ‘a’ church stance (or at least ‘a’ Catholic stance, ‘a’ Uniting Church stance and so on) on any matter. Although there may be sufficient consensus within a denomination to produce periodic official statements on various issues, perhaps with a consistent political thrust, there is also likely to be enough divergence for those who disagree to find authoritative backing. Anyone who doubts this has only to read the letters column of any church newspaper in the weeks—frequently dragging into months and sometimes even years—after any controversial pronouncement. If we are looking for connections between religion and political behaviour, in other words, it is not enough to look just at the official pronouncements of churches. Any convincing account of how religion and politics work together will also need to be alert to the strands of divergence within denominations and theological traditions.
Third, Gustafson offers the reassurance that, despite the aforementioned difficulties, the quest for connections between religion and political behaviour is not sterile. One pattern which quickly became evident in my study was the degree to which even people who reported only irregular attendance reached their conclusions by following theological paths which were consistent (often distinctively so) with the denomination with which they identified. This remained true even when the connections to a particular tradition were, on the face of it, quite tenuous. For example, Ms Kathy Sullivan, Liberal Member for Moncrieff, reported that she has for many years attended (for family reasons) a Roman Catholic congregation rather than the Methodist tradition in which she grew up and with which she still identifies. The conclusions she reached were often at variance with Methodist (later, Uniting Church) official pronouncements ('I'm still an unrepentant hawk on Vietnam'); but the methods of moral reasoning she drew on to reach them were recognisably those of Wesley rather than the Vatican. Gustafson's discussion of religious denomination as an indicator of the routes someone is likely to pursue in arriving at a conclusion, rather than as a predictor of the conclusion itself, offers a way of understanding such continuities. It also points a possible way forward for those political analysts who retain their strong hunch that religion is significant in the formation of political commitments, even as they remain unable to account convincingly for its effects.

Fourth, Gustafson's rejection of any simple denomination-partisanship connection helps explain change in both theological and political commitments. Studies of the relationship between religion and political behaviour tend to assume that religious preferences are fixed, and precede—even perhaps determine—political choice. The possibility that political commitments affect one's theology is less often raised. To some degree this may be a function of how research findings are phrased. Thus, typically of the field, Hans Mol's exhaustive Religion in Australia includes a lengthy section on beliefs and morals in which the results are reported in the form 'people who go to church and pray regularly are more likely to disapprove of ...' While that presentation does not necessarily preclude an alternate reading (people who disapprove of X are more likely to go to church and pray regularly), Australian religion-and-politics research certainly conveys the impression that researchers have gone in quest of
fixed religious beliefs which influence variable political attitudes. Gustafson invites us to consider flux in both political and theological views.

In this connection, we might turn to another Christian theologian, Edward Schillebeeckx. He directly challenges the idea that people passively derive their moral, social and political commitments from religious doctrine. At least in cosmopolitan, secular, urban societies, he argues that the opposite movement is more fundamental:

> It is often forgotten that a change in ethical view also brings about changes in one’s image of God. Those who cling on to old pictures of God then find themselves involved in all kinds of clashes with new ethical values, so that in the long run the abandonment of the ‘old morality’ also affects belief in God … Legitimate changes in ethical appreciation must therefore go hand in hand with new conceptions of God if in the long run people are not to experience some dichotomy or schizophrenia.\(^{85}\)

Schillebeeckx’s reminder helps us make more sense of the accounts of people such as former Senator Woodley and Rev. Tim Costello, about how the experience of hands-on ministry on the under-side of affluent Australia produced parallel political and theological radicalisation. Just such a mutual exchange between theological and political views is described by former Australian Democrats Leader Senator Meg Lees. Theological doubts led her out of the Catholic Apostolic church of her childhood, into Anglicanism. Then:

> As I became more and more politically aware and active I had more and more problems with the [Anglicans’] treatment of women in particular and also their attitude towards what I saw as social justice. Of a sense of having some responsibility for those that are at the margins. So my decision was when I moved down here to Adelaide in 1986 to move to the Uniting Church.\(^{86}\)

If changes in political experience contribute to theological revision, then variations within denominations are only to be expected. Those who try to understand the relationship between religious and political commitments in one direction only—the effect of religion on politics—are looking in the wrong place. Rather, we need to understand how changes in life experience
or political allegiance prompt new theological interpretations, which, in turn, inform political ideology.

Since 1990, a further, promising direction has emerged in the study of the relationship between religious and political behaviour. Its most exhaustive expression is in a study by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry Brady. Their findings on religion are one product of a wider study about citizen participation in politics. They look beyond voting behaviour to activities like writing to a political leader, signing a petition, taking part in a protest rally or donating to a campaign fund. They examine both the factors which predispose people for such activity and factors which reduce the likelihood of a person participating in such ways. They find that ‘personal connections among acquaintances, friends, and relatives—often mediated through mutual institutional affiliations—are ... crucial for political recruitment.’ Moreover, possessing certain kinds of skills strongly predisposes people to respond positively when the opportunity for political activity arises. The necessary skills for political participation are, not surprisingly, fostered through explicitly political organisations, such as political parties, local pressure groups, environment groups and unions. However, they are also, importantly, fostered in non-political associations. Youth groups, sports clubs and so on provide opportunities for people to learn effective communication and administrative skills, for example, which transfer to political activity. A central finding of the study is that the role of religious organisations in fostering political participation is considerably greater than had previously been supposed:

In many respects, the effects of institutions in stimulating political involvement serve to reinforce initial advantage ... Only religious institutions provide a counterbalance to this cumulative resource process. They play an unusual role in the American participatory system by providing opportunities for the development of civic skills to those who would otherwise be resource-poor. It is commonplace to ascribe the special character of American politics to the weakness of unions and the absence of class-based political parties that can mobilize the disadvantaged—in particular, the working class—to political activity. Another way that American society is exceptional is in how often Americans go to church—with the result that the mobilizing function often performed elsewhere by
unions and labor or social democratic parties is more likely to be performed by religious institutions. Consequently, Verba and his colleagues find that, not only is active participation in a religious community a good training ground for the skills of political life, but, in fact, a high proportion of people who are practising adherents of a religious tradition are also politically active. (This meshes with the finding, as it were from the opposite side of the question, of another study, by Peter Benson and Dorothy Williams. According to their Religion on Capitol Hill, a disproportionately large number—even by American standards—of US politicians are religiously committed.) Such findings have led some observers to conclude that religious bodies are a crucial component of a democratic, civil society.

Many people would initially judge these results unlikely to transfer to Australia. Yet, to take one indicator, political biography suggests comparable patterns in Canberra to those in Washington. Peter FitzSimons’s study of Kim Beazley describes the formative effect of evangelising for Moral Rearmament in India, developing skills which subsequently smoothed the future Labor Leader’s entry into the more obviously political forums of student activism. Similarly, eventual federal Treasurer Peter Costello entered student politics at Monash University with already well-honed political skills:

Costello’s ease with the microphone was no accident. He had followed in his father’s and brother’s footsteps as a Baptist lay-preacher and had been delivering sermons since he was fifteen ... Years later parliamentary opponents would seek to deride him as being the product of a private school debating team, but Carey [Grammar School] did not have a debating team and Costello never joined one subsequently ... As a Christian teenager he was preaching to crowds and seeking converts to his faith, often enduring the ridicule of hecklers ... It was an ideal training ground for the Federal Parliament. Such prominent examples could perhaps be written down to individual idiosyncrasy; given the differences between US and Australian political culture, we might expect that religious organisations would play a much slighter overall role in modern Australia. Historically, of course, the influence of religious organisations in the political formation of Australians
was often both profound and explicit, as I discuss in chapter four. Today, however, the national differences stand out. The twenty-three per cent of Australians who report attending church monthly or more seem insignificant beside the sixty per cent of Americans who do the same. On the other hand, the twenty-eight per cent of Australian workers who belong to a trade union, although worrying to union organisers, is fully double American enrolments, suggesting that Australia does not suffer the scale of secular civil vacuum Verba and his colleagues describe, although the absence of an Australian study of comparable scale and depth to Verba’s makes precise comparison difficult. However, further exploration suggests some parallels.

Religion and Political Formation

To get beyond the dead-ends which have dogged so many Australian studies of the relationship between religious and political commitments, I follow the leads suggested by Gustafson and by Verba and colleagues. Rather than trying to demonstrate, for example, that a particular religious background predisposes people to join one or other major party, or to vote in certain ways once they get there, I invited Senators and Members to reflect on how far religion had been a part of their political socialisation, and how (if at all) it featured in their current motivations. Thus, Dick Adams, Labor Member for Lyons (Tas.) recounted:

I was a regular churchgoer as a lad. I did Anglican Sunday school by correspondence. Today, I’m not moved as a Christian. I only go to church for weddings, deaths and christenings. But the ethics of a Christian informs my decisions. There are times when you have to make decisions that are all yours, and, today, many people have never learned basic ethics. It’s a matter of standing by what you believe, trying to overcome poverty and achieve greater equality.

Senator Crowley was more ambivalent about her present relationship to the Roman Catholic church:

Do I go to mass each week? No. Do I celebrate Easter and Christmas? Mostly. Do I believe that there’s a heaven and hell? Probably not. I certainly believe in a spiritual dimension, whether that’s the same as
religious I don't know ... I think by any definition they wouldn't still have me, but I'm not defining myself out.

On the other hand, she was equally forthright about its political legacy:

I learnt about social justice from the encyclicals in grade 5 or 6 in the Brigidine convent. I have just grown up with social justice ... A lot of us will say reconciliation is about sympathy, about understanding, about travelling together, about each side appreciating and valuing the other. But there's a principle to me that's behind all of that. And I don't think just because we're all citizens on the same bus is a sufficient explanation. I find my self retreating to something about the inherent sacredness, or value of human life. That makes a better sense or explanation for why we would have these sorts of policy.97

Taking a cue from the Verba study, one area which could fruitfully be explored in Australia is the role of religious organisations as a political training ground for people who do not readily fit into the more visible channels of political apprenticeship. For example, women are under-represented in trade unions and make up a smaller proportion than men of political party members and office-bearers. But women make up over sixty per cent of all Australian church-goers, outnumbering men in every denomination and every age group.98 Women do not, of course, make up a correspondingly high proportion of those in leadership positions, as many formal church structures are completely or partially closed to women, either officially (like the Roman Catholic priesthood) or by culture and habit. However, Verba emphasises that one can acquire political skills through activities which are neither overtly religious nor directly political. Leading the youth group, organising the jumble sale or undertaking voluntary community welfare work, for example, all foster the kinds of skills which Verba and his colleagues identify as crucial to political training. Churches provide myriad opportunities for women to participate in such activities, which may be less available through other channels.

An additional factor which would repay further investigation in this regard is the growing voter cynicism about party machine politics, and the corresponding success of representatives perceived as 'grassroots' rather than career politicians. Sydney Morning Herald journalist Margot Kingston's observation of the rise of One Nation led her to conclude:
People don’t want that professional class, high-profile class, of politician anymore. What they want is people that belong to them, people coming out of the grassroots … I think this is the start of a much bigger push to finding politicians from the grassroots. Danna Vale is a classic example and Jackie Kelly in the Liberal Party—two women who stood for seats nobody thought they would win, won them and they have really struck because they’re different and they’re grassroots.99

Kingston did not discuss Ms Kelly’s Catholicism or Mrs Vale’s evangelicalism, either as components of their ’grassroots’ appeal or as training grounds for their sometimes formidable political skills. However, the fact that her exemplars of ‘alternative’ politicians happened to be two of the Coalition’s more publicly religious figures is one further indicator of the role religious involvement might play in Australian political formation, in the shadows of the more formal political ladders.

What’s the Religious Problem?

In a recent study on policy analysis, Carol Bacchi has argued that every policy prescription necessarily contains within it its own ‘problem representation’—its own diagnosis of what ‘the problem’ is that a given policy is trying to solve. Policy debates look different according to how ‘the problem’ is conceived. By asking, ‘What’s the problem represented to be?’ Bacchi isolates the particular ‘problem representation’ implied in various policies. She then widens the frame to enable alternative problem representations, which each imply different policy responses. Bacchi gives the example of traffic congestion. One policy prescription would be more highways. That answer diagnoses ’the problem’ of traffic congestion as not enough road space. Other ways of conceiving ’the problem’ would widen the angle from a picture of a road with too many cars on it, to include seeing the surfeit of cars as a response to public transport provision, city size, street design, and even the effects of class on patterns of urban settlement. Once ‘the problem’ is reconceived in that wider frame, ’more highways’ may no longer seem like the answer at all; indeed, it may seem like the beginning of more of the same ‘problem’.100

The present study is not a work of policy analysis; however, Bacchi’s account of her ’What’s the Problem?’ approach offers a helpful way of
conceptualising the issues examined here. Rather than taking the political issues usually associated with religion—such as abortion, capital punishment and so on—and asking why they do not cut more electoral ice in turn-of-the-millennium Australia, I foreground religion in relation to issues which are not often discussed in religious terms. To borrow Bacchi's phrase, I undertake a very specific kind of problem reframing. By foregrounding religious dynamics in topics often conceived as purely secular, I hope to offer new interpretations of existing issues, and point towards some alternative solutions. More broadly, training the lens of religion on issues not usually associated with it allows us to see religion as more central to Australian public debate than conventionally supposed.

Formulated along these lines, the present study leaves unexamined some topics classically associated with religion-politics interactions. Watchers of Australian politics during the 1990s may expect the name of Senator Brian Harradine to occur more frequently than it does. The self-effacingly Catholic DLP survivor\(^{101}\) attracted considerable media attention when his balance-of-power position played a decisive part in the Wik and Goods and Services Tax (GST) debates, among others. However, his political significance at those moments said more about the curiosities of the Senate's proportional representation electoral system than it did about religious dynamics in the Parliament as a whole. That is to say, he was significant less because his political position so uniformly aligns with the official stance of the Roman Catholic church than because he happened to hold, for a time, the balance of power (along with the Australian Democrats) in a tightly-balanced Senate. That position could have been held by anyone, of any religious persuasion or none. The fact that it was held by Senator Harradine, whose theological position provided one of the few reliable points of reference for those trying to predict the political position of an otherwise enigmatic man, meant that his theology drew an unusual amount of public attention. His theological position undoubtedly added drama to 1990s politics; however, it offers few pointers to the deeper dynamics of religion and politics in Australia.

One topic which generated substantial press discussion about religio-political intersections, particularly at the level of personalities, was the parliamentary debate over the Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996 (commonly called
the Andrews Bill). I have discussed that debate elsewhere,\textsuperscript{102} and do not revisit it here. Instead, chapter five follows up a question which I raised in that earlier discussion, but was prevented by a lack of empirical data from pursuing at that time, about the role of the Lyons Forum in the federal Coalition.

In 1998, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory saw heated debates in their respective legislatures over abortion law.\textsuperscript{103} Partly because of its significance in the United States electorate, abortion ranks with euthanasia as one of the classic issues in the religion-and-politics literature. Successive Australian federal parliaments have dealt with the issue's political divisiveness by determinedly avoiding it, leaving it to be worked out by the various States. Although the Australian Capital Territory is not a State, its abortion debate did not become a federal issue—it did not, in other words, mirror the way that the Northern Territory's \textit{Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995} brought euthanasia to Capital Hill. So successful has this avoidance strategy proved that, at the time of writing, abortion has not been raised in the federal Parliament since Mr Alasdair Webster (then Liberal Member for Macquarie (NSW), brought a private member's bill (the Abortion Funding Abolition Bill) in 1992. Even then, the Parliament's reluctance was evident in that the 1992 Bill failed to reach second-reading stage. The last substantial discussion of abortion, was the similar private member's bill brought by Mr Stephen Lusher in 1979. The present study's concentration on the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments relegates abortion to the sidelines.

Capital punishment is another topic regularly revisited in American religion-and-politics literature but with limited currency in Australia. Recently, a number of Australian political leaders for a (such as former WA Liberal Leader Richard Court and federal National Party Leader John Anderson) have stated their support for a referendum on the death penalty, and One Nation party policy calls for a binding referendum on mandatory capital punishment for some crimes.\textsuperscript{104} It is therefore possible that future parliaments might entertain the issue; for the present, it remains on Australia's policy backburners, and therefore out of this study's view.
Those topics are, of course, important. My hope is that, leaving them for another occasion and concentrating instead on matters to the fore during the Howard Government, the present study will open up new ways of seeing the relationship between religion and politics in Australia which will ultimately prove useful for understanding both the well-trodden and the less-explored areas of this wide field.

Another effect of the focus on the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Parliaments is to shift the focus from the ALP, which has so long enjoyed what little limelight Australia has to shine on religion-politics connections. With the Split consigned to the history books, sectarian party alignments in decay and Labor on the opposition benches, the focus shifts instead towards the hitherto much-neglected Coalition parties.

Endnotes


3. Sex is probably more resilient.

4. This contrasts with the now vast and growing literature on religion and politics in the USA (destined to become still larger in the wake of the Bush-Gore struggle). For an accessible introduction to this massive field, see D. H. Davis, 'Separation, Integration and Accommodation: Religion and State in America in a Nutshell', *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2001, pp. 5–17. There is also a substantial body of more philosophically-oriented literature related to the American religion-politics nexus, some of which is surveyed later in this volume. A smaller, but still significant literature on religion and politics in the UK includes, for example, the contributions to *Keeping the Faiths: The New Covenant Between Religious Belief and Secular Power*, special issue of *Demos Quarterly*, no. 11, 1997. A comparable range of historical and normative questions is addressed in R. Ahdar and
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Endnotes continued


7. The qualification is to take account of the Christian Democratic Party (formerly Call to Australia). It has achieved impressive durability in New South Wales, where Rev. Fred Nile has served in the Legislative Council since 1981, joined by Mrs Elaine Nile since 1988. It enjoyed a brief federal presence in 1998 when the Member for McPherson, Mr John Bradford, resigned from the Liberal Party to sit instead as the CDP’s federal Leader. He ran unsuccessfully in the 1998 federal election on a CDP Senate ticket for Queensland. The CDP’s longevity in NSW has seldom translated into real political impact. This, with its failure so far to achieve any elected federal representation, has kept it as an electoral curiosity, difficult to compare with the DLP’s lasting impact on the ALP’s fortunes.

8. 1912 15 CLR 366.


11. 1983 154 CLR 120.

Endnotes continued


17. For an analysis emphasising socioeconomic factors in the Catholic shift to the right during the 1950s, see R. Alford, *Party and Society: the Anglo-American Democracies*, op. cit.


23. For example D. Aitkin, *Stability and Change in Australian Politics*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1982; C. Bean, *The
Endnotes continued


27. See G. Henderson, A Howard Government? Inside the Coalition, Harper Collins, Sydney, NSW, 1995, pp. 16–21. To some extent, that divergence within Methodism is itself the product of an older denominational division between Primitive Methodists, Wesleyan Methodists and Bible Christians each carrying forward dynamics which had been in tension within Methodism from its eighteenth century foundations.


Endnotes continued


34. R. Smith, ‘Religion and Electoral Behaviour in Australia: the Search for Meaning’; op. cit., p. 37n.

35. ibid., p. 27.

36. J. Bodycomb as paraphrased in ibid., p. 28.

37. ibid.

38. ibid.


41. ibid., Section III.


44. N. Blaikie, The Plight of the Australian Clergy, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia Qld, 1979, p. 231.


47. Senate, Debates, 18 August 1993, p. 252.

Endnotes continued


53. K. Beazley snr, ALP member for Fremantle, WA, from 18 August 1945 until his retirement on 10 November 1977.


56. See P. FitzSimons, Beazley: A Biography, op. cit.


58. 'What Our Leaders Believe', Compass, op. cit.


62. 'What Our Leaders Believe', Compass, op. cit.

63. ibid.

64. ibid.

Endnotes continued

66. Seventy-two per cent of Senators and 78 per cent of Members in the Thirty-ninth Parliament are male.


72. Interview with Margaret Throsby, ABC Classic FM, Friday 28 April 2000.

73. Contemporary usage with respect to capitalising 'Indigenous' appears to be in flux. At the time of writing, the most recent edition of the Commonwealth Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers is the fifth (Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1994). It uses lower case (pp. 40–41 and 137–139), and refers those seeking more information to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission’s Human Relations Section (p. 41). However, The Little Book of Style (Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1998) describes itself as 'a bridge between the fifth and forthcoming sixth edition' of the Style Manual and advises readers that it 'incorporates stylistic changes that have been made since the 1994 edition' (p. x). The Little Book of Style specifies that "Indigenous" carries an initial capital (p. 49). Official publications of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies all capitalise the term inconsistently, but with a trend towards more frequent capitalisation in more recent writings. Overall, capitalisation seems to be emerging as the preferred usage. In this study, I use a capital except when quoting from sources which use lower case.
Endnotes continued

74. When I began the research, the House of Representatives was that of the 39th Parliament, but the Senate was that of the 38th. The figures from my original list were ALP 22 out of a total representation of 56, or 39 per cent of the total sample compared with their representation as 42 per cent of the Parliament; Coalition 28/56, or 50 per cent of the total, compared with 52 per cent of the Parliament; Democrat 2/56 or 3 per cent of the total, the same as their representation in Parliament; Independent 2/56; Green 2/56.

75. In the event, these were fewer than I had anticipated. The reluctance may be explained by electoral pressures, even though very few interviewees said they thought that religion was electorally significant in Australia.

76. 'What Our Leaders Believe', Compass, op. cit.


78. For example, the second volume of James Gustafson's own major contribution to moral theology, Ethics From a Theocentric Perspective, Chicago University Press, 1984, includes the themes of population and nutrition and allocation of biomedical research funding, along with marriage and family and suicide, as exemplars of Christian moral reasoning.


80. ibid., p. 156. That might suggest just that many devout church attenders ignore their churches' teaching on social questions. However, even among the theologians who develop the church teaching, theological and political divisions are likely to coincide, cutting across denominational boundaries. As a result, 'many socially and theologically radical Catholics relate well to their Protestant counterparts' and 'moderate Catholic theologians relate well to moderate Protestant theologians'. Other studies make clear that the specific ways in which theological and political allegiances have been formed varies with time and circumstance. For example, see S. Ross's study of the growth of ideological trends within Australian Catholicism as a response to the Depression, 'Australian Catholic Ideology in the Depression Era' Honours Thesis, History Department, Australian National University, 1987. D. Pike points out that nineteenth-century Church of England evangelicals were able to make common cause, both politically and theologically, with 'fervent Dissenters', sharing 'their identical views of personal righteousness', Paradise of Dissent: South Australia 1829–1857, op. cit., p. 14.

81. J. M. Gustafon, Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics, op. cit., p. 130.
Endnotes continued


86. 'What Our Leaders Believe', *Compass*, op. cit.


89. ibid., pp. 18–19.


Endnotes continued


Chapter Two: With Hope in the Electorate: God and the Constitution

For a century, secularisation theorists have foretold religion’s imminent disappearance. Other scholars have retorted by documenting religion’s persistence. By and large, they accept that religion is on the wane in the educated and democratic west, finding evidence instead in the increasing strength of third world and anti-western religious movements. Australia is often held to be an extreme case among secular societies. This chapter finds that, contrary to reputation, religious concepts retain a considerable vitality in late-twentieth-century Australia. However, their meaning has shifted. Rather than statements of shared faith, they provide a way of expressing—and, sometimes, resolving—new anxieties and preoccupations.

On 6 November 1999, a referendum asked whether Australia should become a republic. A second question asked voters to endorse a new Preamble for the Australian Constitution. The people said ‘no’ to both. Amid protracted debate about whether Australia should become a republic—and if so, what kind—the Preamble proposal received only moderate public discussion. That centred, for the most part, on the portrayal of Australia’s cultural diversity, especially the status of Indigenous peoples. Once Prime Minister John Howard unveiled a draft, attention fell on its references to ‘mateship’ and ‘those who defended our country and our liberty in time of war’.
One aspect of the Preamble proposal which received comparatively little public discussion was the decision to include a reference to God. However, that little revealed considerable passion, almost entirely on the side of God’s inclusion. The classic arguments for keeping state and religion apart were forgotten. This was in notable contrast to the polarised debates which eventually installed God in the 1901 Preamble. A close examination of the 1990s arguments about a constitutional God, and comparison with those of the 1890s, suggests that God was acceptable—even desirable—to the much more secular polity of the late twentieth century because the meaning of ‘God’ had changed dramatically. When the founders oversaw Federation ‘humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God’, they supposed a transcendent being overseeing the Commonwealth. By the late 1990s, ‘God’ had developed a dual public persona—on one hand, as a metaphysical representation of a national identity built around the ideas of openness and toleration of difference; on the other hand, as a guarantor of continuing hierarchically-ordered stability. We shall see both theologies endorsed across the religious spectrum, from atheists to evangelical Christians, and across the political spectrum from republicans to monarchists. Foregrounding the seldom-explored religious aspect of the Preamble debate reveals a significant shift in the role of public religion in Australia between Federation and its centenary. That shift tells us a good deal about our preoccupying anxieties, and sets the frame for further exploration of the relation between religion and the state in modern Australia.

Prelude to a New Preamble

In 1996, the republic became a significant election issue. Prime Minister Paul Keating and his Labor Government actively promoted a republic. Some Coalition members declared themselves similarly in favour. Self-declared monarchist Leader of the Opposition John Howard defused the issue by promising, if elected, to hold a ‘people’s convention’ on the republican question, modelled on the 1890s conventions which shaped Australia’s Constitution.

The 1998 Constitutional Convention was held in Old Parliament House between 2 and 13 February 1998. Its main task was to determine a
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republican model to be put to a referendum. However, it also addressed the suggestion that a constitutional change as fundamental as the shift to a republic would require, or at least provide a good opportunity for, reviewing the constitutional Preamble. The Convention recommended that there should be a new Preamble, containing, inter alia, 'reference to "Almighty God"'.

The existing (1901) Preamble begins:

Whereas the people of New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, and Tasmania, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth ...

The Convention records reveal some confusion among delegates as to whether a new Preamble would replace the existing Preamble. Delegates repeatedly spoke of a new Preamble 'keeping God in', as though the alternative were God's removal. In fact, the motion to which the Convention finally agreed included the statement that 'the existing Preamble ... would remain intact'. Thus, any new Preamble would be an addition, not a replacement. Despite Professor George Winterton's repeated warnings that to have two Preambles, both referring to Almighty God, 'would look ridiculous', God seemed assured of doubled representation in any revised Constitution.

The Constitutional Second Coming

To provide some context for God's mooted Constitutional second coming, it is worth briefly revisiting the Convention's overall treatment of the Preamble. The Convention appointed four 'Subgroups', which met during the convention and returned with proposals on various Preamble-related themes. Subgroup (i) considered 'Preamble and transitional covering clauses', while Subgroup (ii) debated a single covering clause, the recognition of 'Almighty God'. Subgroup (iii) concentrated on recognition of Indigenous Australians. Subgroup (iv) considered the general issue of 'citizens' rights'.

From speeches at the Convention and writings after its conclusion, it is clear that some delegates regarded God's inclusion as controversial, and the
task of ensuring it as precarious. The chair of Subgroup (ii), Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane Most Reverend Peter Hollingworth, alerted the Convention to 'a move to delete the God reference', a sense that 'people want it out' and even the idea that 'the reference to God is offensive'. Rev. Tim Costello detected 'quite a lot of debate' about whether God should be retained, adding, almost defensively, 'I think that is a very refreshing value'. More militantly, former Australian Democrat Senator and Republican Karin Sowada reported Christian delegates 'all united' on the clause, and poised to act in its defence:

Alerted by a recent vote of the Constitutional Centenary Foundation to have this reference deleted, a number of us were conscious of a possible attempt to repeat this at the Convention. Some informal networking prior to the ConCon ensured that intelligence was shared so we were ready for the debate, and prepared with the numbers to work whatever committees were established to investigate the matter.

But read the Convention's Transcript of Proceedings and this edginess on the part of God's self-designated defenders becomes perplexing. Whoever was advocating God's removal must have done so behind the scenes; those who spoke on the record were unanimous for God's inclusion. The only objections were that the so-called 'recognition clause' is inappropriately narrow: critics wanted the Preamble to embrace more religion, not less. Delegates did not even wait for the report of the Subgroup charged with considering the recognition clause before lining up to declare their enthusiasm for God. The Christian vanguard politics described by Ms Sowada were either unnecessary or extraordinarily effective.

God and the Covering Clauses

Subgroup (i), meeting under the theme 'Preamble and transitional covering clauses', proposed unanimously that there should be a new Preamble, and that it should:

1. build upon the existing preamble
2. recognise prior occupancy/custodianship by Australia’s indigenous peoples
3. acknowledge the positive contribution of the crown
4. acknowledge the establishment of an Australian republic
5. conclude with an enactment clause recognising the sovereignty of the Australian people.16

Although there was no reference to discussion of God in the brief of Subgroup (i), the recommendation to 'build upon the existing preamble' elicited the following question from Ms Janet Holmes a Court to its mover, Dr Tony Cocchiaro:

Mr Chairman, I particularly want to ask Tony this question as we heard this morning from Stella that about 30 per cent of our population are not Anglo-Saxon. As a Christian who cannot take the step of believing in God and therefore is not allowed to be a Christian, I do not have difficulty with the words 'on the blessing of Almighty God'. But I wonder if your group, as you have put up a draft preamble, discussed how Buddhists, Muslims, Aboriginal people and so on feel about having that. I do not want to take that out, but is it possible that some extra phrase could go in which is more inclusive?17

In at least two areas, Ms Holmes a Court's intervention set out ground which would become important as the debate progressed. First, she appealed to a statistic, '30 per cent of our population are not Anglo-Saxon'. The implication was that the non-Anglo 30 per cent would be the part of the population likely to have difficulty with God's inclusion. In fact, the non-Anglo-Saxon component of the population includes groups who are among the most devoutly Christian in the Australian community, such as Eastern and Oriental Orthodox18 and Roman Catholics from Vietnam, Italy, the Philippines, Malta and Croatia.19 A more apposite statistic would be that only between 70 and 75 per cent of Australians profess belief in God,20 leaving somewhere between a quarter and a third outside the monotheist fold. Ms Holmes a Court might have argued that such a substantial body of non-believers should not be obliged to recognise God in their Constitution.

In fact, however, that argument was precluded by the second aspect of her intervention which was to be revisited throughout the Preamble debate. This was her insistence that she personally finds atheism no bar to 'relying on the blessing of Almighty God'. By placing the statistical argument alongside a statement of her own atheistic support for God, she set the agenda as intercultural sensitivity. Potential objections to the clause arise
not from the absence of religious conviction, but from belief in some other kind of divine presence.

Spiritual Wealth and Citizens’ Rights

Subgroup (iv) gave as its main recommendation that the Preamble should ‘provide constitutional recognition of citizens rights’.21 In addition, it endorsed a Preamble wording proposed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, but with four recommended additions, including recognition of ‘the spiritual wealth of our people’.22

Real Republican delegate Ms Moira Rayner expanded:

We referred specifically … to the recognition of the spiritual wealth of people. That was to address the issue that you have all heard a number of statements of personal faith about this afternoon. That is an acknowledgment that, for the vast majority of Australians, we have a spiritual commitment which we reflect in many different ways and which in its own wealth and diversity is part of our treasury of the nation.23

Like Ms Holmes a Court, she hastened to emphasise that the call was to strengthen rather than weaken the recognition clause:

We did not specifically adopt the language of 'humbly committing ourselves to Almighty God' not because we rejected those words, but because we thought there should be discussion of the possibility of wider language to include those of other faiths entitled to equal respect in a nation which respects freedom of conscience, religious beliefs and expression.24

Thus, while Subgroup (ii) was specifically charged with considering the recognition clause, it first entered debate through the recommendation of Subgroup (i) to 'build on the existing Preamble', and enjoyed a reprise when Subgroup (iv) introduced 'spiritual wealth'. Moreover, the only caveats to God’s inclusion took a common form. With Ms Holmes a Court’s question to Subgroup (i) and Ms Rayner’s report from Subgroup (iv), the call was not for less preambular religion, but for more. No one wanted to expunge 'Almighty God', still less to abolish any kind of recognition clause, but some wanted to
widen the clause's embrace. The same dynamics were even more strongly in evidence in the discussion surrounding the report of Subgroup (ii).

**Humbly Relying on the Blessing of Almighty God**

Subgroup (ii), delegated to consider the phrase 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God', had eight members, a number of whom wore their religious credentials prominently. Subgroup chair Most Rev. Peter Hollingworth was, at that time, the Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane. His group included Archbishop George Pell, then of the Roman Catholic archdiocese of Melbourne, and South Australian Anglican Catholic Bishop John Hepworth. It also included two former federal politicians, both prominent lay Christians. One-time federal Liberal Mr Alasdair Webster is now a member of the Christian Democrat Party, which he represented at the Convention. Dr Baden Teague has retired as a Liberal Senator but not as an Anglican lay preacher. The Convention's list of subcommittees notes that Dr Teague and Archbishop Pell sent their apologies; however, as the membership list demonstrates, the subcommittee had plenty of religious voices without them. Dr Teague, in any case, spoke in support of the Subgroup's unanimous recommendation on the floor of the Convention.

The recommendation read:

> It is recommended to the Convention that the present [that is 1901] formula, ‘humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God’, be retained in any subsequent amendments to the Preamble.

> This action will keep our Constitution clearly in line with nearly all other constitutions of nations in this region and beyond where reference is made to the Divinity as the source of all power and be a unifying statement for people of all religious faiths throughout Australia.

Moving the report, Archbishop Hollingworth reported that the subgroup anticipated controversy, partly because of events which preceded the Convention. The Constitutional Centenary Foundation and the Women’s Constitutional Convention had both recommended removal of the reference to God. Numerous unofficial draft Preambles had been circulated in which there was no mention of God. The Archbishop also detected hostility within the Convention.
It was ironic, then, that his speech provided the Convention’s only sustained critique of God’s inclusion:

What lies behind the move to delete the God reference? Why do people want it out? … One [reason] is that it is a problem because Australia is a pluralist multicultural society and therefore the reference to God is offensive. A second reason is that the number of professing Christians in the latest census is now down to seventy per cent, though, of course, if you take into account other believers in God, that percentage is considerably higher. A third reason is that a small minority of non-believers believe—that religion is a divisive force and they would want to remove the reference in the preamble and make Australia a strictly secular republic without any reference to the Divinity.³¹

He answered those objections, first, by arguing that ‘Australia is the stronger’ for the religious faith of migrants. With Ms Holmes a Court, he held that, ‘It is not true that multiculturalism or cultural diversity implies the diminution of religion or belief; the opposite is the case’.³² Consequently, the recognition clause can ‘unite all the citizen subjects of this nation’.³³

Furthermore, a reference to God links us to the founders. I return below to the question of how the debates of the 1890s Constitutional Conventions should be interpreted; however, on Archbishop Hollingworth’s reading:

Sir John Downer summed up the debate in these words:

… that the Christian religion is a portion of the English Constitution … is part of the law of England … that the Commonwealth will be from its first stage a Christian Commonwealth.³⁴

Clearly, that is not the way things have worked out. We cannot claim that Australia is, ever has been or perhaps is ever likely to be—certainly not in our time—a Christian Commonwealth, but that does not imply that we should become a purely secular republic.

In addition, the Archbishop argued that recognition makes sense of the practice of prayer in Parliament, instituted at Federation.³⁵

Finally, any objectors to God’s inclusion received a wry caution that things might have been worse:
We have heard much from delegates about the Irish model, particularly in relation to a president. I have listened to that with great interest. I now quote to you in proximate terms the Irish preface, for which I thank Professor Greg Craven. That preface says:

In the name of the most Holy Trinity, from whom all power is derived and to whom all acts of men are ultimately referable …

The committee thought about this for a brief moment, and then, humbly and reverently, decided not to hit this Convention with the full Irish monty!36

The report from Subgroup (ii) attracted comment from four delegates before the chair called time. All supported God’s inclusion. Dr Baden Teague made it clear that his endorsement arose out of personal faith: ‘I share those words sincerely as an individual Australian’. His stance towards those who might not ‘share those words’ was ambiguous. The former Senator framed his comments in relation to the optional appeal for divine help in the oath for Members of Parliament and Ministers:

In addressing and retaining those traditional and fundamental elements of affirmation and oath, there is a choice. Where there is a requirement for an individual citizen to subscribe to a formula of words, that citizen can choose to use the language that includes reference to God, or choose another form of words. That is entirely consistent with the … totally general appeal that Archbishop Peter Hollingworth has made in the keeping of these words in the preamble. I strongly support that and ask delegates to bear these other references to God in mind when these matters are being discussed.37

Dr Teague is not unusual in relating recognition to the matter of oaths and affirmations, which I discuss in chapter three. He might be read here as proposing an optional recognition clause. Alternatively, he might have been saying that the Preamble’s meaning of ‘God’ is sufficiently inclusive to embrace both oath-takers and those who choose the affirmation.

The next speaker on the report of Subgroup (ii) was Mr Geoff Hourn, representing Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy. He supported the recognition clause but took issue with the Subgroup’s justification. Where the resolution explained that retaining the recognition clause would ‘keep
our Constitution clearly in line with nearly all other constitutions of nations in this region and beyond …’, Mr Hourn argued, 'It is our Constitution and it really is irrelevant what other nations think’. Although Subgroup (ii) had found the argument from international conformity sufficiently compelling to include it as part of their resolution, Mr Hourn considered his disagreement 'a minor point'. He flagged a number of reasons for God’s inclusion which he saw as more important, and which were revisited in subsequent speeches. One was the need to keep elected representatives in their place:

> Obviously, many deities have graced the floors of this chamber. The key thing here is that the reference is to the 'Almighty God', and that is important to keep in mind.38

Like other speakers, he asserted God’s multicultural inoffensiveness:

> The other thing is that it does not offend the 70 per cent of Australians who indicated in the 1996 census that they believed in some form of God, nor does it offend Hindus, Christians, Jews, Muslims or others in that category. So ... there was a clear majority of Australians who believe in some form of God and those words would not offend any of those.39

Finally, in the face of the chair’s exhortation to brevity, he cautioned:

> The word 'humbly' is an important inclusion. 'Humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' is a phrase that is important for all Australians to remember.40

The third speaker on the Subgroup (ii) report, Tasmanian Greens leader Ms Christine Milne, echoed Ms Holmes a Court’s call for greater inclusivity:

> I do not want to see the concept of God, the divine or the spiritual dimension taken out of the Constitution. Rather, I would like us to consider perhaps being more expansive and inclusive of the spirituality of all Australians ... I would like to ask Archbishop Hollingworth whether he has looked at the preamble of some other countries. The Czech Republic, for example, uses the term 'spiritual wealth' to describe a similar concept.41

She was concerned 'that some people might ... see it [God] ... as ... something specifically Christian'. However, she shared Ms Holmes a Court’s concern that her contribution should not be taken to imply opposition to God, having been 'misrepresented in that way in the past'.42 On the
contrary, she first announced and then joined the Convention's 'consensus that we want the divine, the spiritual dimension, in the preamble and probably a consensus that the reference to "Almighty God" stay'.

Not everyone saw 'God' as 'specifically Christian'. The final speaker on the report of Subgroup (ii) was NSW magistrate and University of New England Chancellor Dr Pat O'Shane, representing A Just Republic. She entered the debate 'as probably the most committed atheist in the chamber'. In the face of procedural heckling to the effect that she should not be allowed to make 'a statement of belief', she testified:

I have heard some people have their each-way bet on the issue, but I want to tell you all that I am an atheist and I happen to respect the spiritual and religious beliefs of my fellow Australians. I personally do not have any objection to the words being retained.

Dr O'Shane recalled Archbishop Hollingworth's theology in his discussion of the appropriateness of prayer in Parliament. Prayer, he said, 'should be recognised as something which all people of good faith can engage in, however they define their understanding of God—if they can'. To Dr O'Shane, this meant that 'the word "God" is a generic term'. Consequently, she could 'find the words unexceptional' and 'endorse the proposal to retain those words in the preamble'.

Drawing the discussion of the report to a conclusion, Archbishop Hollingworth welcomed her interpretation:

Can I first of all say, in response to Dr Pat O'Shane, thank you for your leadership on this matter because that is the kind of spirit I think we want to embrace. I have worked closely over many years with people who would call themselves atheists and agnostics but who also respect me and what I stand for, what the Church stands for and what religion stands for. There is a broad inclusive sense in which we can embrace and be embraced.

Incarnation of the Generic God

The exchange between Archbishop Hollingworth and Dr O'Shane marks a key point in the Convention's understanding of the recognition clause. It
involved at least two theological moves, each quite substantial. The readiness with which these moves were endorsed by other Convention delegates, confessed Christian and avowed atheist alike, tells a good deal about the role of public religion in secular Australia.

The first move was to clarify the scope of the Archbishop’s original interpretation of ‘God’ as incorporating all the ways in which people ‘define their understanding of God—if they can’. He spelled out:

The word ‘God’ is to be understood in the generic sense as every man, woman and child understands him/her to be according to their own particular experience. I think that probably covers the issue.48

Where some found ‘God’ insufficiently broad, Archbishop Hollingworth argued that any attempt to broaden it would detract from its ‘generic’ inclusiveness. He offered the Biblical gloss that ‘the term “God” … in the Hebrew simply means "I am" or "I will be what I will be"’.49 However, in the second significant theological move, he immediately added a further definition, again developing a theme first flagged by Dr O’Shane. Her speech declared that ‘this is a statement of the Australian people about who we are and the values that we hold dear’, leaving ambiguous whether ‘this' referred to the recognition clause or to the Preamble as a whole. Archbishop Hollingworth resolved the ambiguity:

In the term God … you really could not get a more simple, basic description of us as a people and what we might become in our unfolding destiny.50

The idea that the object of any community’s worship is ultimately a collective representation of the community itself is most famously associated with the sociologist Emile Durkheim, in The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life.51 However, for Durkheim, a society’s ‘consciousness of itself’ emerges from, and becomes the object of worship through, collective ritual practice.52 The sacred has a distinctive nature and form in every society, specific to the practices and collective representations to which it relates. Lacking this dimension, the Constitutional Convention’s concept of God as a shorthand for national identity or national aspirations was a kind of truncated Durkheimianism. The content of the ideas and images associated with ‘God’ was left entirely open.
One might expect that this ‘generic’ theology, devoid of content beyond a vague nationalism, would have proved controversial, if not at the Convention then in religious debate thereafter. In fact, neither eventuated. Instead, it was welcomed by delegates from a surprising range of theological positions. Even those who espoused theological views prima facie at odds with that articulated by the Archbishop nevertheless found ways to endorse it. Self-described conservative evangelical Ms Sowada found ‘keeping God in the Constitution’ to be ‘an expression of our dependence on God as creator and sustainer of all things’. The substantial difference between a view of God as ‘creator and sustainer of all things’ and as ‘a description of us as a people and what we might become in our unfolding destiny’ did not prevent her endorsing Archbishop Hollingworth’s ‘well-chosen words’.

Dr Teague, who describes himself as evangelical but not conservative, also welcomed the ‘generic’ God, even as he explained, ‘by God, I mean the God worshipped in Australian churches’.

Rev. Tim Costello saw the recognition clause in functional terms only slightly more specific than those of Archbishop Hollingworth:

In the face of crass materialism, oppressive materialism and everyone talking about the bottom line—as if that only ever can mean an economic bottom line—the value of referring to God, to spiritual reality, says that as Australians we affirm there are things much more fundamental, that there is a dimension of life much more life-giving than simply the values that seem to be so dominant with the advertisers and mind benders today.

He did not spell out in any more detail what that more fundamental dimension is. His allusive account portrays ‘spiritual reality’ as a ‘bottom line’ beneath (not above, as in the founders’ vision of a transcendent deity looking down on the emerging Commonwealth) the socially constructed fundamentals of economic growth and spiralling consumption. It arguably challenges a view of God as the shorthand for ‘who we are as a nation’ (the view that I dubbed ‘truncated Durkheimianism’), since it criticises many of the values which characterise a modern capitalist nation. It fits better with Durkheim’s fuller conception of the sacred as the moral force of society, lying both within and beyond individuals and claiming their perpetual dependence, and the source both of shared values and their critique.
Others, without identifying themselves with any religious orientation, told the Convention that the ‘generic’ theology had quieted reservations they might otherwise have felt about a modern recognition clause.57

Whatever the technical theological objections which might attend a ‘generic sense’ of God, it clearly resonated with delegates. It enabled them to show remarkable unanimity on God’s constitutional incarnation. When the Resolutions Group returned its proposals on the Preamble, the recognition clause had been softened, but only slightly. Where Subgroup (ii) proposed that the phrase ‘humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God’ be retained, the Resolutions Group wording proposed that a new Preamble should contain ‘Reference to “Almighty God”’. It was agreed to without debate.58 In the widely-quoted quip attributed to Convention chair Mr Barry Jones, ‘God had a good convention’.

God's Good Convention

There are many objections to the constitutional second coming which might have been advanced in the 1998 Convention, but were not. For example, it could have been said that God has no place in the Constitution of a secular state. Some might have maintained that, even if recognition of God is relevant to the nation’s life, the Constitution is not the place to do it. Critics might have denounced the ‘generic’ God as too vague, or seen overt religious reference as culturally incongruous in secular Australia. Republicans might have feared that implying a divinely ordained political order would weaken the principle of popular sovereignty. Reformers might have worried that attaching the name of God to the Constitution improperly claims divine sanction for Australia’s existing constitutional arrangements. Christians and Jews might have suspected that attaching the name of God to a human document strains the third commandment. Amid the Convention’s discussion of Indigenous spirituality, the term ‘God’ might have seemed unduly tied to the monotheist world religions (a theme we revisit in chapter six). Atheists might have felt their citizenship diminished by a religiously-framed Constitution.

In fact, only the last objection was raised, and then only vicariously. Not only did the two speakers who identified themselves as non-believers
support God’s inclusion, but it was left to a self-described Christian, Dr Tony Cocchiaro, to move an amended wording which 'seeks to be inclusive of people who may be atheist'. No atheists reported on how included they actually felt by his proposal:

With the blessing of God and in acknowledging spirituality and humanity, we the people of Australia give ourselves this constitution.

Indeed, by moving from 'reliance' to 'blessing', his amendment arguably implied stronger religious commitment than the existing Preamble.

The dearth of argument against a Constitutional theophany is the more surprising given controversy about including other 'abstract values'. Professor Greg Craven led a body of opinion that mentioning values such as equality and democracy could prove 'really dangerous, even poisonous'. Only one speaker, former MHR Mr Phil Cleary, drew a connection between the 'abstract values' argument and God. Far from challenging divine recognition, he used the fact of apparent unanimity on God to argue that other 'abstract values' should be similarly embraced:

As for spiritual beliefs, Professor Craven says, 'No abstract values.' You do not get a more abstract value than the concept of god. I am not deriding the concept of god. That is its beauty, Archbishop. Its beauty is that it is an abstraction and we seek out abstractions in our life, because abstractions actually develop our imagination; they can inspire us.

That the recognition clause surfaced in the deliberations of Subgroups (i) and (iv), apparently beyond their briefs, and despite the fact that there was a specifically-delegated group devoting itself exclusively to that clause, suggests that delegates found some urgency or significance in the topic. We might expect that in such a secular society as 1990s Australia, the urgency would lie in the inherent controversy of divine recognition. But that is belied by the remarkable unanimity in its favour. On the other hand, any speculation about an upsurge of religious fervour among the Australian people is quickly dispelled by the statistical evidence of declining church attendance and increasing secularisation. Moreover, the declarations of a number of recognition supporters that they wanted the Constitution to acknowledge a God in whom they did not believe only compounds the conundrum. Adding to the perplexities is the impression on the part of some
of the Christian delegates that God’s inclusion was controversial and in need of militant defence, while speakers, irrespective of theological persuasion, in fact seemed metaphorically to fall over one another in their enthusiasm to support the recognitionists’ cause.

Why did God get such an easy run? One way of answering is to extend our comparison between God’s treatment at either end of the twentieth century. A key to understanding God’s enthusiastic reception in Canberra lies in the differences between the arguments advanced there, and those put forward in support of God’s earlier constitutional incarnation, at the Australasian Federal Conventions in Adelaide in 1897 and Melbourne in 1898. Other useful information can be gleaned from newspaper commentary leading up to the referendum, from public comment solicited by the Centenary of Federation Committee, and from the comments of Senators and Members about their opinion of God’s inclusion in the Preamble.

A Century of Recognition

Reluctant Recognition

In 1998, Archbishop Peter Hollingworth invoked ‘what our forebears said’ at the 1898 Melbourne Convention:

There was a long and extensive debate, there were many submissions from many quarters—the various states, churches and religious groups—and there was strong demand for the inclusion of a reference to Almighty God. Sir John Downer summed up the debate in these words: ‘… that the Christian religion is a portion of the English Constitution … is part of the law of England … that the Commonwealth will be from its first stage a Christian Commonwealth.’

The quotation from Sir John Downer is correct as far as it goes; but, contrary to the impression Canberra delegates might have received (without reading the Melbourne proceedings), Downer’s speech was consistent with his longstanding opposition to the recognition clause. He had been in the majority that opposed Mr Patrick Glynn’s motion, at the Adelaide Convention the previous year, to include the words ‘invoking
Divine Providence’. God did not enjoy such a good convention on that occasion.

Glynn’s subsequent, Melbourne proposal, to include the words ‘humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God’, was less contentious. It answered Edmund Barton’s objection that ‘invoking’ God on the Commonwealth’s behalf implied second-guessing the sentiments of electors when, in reality, ‘we cannot know that anyone will have those feelings’. The Melbourne Convention accepted the revised wording on the voices. However, the majority who voted in favour kept largely silent in the face of determined argument. Some simply put their support for God on the record without advancing any argument.

A number of the arguments advanced in the nineteenth century still resonated a century on. I shall first explore arguments which had clear parallels at either end of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, although the nineteenth century recognition debates took place in a more homogeneously Christian society than the Australia of a century later, God’s constitutional inclusion considerably more controversial at Federation than it had become by 1998. So, it is still more instructive to examine two areas of substantial divergence between the founders and their late-twentieth-century legatees.

Ultimate Reliance

One strand of debate at the nineteenth-century Conventions might be summed up as between those who saw reliance on God in individual terms and those who wanted to attribute a special divine mandate to the emerging Commonwealth. Glynn saw divine intention in the Commonwealth’s origins, as compared with other democracies born out of fear and bloodshed:

> The foundations of our national edifice are being laid in times of peace; the invisible hand of Providence is in the tracing of our plans. Should we not, at the very inception of our great work, give some outward recognition of the Divine guidance that we feel? … Right throughout the ages we find this universal sense of Divine inspiration—this feeling, that a wisdom beyond that of man shapes the destiny of states; that the institutions of men are but the imperfect instruments of a Divine and beneficent energy, helping their higher aims.
His opponents disagreed with the need for recognition, but not (at least, publicly) with the theology of ultimate reliance. As Barton told the Adelaide Convention:

I do not want a motion of this kind if it can be avoided ... It is not with any feeling of irreverence that I say this, but because I think there are some occasions on which the invocation of the Deity is more reverently left out than made.70

The same view was strong in Melbourne, where a group led by Adye Douglas, President of the Tasmanian Legislative Council, feared that formal recognition would be counterproductive:

I should like to know what is the object honorable members have in view in desiring the inclusion of these words? Do these words convey to the public mind any particular idea that their insertion in the preamble of this bill would make us a religious people? ... Now, do not we all rely upon the blessing of Almighty God in our daily transactions? Certainly. But do we set forth that fact in all our letters and documents by which we communicate with one another? Certainly not ... I presume that I am ordinarily as religious as any member of this Convention, but I do not make a parade of it.71

A century later, the idea of ultimate dependence on God was put to the Canberra Convention by Ms Sowada, in her interpretation of the recognition clause as 'an expression of our dependence on God as creator and sustainer of all things'.72 However, no one in Canberra raised the nineteenth century counter-argument, that a sense of reliance on God belongs properly to individuals rather than the polity. No one's 'reverence' extended to an argument for excluding God.

The Preamble as a Prop to Faith

Glynn's support for a collective expression of faith certainly did not indicate any lack of concern for individual piety. On the contrary, he argued that the recognition clause would enhance the spiritual lives of individual citizens:

I speak not as one whose mind is braced beyond the measure of his neighbours by an adamantine faith, or any of those consolations that come from the larger hope. Say what we will, there are moments, short though
they may be, when the puzzle of life and destiny staggers the sense, when the shadow is cast and obscures the vision, and the best of us feel our weakness and loosening grip of the unseen. Then it is that the symbols of faith and reverence attest their power and efficacy, and brace the reeling spirit with a recovered sense of the breadth and continuity of man’s consciousness of an inscrutable Power ruling our lives.73

Not all his audience agreed that it is the Constitution’s job to buttress citizens’ faith. Douglas agreed with Higgins, Barton and others, that faith works only from the inside outwards:

What is the object of inserting these words? Is it to make the people believe that they will be more religious if the words are inserted? Shall we be more religious if we put them in? Will it have any effect whatever upon us? Why, it is all nonsense—a sham and a delusion—like many other things that have taken place here!74

Other exchanges reinforced the point. When Higgins expostulated that, ‘The Christian or religious observance is no good … unless it is the outcome of a man’s own character, and the outcome of a man’s own belief,’ Mr (later Sir) Josiah Symon interjected to agree: ‘You do not want to keep it always stuck up in the form of a sentence in your bathroom.’75

By the 1990s, expectations of a Preamble were more modest. No one any longer thought it would make people more religious, but there remained a sense that it could reflect their hopes or memories of faith. An example is Ms Holmes a Court’s wistful self-description as ‘a Christian who cannot take the step of believing in God and therefore is not allowed to be a Christian’, with its overtone of grieving for a lost faith. In a modern version of the New Testament cry, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief’,76 some of the 1998 enthusiasm for constitutional recognition might be paraphrased, ‘I can no longer believe; but I ask the nation to do for me what I cannot do for myself’. The recognition clause, then, is a collective statement whose virtue is the spiritual benefit it gives to individuals. Given the tentativeness of 1990s spiritual expectations, however, the forthright objections of Douglas, Higgins and Symon were no longer necessary. At least, no twentieth-century version was forthcoming.
A God Beyond the Counter

The final years of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have more in common than constitutional debate. Both were also periods of rapid globalisation, and of vigorous public discussion about its consequences. That perhaps explains another set of parallel recognition arguments. Glynn exhorted the Melbourne Convention:

In these days of too-often dying ideals, when thoughts that once would burn are chilled by the besetting touch of commonplace, when utility seems the measure of virtue, and the greater passions pale under the searching rays of reason; when affection, love, duty, the divine but reckless instincts of patriotism, have been expressed in the language of metaphysics, or become the subjects of mental pathology, when the ardour that fires our noblest aims is damped by a calculating cynicism, and the glow of poetry goes out before the glare of materialism; it is well that we should set in our Constitution something that may at times remind us of ideals beyond the counter, and of hopes that lift us higher than the vulgar realities of the day.

Glynn did not spell out why ‘it is well’ to be reminded of ideals ‘beyond the counter’, or what effects he hoped such inclusion would bring about. Nineteenth-century critics such as Douglas interpreted the goal as primarily individual—to ‘make people more religious’. Equally, one can interpret the aim collectively, as necessary to save political life from becoming dominated by a single set of goals (and ‘vulgar’ goals at that).

We have already seen the same idea motivating some of God’s twentieth century constitutional advocates. Mr Cleary’s view of God as an inspiringly ‘abstract value’ is one example. Another is Rev. Tim Costello’s argument that including God in the Preamble reminds Australians of something beyond the ‘crass materialism’ of an ‘economic bottom line’.

A Little Bit of God Won’t Hurt Anyone

In Melbourne, Glynn assured his audience that the recognition clause could embrace those of no religion. It was a phrase ‘in which faith may find a recommendation, and doubt discover no offence’. Indeed, at one point Glynn offered an interpretation even more tentative:
Let us then, in no spirit of Pharisaism—for we speak as much for others as for ourselves—fix in the Constitution, this mark of the Omnipotent, this stamp of the Eternal, this testimony of feeling, or it may be but of desire... 

Although he maintained his Adelaide opposition, Barton conceded in Melbourne that 'if such an amendment is to be made', the Melbourne form of words 'is the least objectionable which could be devised'.

The recognition clause's ultimate inoffensiveness was likewise a comfort to modern advocates. In March 1999, the Prime Minister produced a draft Preamble written in consultation with poet Les Murray, beginning 'With hope in God ...'. I asked Mr Murray what lay behind that choice of words. Echoing Glynn, he replied, 'Not everyone has faith, but most people can hope'.

Humbly Relying on Everyone's Gods

To sum up, each of the theological arguments in favour of recognition advanced at the Constitutional Conventions of the 1890s had a parallel at the 1998 Canberra Convention. A striking difference is in how the theological arguments were received. In the nineteenth century, each met a corresponding counter-argument. At the twentieth century Convention, none was contested. To understand why God's public acceptance had apparently risen as levels of reported faith declined, it is helpful to examine another significant theme in the 1998 Convention debates.

A number of speakers in 1998 were at pains to point out the greater multicultural inclusiveness of their Convention than of those a century earlier. Prime Minister John Howard's opening address set the tone:

Never before has this historic chamber received such a wonderfully diverse group of Australians ... It is a vastly different gathering from one of 100 years ago. There were no indigenous Australians at the convention of 1898; it was an all-male gathering; the names were overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic; and I am sure that no delegate was aged under 25.

Concern for multicultural inclusiveness pervaded Preamble-related debates at the 1998 Convention; it was the issue par excellence running through the
deliberations of all four working groups. The repeated reference to non-Christian religions in the 1998 debate about the recognition clause further sustains the impression of multiculturalism as a quintessentially 1990s concern.

Contrary to the impression given by 1998 speakers, however, the phrase 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' was not originally chosen without regard for non-Christians. The 1890s conventions deliberately eschewed formulations which were too recognisably Christian. Glynn, introducing his amendment in Melbourne, saw his clause as giving 'expression to the central fact of all our faiths'. Far from fostering Christian exclusivism, it could become a foundation for inter-religious harmony, in much the same way as that predicted by Archbishop Hollingworth and his Subgroup a century later.

Dr John Quick maintained:

... the words 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' could be subscribed to not only by Roman Catholics and Protestants, but also by Jews, Gentiles and even by Mahomedans. The words are most universal, and are not necessarily applicable only to Christians.

Moreover, the 1890s conventions included at least two members of a non-Christian religion. The inclusiveness of the nineteenth-century recognition clause was underlined by the fact that its supporters included a Jewish delegate, Mr (later, Sir) Isaac Isaacs. He did not speak on the clause, but voted in favour at Adelaide. The Melbourne Convention carried the recognition clause on the voices, so individual votes are not recorded; but when its successful version of the recognition clause was introduced into the colonial legislatures, Isaacs was its Victorian mover.

For all its celebration of inclusiveness, I have been able to identify only one member of a non-Christian religious tradition at the 1998 Constitutional Convention. No speaker on the recognition clause declared a connection with any non-Christian religion. Speakers in 1998 assumed that members of non-Christian religions would support some form of (perhaps expanded) recognition clause. Only one speaker offered any evidence about non-Christian religious reactions. Christian Democrat Mr Alasdair Webster drew on an eclectic range of anecdotal sources. His former life as Liberal
Member for Macquarie had given him access to a Buddhist authority: ‘I asked the Dalai Lama about this concept of Almighty God and he said, “At the end of the day it is the same supreme being.” Those were his words’. 

Mr Webster’s previous career provided the basis for a further inter-faith comparison. A member of the Aboriginal Affairs committee, he had:

Sat down in creek beds with Aboriginal leaders; I know many of them. I know that, when they talk of the great creator and the great spirit, they too equate in a measure—some varying degrees of measure, I suppose—with the Christian concept of Almighty God.

Mr Webster had also researched Muslim reactions:

I was getting a suit dry-cleaned at the Springwood dry-cleaners where my dry-cleaner is Bill, a very strict Moslem … Bill said, ‘Are you off to Canberra again?’ I said, ‘Yes.’ He said, ‘What are you doing?’ I said, I’m on the Constitutional Convention … [and] one of the things that I am going to be advocating is that we make sure that humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God remains in our preamble, because there are moves from some quarters to have it removed.’

What happened then was an explosion, as he jumped in the air, banged his ironing machine and steam went in all directions. He said, ‘How dare they take Almighty God from the Constitution. You tell them from Bill the dry-cleaner’—as he kept banging his steamer—‘your Moslem friend in Springwood, that I will be down to see them.’ Through the cloud of steam, I could see this name ‘Salman Rushdie’. I do not know why that flashed into my mind. I said to him, just to calm him down, ‘Look, Bill, don’t get steamed up. I’ll go down and press your point and iron out the problem.’ So I am here to say that the members of the Islamic faith, I am sure, do not have any problems with the whole concept of Almighty God.

His final instance of non-Christian religious support was historical:

The Jewish people expressed their view in the 1890s when it was proposed on the first occasion, and they agreed that the concept of Almighty God, humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God, would be quite acceptable to them.

In the absence of any further discussion, possible responses were not aired. For example, there was no discussion of the different strands of Buddhism,
only some of which speak in terms of a 'supreme being'. The varying political experiences of non-Christian migrants, leaving some communities suspicious of any association between religious and political authority, were likewise left unexplored. Multiculturalism featured in the 1998 recognition clause arguments less as a response to specific communities' stated concerns than as a general expression of the desire to be inclusive.

**Why Religious Inclusiveness Mattered to the Founders**

Although the nineteenth and twentieth century Conventions' advocacy of God's multifaith inclusiveness were in many respects parallel, the reasons behind the arguments reflect different priorities. Before Federation, and especially at Melbourne, the concern for 'religious toleration' was supplemented by fear of judicial activism. Delegates were anxious to avoid any implication that Australia had a Christian Constitution because of fear of what future courts might make of such an implication. Henry Higgins warned the Melbourne Convention about a Supreme Court decision in 1892 that the United States was a Christian country. That decision had provided sufficient foundation, four months later, for a heavily-lobbied Congress to enforce Sunday closing on the Chicago Exhibition.91

That the court had managed to make such a finding even without a recognition clause in the US Constitution should make delegates think twice about burdening Australia with a careless phrase which might enable similar decisions:

I should have thought that it was not within the scope of Congress to pass a law, no matter how righteous, to close the exhibition on Sunday, but I find, on looking to a number of decisions in the United States, that it has been held again and again that, because of certain expressions, words, and phrases used in the Constitution, inferential powers are conferred upon the Congress that go beyond any dreams we have at present.92

Sir John Downer's speech, from which Archbishop Hollingworth quoted in the 1998 Convention, underscores Higgins's warning:

I do not know whether it has occurred to honorable members that the Christian religion is a portion of the English Constitution without any decision on the subject at all. It is part of the law of England which I
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should think we undoubtedly brought with us when we settled in these colonies. Therefore, I think we begin at the stage at which the Americans were doubtful, without the insertion of the words at all, and I would suggest to Mr. Higgins to seriously consider whether it will not be necessary to insert words distinctly limiting the Commonwealth's powers... because the Commonwealth will be from its first stage a Christian Commonwealth, and, unless its powers are expressly limited, may legislate on religious questions in a way that we now little dream of.93

Quick's assertion that the recognition clause could be 'subscribed to by Jews, Gentiles and even by Mahomedans' was to reassure delegates that 'I do not see ... how the insertion of such words could possibly lead to the interpretation that this is necessarily a Christian country'.94 He scoffed at the idea that 'the mere recital in respect to the Deity in the preamble' could 'confer on the Federal Parliament power to legislate on any religious matter'.95 However, Quick's reassurance that the recognition clause is irrelevant to the separation between church and state loses some of its persuasiveness if compared with Glynn's Adelaide speech. Glynn cited what he saw as the close association between church and state as a reason for including the recognition clause. More damagingly still, he specifically invoked the touchy topic of Sunday observance.96

With a century and more between ourselves and the Australian founders, it may be hard to recall why the professedly devout were so cautious about official expressions of devotion. Even more, it might strike us as ironic that the recognition clause was rejected in the 'city of churches'.97 Yet Adelaide offers an answer to both riddles. That the recognition clause was first proposed in a city famous for its devotion is, of course, a coincidence; but Adelaide epitomises a particular kind of piety. Then as now, South Australia is a demographic exception to the national pattern, with unusually small numbers of the Anglicans and Roman Catholics, who predominate elsewhere. Instead, South Australia has unusually high representation of 'Dissenting' churches.98 Disenfranchised from the established churches of their home countries, South Australia's Federation delegates were within one generation of a situation where:

Principled Dissenters [in England] refused to accept nomination to public office, resenting the unwarranted retention of laws that not only denied
them the full rights of citizenship, but also linked them with knaves and fools as unfit to serve the state.99

Still greater obstacles stood in the way of full citizenship for Roman Catholics, especially clergy (who could not, for example, sit in Parliament.)100

The civil sphere was, if anything, more restricted than the political. Oxford and Cambridge graduates had to subscribe to the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles, severely limiting university opportunities for non-Anglicans. Indeed, this civil restriction carried a more directly political overtone due to the institution of 'university constituencies', whereby Oxford and Cambridge graduates (gradually extended to a number of other universities during the course of the nineteenth century) were allowed an additional vote for the House of Commons.101 While religion was plainly not the only, or even the most significant factor in this electoral inequality, as a consequence of educational privilege it added one more layer to the disadvantages faced by non-Anglicans. Birth registration required Anglican baptism; without it, 'individuals risked the loss of their just inheritance and whole families occasionally stood in danger of bastardy'.102 Marriages in Dissenting churches were not legally recognised: 'against the dictates of conscience', Dissenters 'were obliged to join in the ritual and pay the surplice fees of some Anglican church'.103 Burial in the parish cemetery required an Anglican funeral. Civil disabilities and violations of conscience spilled over into financial drain, as dissenters had not only to provide for their own churches but also to pay the established church's church rates and tithes.104

By the time of the Australasian Conventions, some of these disabilities were still in force in the mother country and others remained in living memory. The possibility that a Parliament not expressly prevented from doing so might, at some future time, take upon itself the passing of 'religious laws' was never far from delegates' minds. The fervour of some evangelicals for 'Sabbath observance' was a particular warning here,105 reinforced, in the Melbourne debate, by the lessons which Higgins drew from the Chicago Exhibition.
The greatest fear of Sunday observance laws came from Seventh Day Adventists, who, for reasons both economic and theological, wanted to keep the right not only to rest on Saturdays, but also to work on Sundays. They therefore spearheaded the opposition to the recognition clause, with a newspaper and petition campaigns dedicated to promoting the separation of church and state. The other substantial group one might have expected to share their concern did not do so. Isaacs' support for the recognition clause, at both Adelaide and Melbourne Conventions and in the Victorian Parliament, and the involvement of some rabbis in the popular pro-recognition movement, are indications that Jews did not regard compulsory Sunday closing with the same abhorrence. Ely attributes this to the difference between the economic pressure which an additional day's rest would entail for working- and lower-middle-class Adventists as compared with generally upper-middle-class Jews. We may also seek some explanation in the recognition that 'it is not easy to be a Jew and not very safe'. The historical tendency for Australian Jews has been to foster active participation in public life and a vibrant Jewish identity, while at the same time being reluctant to confront the dominant culture head-on over such matters as Sabbath observance. These two groups, then, exemplify possible minority religious attitudes to the recognition clause. The poorer Adventists sensed imminent economic and social marginalisation from a society in which they had achieved a tenuous hold. The economically safer but more socially precarious Jews welcomed the clause as Glynn's 'pledge of religious toleration'.

To emphasise the founders' concern about religious laws is not to say that concern for religious diversity per se was absent from the 1890s debates. It is most clearly seen in the arguments of those, like Douglas, who took issue with Quick:

Dr. Quick says we all have some religious views, and even Hindoos and Mahomedans—although I presume there are very few Mahomedans here—even religious Hindoos and religious Mahomedans would not apply the words of this amendment in the same sense as we apply them, nor are they applied in the same sense by Christians of one character and Christians of another. And we know that there are at least about 120 different descriptions of Christians, and, it may be, many more. The insertion of these words would be a mockery.
However, the founders' overriding concern that the recognition clause should not be interpretable as exclusively Christian was because, the more sectarian its interpretation, the greater the potential it opened for divisive religious laws.

Why Religious Inclusiveness Mattered in 1998

The fear of judicial activism which motivated the founders had certainly not abated by 1998, as the debate over inclusion of 'abstract values' such as 'equality' and 'democracy' demonstrates. However, religious laws were not at the forefront of Canberra delegates' concerns. In their place, multiculturalism rings through the 1990s debates with unmistakable urgency.

In addition to the speeches at the 1998 Convention, another source of information about how late-twentieth-century Australians regarded multiculturalism in relation to constitutional reform is responses to the Constitutional Centenary Foundation's 'Preamble Quest'. The Foundation invited comments on each of the Constitutional Convention's Preamble recommendations, and published the results as 'We the People of Australia …': Ideas For a New Preamble to the Australian Constitution. With 269 of the 383 respondents addressing it, the inclusion of 'Almighty God' achieved the third-highest response rate, after the 278 who addressed the recommendation on recognising cultural diversity and 273 who discussed the phrase 'We the people of Australia'. The Foundation reported that 'Most … supported the inclusion of a reference to "Almighty God" in the preamble, in many cases very strongly'.

Nonetheless, 44 respondents opposed the phrase, making it, in the Quest compilers' eyes, 'one of the most controversial proposals'. However, a look at the reported reasons suggests an alternative reading. Arguments which were counted by the Quest compilers as opposing 'Almighty God' included such views as:

The reference to 'Almighty God' is too specific to the Christian religion and therefore is inappropriate, given the variety of religious beliefs in modern Australia and the proportion of non-believers. There is potential for a conflict with a reference in the preamble to cultural diversity.
Further evidence that the Quest respondents' passion was not against recognition per se comes from the detail of their replies. The compilers report an eclectic array of suggested alternative credal formulae, including 'The Great Spirit', 'Creator of All', 'Master of All Things' and 'A God who loves all, no matter what race, colour, religion or gender'. One, whose response the Quest organisers listed with those opposing recognition, advised the drafters to 'Balance the reference to Almighty God with a reference to religious tolerance'. Others in the 'opponents' category were paraphrased as: 'Omit the word 'Almighty'. It is too specific; it is a bit churchy/hackneyed/archaic'.

Overall, then, the reported relatively high number of objections masks the fact that a good proportion came from people who had no quarrel with mentioning the divine, but, like some 1998 Convention-goers, found the specific phrase ' Almighty God' inappropriate. The suggestions and alternatives from the Preamble Quest exercise, like the respondents' arguments against God's inclusion and the debate at the 1998 Convention, indicate the importance of multicultural sensitivity for late-twentieth-century feelings about the recognition clause.

The evidence of multicultural inclusiveness as a major concern in late-twentieth-century recognition debates suggests that the conundrum of God's increasing constitutional acceptability with increasing secularisation is best explained by a shift in what 'God' signifies. In the nineteenth century, a groundswell of public passion supported both advocates of the recognition clause and advocates of separation between church and state. For both, 'God' was the object of widespread religious practice, overwhelmingly Christian. A century later, the weight of opinion in favour of God's inclusion came from people who thought that God's inclusion was what other people wanted. Those who opposed God's inclusion were likely to do so less on grounds related to their own beliefs than because they feared it violated the beliefs of others. Thus, the only voice raised for the inclusion of 'people who may be atheist' came from a self-professed Christian: those atheists who spoke were at pains to demonstrate their own openness to including others' God. The main theological picture emerging from recognition's modern defenders is of 'God' as a 'collective representation' (to
borrow Durkheim's phrase) for the principle of inclusivity underlying their
vision of a cosmopolitan, welcoming Australia.

In 1998, Frank Sulloway and Michael Shermer asked a sample of
Americans whether they believed in God, why they believed in God (if they
did), and why they thought other people believed. They found a substantial
difference between the reasons people gave for their own faith and the
reasons they attributed to others. They propose an 'intellectual attribution
bias' in which 'we consider our own actions as being rationally motivated,
whereas we see those of others as emotionally driven'.115 I suggest that the
heightened sensitivity to others' beliefs in the Preamble debate at the turn
of the twenty-first century reveals a comparable 'tolerance attribution bias'.
'We' may or may not have strong religious convictions, but 'we' can live with
or without constitutional recognition of those convictions. However, we
know that 'others' are religiously passionate. Moreover, 'we' expect those
'others' to be less accommodating than 'we' are. 'Our' convictions (theistic or
atheistic) can make room for a God whom most of us either do not believe in
or do not feel strongly about, because we know how strongly those 'others'
feel. The Preamble debate suggests that, in Australia at the turn of the
twenty-first century, religion is a serious topic deserving consideration and
respect. By and large, however, Australians regard religious passion as
something that other people have.

In a society in which soul-searching about its social and ethnic diversity
was arguably the dominant intellectual trend of the preceding decades,116
God's inclusion in the mooted Preamble became an opportunity for
Australians to demonstrate their mutual openness to one another's values.
Lacking specific theological reference, the Convention's 'generic' God is a
gift from all to all.

To say so is not to attribute disingenuousness to recognition's secular, or
even atheistic, defenders. Theorists of religion have long observed that the
language of the sacred breaks into the everyday at times of social crisis or
uncertainty, when people are borne along by a sense of a bigger reality,
driving them beyond the constraints of the everyday. Durkheim terms that
sense 'effervescence', and associates it with 'revolutionary or creative
epochs' when 'some great collective shock' produces intensified social
interactions. To Durkheim, such periods produce in those who live through them 'mental processes' identical to those 'that are also at the root of religion'—so much so, that 'the individuals themselves have often pictured the pressure before which they thus gave way in a distinctively religious form'. The moment becomes infused with a sense of the sacred which arises out of that intensified sociality.

Canberra delegates came together to consider nothing less than the abandonment of royalty, to whom everything was once pledged, and the acceptance of a new independence. They pondered a future Constitution at the close of a decade which had seen the intensively-discussed polarisation of Australian electorates between the urban, cosmopolitan advocates of multiculturalism and increasingly alienated rural poor; the rise of Hansonism and the softly-softly response from the government 'for all of us'; and the Stolen Generation inquiry and the ten-year labours of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. In one earnest radio discussion and newspaper column after another, in a flurry of academic and popular books and conferences and, in different ways, in the rhetoric of the major political parties, the 1990s quest for 'national identity' had become summed up as the quest for a future in which difference need not mean division. Despite its carefully-minimalist form, the republican debate came to stand in some measure for all of these dynamics. Behind the national canvas, the bigger background was intensified globalisation, throwing into question even the concept of the nation. Although the Canberra Constitutional Convention lasted only a fortnight, its bringing-together of these disparate strands in the national consciousness provided a symbolic intensification of sociality when, in Durkheim's phrase, people 'look for each other ... more than ever'.

Kinds of 'collective shock' which Durkheim had in mind are more cataclysmic than a proposed transition to a republican Constitution: he gives the Crusades and the French Revolution as examples of periods when, 'under the influence of the general exaltation, we see the most mediocre and inoffensive bourgeois become either a hero or a butcher'. His theory of effervescence, although it extends to the sense of the sacred within the every day, takes us only some of the way towards understanding the ways in which a large proportion of the God-language at the Canberra
Convention became harnessed to ideas of interfaith and multicultural inclusiveness. We can go further by turning to another landmark theorist of religion, Victor Turner.

Studying ritual, Turner adopts the idea of liminality from a near-contemporary of Durkheim, Arnold van Gennep. Liminality, in van Gennep’s ethnography, is the condition a devotee enters during a rite of passage. The person leaves behind their old social identity (for example, as a child), in order to be reintegrated into society in a new identity (among others as an adult). During the rite, however, and perhaps during a longer period surrounding it, the person is neither one thing nor the other. He or she does not fit into the usual social order; the usual rules do not apply. People who enter such a state together typically develop strong ties among themselves, with differences of rank, sex or other hierarchising principles likely to be forgotten in the sense of unity engendered by their common ritual ‘outsideness’.

Turner extends van Gennep’s category of the liminality from a period in individuals’ lives. For Turner, it includes stages in the collective life of a society—for example, at times of crisis or transition. Additionally, it describes the permanent state of some parts of the society. As examples of the latter he proposes, among other examples, monastic mendicants, hippies (he was writing in 1966) and court jesters. What these various liminal elements have in common is their falling outside, and in some respects running counter to, normal social organisation: ‘They are persons or principles that (1) fall in the interstices of social structure, (2) are on its margins or (3) occupy its lowest rungs’.120 Like those in the in-between stage of a rite of passage, they share the countercultural, egalitarian intensification of affective, non-hierarchical ties typical of those in the liminal state. That sense of egalitarian communalism further differentiates them from the hierarchically-ordered society to which they nevertheless still belong.

Turner gives this sense of intensified sociality the name ‘communitas’. It cannot be understood apart from social structure: it represents, he says, one of ‘two major models for human interrelatedness’. The second, juxtaposed to
communitas and alternating with it throughout the dynamics of any society, is:

Society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less'.^{121}

Structure and communitas are opposite sides of the same coin; neither can exist without the other. Communitas needs structure to define itself against. Structure needs communitas, and the liminality out of which it emerges, as (among other things) a source of the ideas and feelings which validate the status quo. Ideas and feelings of 'the sacred' are one such means of validation. They arise out of liminality, in settings of communitas, but are readily carried over into hierarchically-ordered everyday life. There, as Durkheim pointed out, ideas and feelings of the sacred readily attach to the structures and institutions which sustain social order, giving them an aura of inevitability and inviolability. For Turner, communitas is 'structurally inferior'; but, 'morally and ritually', it is 'superior', because what looks like 'secular weakness' is in fact the source of 'sacred power' on which secular order partly relies.^{122}

Turner's account is helpful in at least two ways for understanding God's welcome at the 1998 Constitutional Convention. Most directly, we can see the Convention itself as a liminal stage in Australian nationhood. It marked, provisionally, a national rite of passage, out of monarchy and into a republican future. That the story has not yet turned out like that need not disrupt the interpretation: as a later critic of Turner has pointed out, not all ritual players are able to control their own scripts to produce the seamless social drama his theory describes, but the fact that the script is not followed does not reduce its power as a ritual blueprint.^{123}

One of the features which Turner finds in liminal states is embrace of the other. A radical sense of community arises out of radical appreciation of difference. Turner borrows the words of existentialist philosopher Martin Buber: 'Only when I have to do with another essentially, that is, in such a way that he is no longer a phenomenon of my I but instead is my Thou, do I experience reality of speech with another—in the irrefragable genuineness of mutuality'.^{124} From that appreciation comes collective identity which
Buber calls the 'essential We', so that 'the We includes the Thou'. The We, in other words, is:

a community of several independent persons who have a self and self-responsibility ... Only men who are truly capable of saying Thou to one another can truly say We with one another.125

The Canberra Convention's efforts at 'saying Thou to' those of different religious traditions, however superficial the actual representation of those different traditions, fits Turner's view of liminality. The experience of communitas finds expression in religious terms: language of the sacred is an important route by which liminality breaks into, and finds expression within, structure.126

Turner's more metaphorical use of liminality, as those elements which 'fall in the interstices of social structure' or are marginalised from it, offers another level of explanation for the upsurge of the sacred in Canberra. Turner was writing, for the most part, about deeply religious societies. He imagined liminal glimpses of the sacred being carried into, and institutionalised within, structure. That picture fits quite well the setting of Australia at Federation: the founders, at the end of the nineteenth century, represented a people in the liminal state between colony and nation. To them, God was a transcendent being, looking down on their emerging structure. Entering the Constitution in the liminal neither-one-thing-nor-the-other stage of Federation, this God bore ideas of togetherness and cohesion, but also formed a bridge through which the stability of structure could survive the liminal period and be reintegrated in the new structure which the founders would produce.

In secular Australia at the turn of the twenty-first century, by contrast, the language of the sacred is itself liminal, in the sense of marginalised or existing in the interstices of structure. As such, its importance in the 1998 recognition debates can be seen on two levels: first, as a means for expressing the emerging sense of communitas as the nation entered the ritual process of a rite of passage; second, as the expression of that liminality itself.
The Rise of God and Decline of Politics

As well as the theological arguments canvassed above, delegates to the 1890s Conventions heard a range of political and civic arguments in favour of God’s constitutional recognition. Each was met by a corresponding—and, frequently, more coherent and articulate—argument against. Political and civic arguments for God achieved less airtime in 1998 than they had a century earlier; and the preceding century’s counter-arguments did not feature at all. Consequently, to find out how this aspect of the founders’ concerns resonated in twentieth-century Australia, it is necessary to look beyond the pages of Canberra’s proceedings. Activities of the Centenary of Federation Foundation provide a window onto public reactions; comments by Senators and Members add another dimension.

Populism

A large part of the recognition clause’s Melbourne success is attributable to effective marshalling of public opinion. The energy of petitions, votes from colonial legislatures and public meetings suggested to delegates that a timely appeal to populism might help get the Federation bill over the line. Glynn offered objectors the compensation that God’s inclusion ‘will, I think, recommend the Constitution to thousands to whom the rest of its provisions may for ever be a sealed book’.128

William Lyne was similarly instrumentalist:

I recognise this fact—that the insertion of this amendment will assist very materially in the acceptance of the Constitution. It may be, and probably is, a matter of sentiment—I suppose none of us pretend to be actuated on a question of this kind other than by sentiment—but I feel convinced that the insertion of this amendment in the preamble will influence a large number of votes in favour of this Federation Bill.129

The line between populism and democracy is always debatable. Quick argued for inclusion out of respect for popular sentiment, without attributing to the clause’s non-elite supporters the ignorance that Glynn proclaimed or Lyne implied:
I hope that after due consideration, and in face of the strong recommendations of all the Parliaments of Australia, and the numerous and influential petitions which have been presented to the Convention by the inhabitants of Australia, honorable members will give more respect to the Parliaments and people of Australia than to the warning held out by Mr. Higgins.¹³⁰

In both his Adelaide and Melbourne speeches introducing the amendment, Glynn explained his support as resulting first of all from the tide of petitions in favour of ‘recognition’. Despite the eloquence with which he had promoted the idea, Glynn eventually distanced himself from the amendment in Adelaide, offering to withdraw it on the grounds that:

I have done my duty in having, at the request, reflected by these petitions, of a very large body outside this Convention, and of members of this Convention …, brought forward this resolution … I did not act on personal initiative in bringing this matter forward, but wished not to pass over in pure silence the numerous petitions regarding this question which have been presented to the Convention.¹³¹

Perhaps more sensitive to the impression such admissions might create, Barton declared himself ‘quite sure’ that no ‘hon. member of this Convention’ would support the clause merely ‘to conciliate the support of any denomination or any class’.¹³²

If his colleagues’ speeches did not entirely bear out this benign interpretation, their successors a century later did not bring any populist justification to the Convention floor. Comments out of the public arena, however, suggest that it still exerted an attraction for those at the mercy of public opinion. For example, former South Australian Senator John Quirke recalled:

Some atheists, like me, voted with God. The preamble is peripheral, so I thought, let’s just get on with it. If you lose the Preamble, or have a big fight over it, the republic will be lost. God is not an issue, the republic is.¹³³

This reflected the ALP’s overall stance on the Preamble. After the Coalition-Democrat draft was announced, the ALP resolved to support a Yes vote, as the most likely to help the Republic question to victory. However, aiming to
focus the energies of the Labor Party on maximising the vote for an Australian Republic', the Caucus recommended that 'no resources of the Party should be diverted from the campaign for a Republic to the campaign on the Preamble',\(^{134}\) which it saw as 'an unsatisfactory document'.\(^{135}\) Unlike the Coalition parties, Labor Senators and Members reported a 'heated argument' before Caucus agreed to let God remain unchallenged; but the argument by and large remained within the party room. That the Party's resolution did not address the reservations of those, like South Australian Senator Chris Schacht, who wished to see God removed\(^{136}\) suggests widespread assent to the populist ground for including God.

The same idea was present on the Coalition side. Liberal Member for Hindmarsh Ms Chris Gallus, a founder of the small-l liberal John Stuart Mill Society who differentiates herself from the Christians within her party (‘they come from a particular group, but I don’t see myself as belonging to any group’) found the populist argument persuasive:

I voted for God at ConCon. Lots of people want it there and there's no good argument for leaving it out.\(^{137}\)

At least one respondent to the Centenary Foundation’s Preamble Quest agreed: 'God should be included for pragmatic reasons, because otherwise there would be too much opposition to the preamble'.\(^{138}\)

**Relationship Between Church and State**

Glynn’s speeches at Adelaide and Melbourne emphasised links between Church and State, even in the absence of formal establishment. The historical association with English law, the role of the church in coronation, the references to Christianity in daily formalities, all became reasons to put God in the fledgling Constitution.

However, there was also a substantial body of opposition, led, in Adelaide, by Barton:

The whole mode of government, the whole province of the State, is secular. The whole business that is transacted by any community—however deeply Christian, unless it has an established church, unless religion is interwoven expressly and professedly with all its actions—is secular
business as distinguished from religious business. The whole duty is to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's ... In these colonies, this line of demarcation is most definitely observed, and there is no justification for inserting into your secular documents of State provisions or expressions which refer to matters best dealt with by the churches, and which every righteous citizen will deal with in his church and at his time of worship.139

He put the same view in Melbourne, where Douglas picked it up:

I sincerely and truthfully believe in the Almighty Power, but I do not wish to introduce any reference to that Power in the preamble to this Bill ... I do not think it is a matter in which, in a community like ours, a body like this Convention, which has been brought here for a particular purpose, should interfere. We should be travelling out of the range of the purpose for which we were sent here by inserting such words in the preamble to this Bill.140

A century on, separationist arguments of the kind put forward by Barton, Douglas and others141 were rarely raised. None emerged in the 1998 Convention. In the mass media, around the time of the Convention and during leading up to the referendum, when the inclusion of God was discussed at all, it tended to be assumed that support is coextensive with religious commitment.142 Rare exceptions emerged only once the Prime Minister had announced the shape of his draft Preamble. One such belated murmur came from The Australian newspaper, whose religious affairs commentator, Father James Murray, argued that 'in a safely secular democracy, such a proposal ... threatens the neutrality of the State on religious matters'.143 A week later, another columnist, Frank Devine, went further, not only fearing that the Howard Preamble would make God 'a patron of official State positions', but chillingly comparing it with the religious freedom provisions 'in the 1924 constitution of the Soviet Union'.144 Consistently wary of 'trendy' or 'politically correct' religious social justice advocacy, Devine worried that Constitutional recognition would lend credibility to churches' 'babble of political pieties, pop psychology and fashionable prejudice'. It might embolden:

clergy and members of religious orders who shamelessly use their positions to give a semblance of authority to expressions of personal
opinion about secular matters such as taxation policy and childcare subsidies, not to mention the foreign policy of Israel.\textsuperscript{145}

However, Devine and Murray were separationist voices in a media wilderness.

One possible explanation for the lack of 1990s separationist passion is that the issue is thought to be resolved by s. 116 of the Constitution, which prohibits the Commonwealth from (among other things) establishing any religion. (I discuss s. 116 in more detail in chapter three.) Separation remained a living issue for the founders inasmuch as, on Ely's account, many regarded what became s. 116 as a trade-off for the recognition clause, a way of ensuring that recognition could not be taken by future courts to justify religious laws. By their centenary, s. 116 might be held to have become such a part of our constitutional furniture that explicitly separationist concerns are not longer justified.

Further insight into the low overt interest in religion-state separation in 1990s Australia comes from the comments of past and present Senators and Members. When asked for their opinions about mentioning God in the Preamble, few referred to the separationist argument. However, there is one characteristic shared by a large proportion of those who did which casts some light on the wider 1990s indifference to separationist concerns. In contrast to the media stereotype in which support for recognition goes with religious commitment, most of those who expressed separationist reservations about God's inclusion described themselves as practising Christians. For example, former Liberal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Fred Chaney, a Roman Catholic, feared that recognition compromises the state's independence.\textsuperscript{146} Ms Kathy Sullivan's commitment to church-state separation informed her view that putting God in the Preamble is 'just too hard'. Anglican former Senator Chris Puplick appealed to his theologically-based commitment to democracy to argue that 'political documents should not claim any other legitimacy than the will of the people'.\textsuperscript{148} This pattern mirrors that in the nineteenth century, when separationist sentiment was similarly to be found less in the hearts of nervous secularists than among the actively religious. The few modern separationists' answers on the recognition clause suggest that their own religious commitments leave them unusually sensitive to the possibility
that any too-close association between religion and state risks excluding or marginalising those whose religion fits neither the state-preferred model nor a comfortable irreligion.

None of the modern separationists regarded the issue of church-state separation as looming large in public consciousness. Mr Chaney, Ms Sullivan and Mr Puplick all couched their answers as the result of their own reflection rather than as a response to public concern. Moreover, these politically liberal, theologically and philosophically self-conscious separationists arguably represent a fading Jeffersonian strand in contemporary politics. Mr Puplick left Parliament in 1990, Mr Chaney in 1993. In February 2000, Ms Sullivan, who entered Parliament in 1974, announced her intention to retire at the next election. Recent Parliamentary arrivals were likely to find the issue more ambiguous than the departing liberals. For example, ALP Member for Griffith and committed Anglican Mr Kevin Rudd entered Parliament at the 1998 election, just in time for the republic referendum debates:

I found myself genuinely internally divided on the question of a reference to God in the Constitutional preamble. I'm a Jeffersonian with respect to the secularity of the state, and the role of Constitutions within the state, and therefore I do have a problem just with the establishment of the church, which fortunately the founding fathers saw fit not to do, though I probably also have something of a problem with assertion of deity—let alone 'the Deity', or 'a Deity'—in the Constitution. However, I've not reached finality in my intellectual struggle with that, knowing where most of the church comes from—it is a so-called Christian country, so why not refer to the Commander-in-Chief in our organisation? 

Only one sitting Member raised church-state separation as a concern in the electorate. Dr Carmen Lawrence raised the issue as having been put to her by Christian constituents, among others.

In contrast to those who wanted God left out of the Preamble to preserve church-state separation, Dr Baden Teague argued that that separation is best achieved by putting God in. An Anglican lay preacher with a PhD in the history of ideas, he is no stranger to rumination on the relationship between religion and the state. 'God', for him, encapsulates ideas such as
'an unwritten tradition of justice, and an ageless commitment to the land—areas Parliaments must not invade'.

Separationist arguments’ absence from the 1998 Convention and the little interest they raised in the media and elsewhere suggest that their importance had diminished substantially since Federation.

Fear of Divisive Religion

At the Canberra Convention, Archbishop Hollingworth attributed the idea that religion is divisive to ‘a small minority of non-believers’. Historically, however, the idea that state recognition of religion intensifies sectarian divisions and fuels civil strife has been at least as regularly articulated by believers. The nineteenth-century Conventions were no exception. Again, Barton and Douglas made the running. Barton feared the damage which religious division could wreak on a newly-federated polity. In Adelaide, he warned:

> We ought to avoid a long debate, and have no division. The best plan which can be adopted as to a proposal of this kind, which is so likely to create dissension foreign to the objects of any church, or any Christian community, is that secular expressions should be left to secular matters while prayer should be left in its proper place.

In Melbourne, he extended his concern to the potential damage to the delegates’ own cohesion:

> For myself, I hope I have not introduced a word which would enable any one to say that I have dealt with this matter in any factious or party spirit, and any idea of faction or party must be eliminated from the proceedings.

While continuing to oppose the recognition clause, he promised ‘that I shall recognise the good intentions and high motives by which those who seek to introduce a declaration of this kind into the Constitution are actuated’.

Douglas feared harm to the cause of religion itself:

> Nothing can make religion more ridiculous than to have the form without the substance ... We are asked to put in words which would create
difficulty, annoyance, and vexation, and instead of doing good would do harm.\textsuperscript{157}

By Melbourne, he had become, if anything, more scathing:

A man's actions and not his words denote what he is, and hypocrites in religious circles do more harm to religion than is done by persons outside religious circles. I oppose this amendment because I believe it will minister to hypocrisy to put these words in the Bill.\textsuperscript{158}

Among late twentieth century Senators and Members, many believers shared Archbishop Hollingworth's view that the ship of state need fear no religious tossing. However, those who did put forward arguments that 'religion is a divisive force' were more likely to be believers than non-believers. Ms Sullivan concluded that any mention of God in a predominantly Christian society would be read as the God of Christianity. If it could be there but not prescriptively Christian, I'd like that, because society needs a moral structure. But I think it's just too hard—it's better not to have it there at all than to cause division.\textsuperscript{159} Labor Senator Barney Cooney agreed. As a practising Roman Catholic, he was personally happy to see God in the Preamble; but, as a matter of principle, God should be left out because the proposed form of words 'gives precedence to one position and could be interpreted as exclusive', whereas 'the Constitution should reflect national diversity'. He mused that 'Almighty Being' might be sufficiently open.\textsuperscript{160}

The small number of self-described atheists and agnostics who argued against God's inclusion often drew on theologically-informed reasoning. For example, self-described 'non-theist'\textsuperscript{161} Dr Carmen Lawrence quoted Christian constituents in support of her objection to the government's use of the phrase:

\begin{quote}
MM: Should God be in the Preamble?

DR LAWRENCE: No—and many Christians tell me no: … They say, 'I believe in a God, but not theirs!'\textsuperscript{162}
\end{quote}

Mr Anthony Albanese, ALP Member for Grayndler (NSW), was raised as a Roman Catholic—'I even used to be an altar boy'—but no longer regards himself as a believer. However, he did not stop taking religion seriously
when he stopped swinging a censer. Mr Albanese pointed out that 'Australia is no longer Christian. Buddhism is the fastest growing religion. Politics should reflect that [diversity], it shouldn't just reflect one view'. Mr Albanese spoke of the Christian God as an immigrant to Australia:

A whole section of society doesn't believe in God ... And when you get into it, the more technical thing of whose god, which god. Was there no God here before white people came? ... The draft Preamble was clearly talking about a God who came on the boat in 1788.163

Another Labor ex-Catholic, Mr Sid Sidebottom, Member for Braddon (Tas), reached the seminary before lapsing. He was willing to concede that the Preamble's invocation of God need not mean the Christian God. 'You might as well stick in Buddha or the Rainbow Serpent. It doesn’t mean the Christian God, it means transcendent being.' However, in a society where the dominant religious frame of reference is Christian, it is difficult to avoid the phrase being read with a Christian spin. Consequently, Mr Sidebottom concluded, 'I don't like it'. As a teacher, he spent years promoting cross-cultural study of religion in Tasmanian schools; as a politician, he was worried by a phrase which, although technically inclusive, was likely in practice to exclude many non-Christians.164

For some, the problem went deeper than the need for a more general term. Mr Brian Howe retired as Member for Batman, (Vic.) and Deputy Prime Minister in 1996, and at the time of writing is a Professorial Fellow at the University of Melbourne's Centre for Public Policy. He also retains his status as a Uniting Church Minister. For him, Constitutional 'recognition' posed the unsatisfying choice between a God so specific as to be exclusive or so general as to be vacuous.165

Similar reservations about any quest for a 'generic' God were raised by two newspaper commentators, after the government’s draft Preamble was released. Frank Devine feared that the 'woosiness' of 'with hope in God' was 'an affront to believers'.166 The Sydney Morning Herald's religious affairs writer, Chris McGillion, provided a rare public rejection of the idea that 'God' is a concept accessible to members of all religions:
How can Howard and Beazley confidently assume these people would have no objection to the inclusion of God in the preamble to their Constitution? By diluting the meaning of God, that’s how.\footnote{167} For McGillion, dilution is dangerous:

Even the Rev. Tim Costello conceded this was as much as might be expected when he said recently that ‘God’ was a general term that ‘reminds us that democracy and life is still fragile and contingent on transcendental sources of wisdom’. Transcendental sources of wisdom. Would they include the oracle at Delphi or the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh?\footnote{168}

In general, then, 1890s theological arguments in favour of God’s preambular recognition had surprisingly close parallels in the secularised 1990s, refracted through the lens of a heightened concern for multicultural inclusiveness. By contrast, the founders’ arguments against God’s inclusion, whether theological or political, seemed, by 1998, either to have evaporated altogether, or to have become the concern of a small minority.

Moreover, the 1990s saw the appearance of a new political justification for God’s inclusion, which suggests further attrition of the theological and political categories which framed the 1890s debates.

‘But You Have Made Us a Little Lower Than the Angels’: God and Republican Consciousness

At a time of constitutional revision, we might expect the classically republican theme of the mutual independence of church and state to come to the fore. Not only did it not do so, but the 1998 Convention accepted, with apparent equanimity, a view which ran blithely against one major stream through at least three centuries of republican thought. In the Subgroup (ii) report to the Canberra Convention, the recognition clause legitimated a hierarchical view of political authority with God at the top (‘the Divinity as the source of all power’). Indeed, this justification was not only propounded in the report, but incorporated into the wording of the motion itself. The point was picked up by Ms Sowada’s further argument that the recognition clause expresses ‘our dependence on God … as the one under whom all authority is established’\footnote{169}. For Ms Sowada:
Keeping God in our Constitution is ultimately an expression of the fact that those who govern us are accountable for their actions to someone other than themselves.\textsuperscript{170}

Her remarks were typical of a group of speakers who emphasised the importance of retaining God at the apex of the political structure, so as to keep politicians in check. Former Senator Baden Teague found that reason for including God to be 'very good, very Australian' and mirroring arguments of his own: 'I always supported opening Parliament with prayer. It's a way of saying this Parliament isn't the beginning and end of anything, we're part of the process.'\textsuperscript{171} The feeling extends beyond the Convention, and is shared by opponents of Dr Teague's and Ms Sowada's republicanism. For example, to Mr Ross Cameron, the Liberal and monarchist\textsuperscript{172} Member for Parramatta (NSW), 'it is good for politicians to accept that they are subordinate to a higher power'.\textsuperscript{173}

The justification is more instrumental than theological: civil life will go better if those at the top of the political structure do not see themselves as the chain of being’s topmost link. It has a striking consequence. The claim that God is needed to provide something 'higher' than politicians implies that, without God, there would be nothing 'higher' than politicians.

This argument about political hubris was not made at the 1890s conventions, and does not feature in Ely’s detailed survey of newspaper debate and church opinion at the time. Moreover, the minimalist recognition clause 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' resulted from the founders' successful resistance to petitions from the public requesting more specifically political recognition phrases, such as 'acknowledging the Government of the World by Divine Providence' or acknowledging God 'as the Supreme Ruler of the Universe'. Concern with political hubris did not trouble the founders—or, at least, they did not see God as its remedy. There was no need: the system of government which they were in the process of establishing left no room for doubt that there is 'something higher' than politicians, namely, the crown.

A century later, public opinion polls no less than Convention debates indicated that political hubris had become a serious concern. Indeed, it became a major theme of the Republic referendum overall, as opponents of
change tapped public distrust with the slogan 'Say No to the Politicians' Republic'.

In fact, democratic theory provides a secular version of the 'something higher than politicians' argument by seeing all political authority deriving from the people. However, the democratic version of the 'something higher than politicians' argument was not raised in response to God's mooted inclusion in any discussion on the 1998 Convention floor, canvassed in the media or put to me by any interviewee, whether in favour of or against God's inclusion.

From the frequent 1990s presentation of the political hubris argument as a justification for a constitutional second coming, I draw two related conclusions, both pointing to a deep shift in perceptions about political authority. The first follows from the observation that advocates for God's inclusion who raised the political hubris argument included both monarchists and republicans. They shared the assumption that, without God, politicians stand under no higher authority. My first conclusion is that this finding should give some comfort to those republicans who argue that Australian political consciousness has already abandoned the monarchy in all but name. The monarchists' appeal to God to cap politicians' power suggests that the crown's role as the ultimate site of political accountability has disappeared, even for those who favour its retention for symbolic or other reasons.

However, my second conclusion is that those republicans go too far who say that the crown's fading from popular imagination amounts to a shift to a republican consciousness. Among those who see God as the only thing standing between politicians and ultimate authority are some of the country's most articulate and high-profile republicans, the very people one would expect to be envisaging politicians as curbed by popular or as well as divine sovereignty. If confidence in the crown has failed, the republican idea that ultimate political authority resides with the people has not taken very deep root. Australian republican consciousness stands at a halfway house. Australians have psychologically abandoned the crown to the point where even monarchists no longer see it as really 'sovereign'; but sovereignty has
not yet passed to the people. Instead, for many, God serves as a (real or metaphorical) emergency reserve to fill the space vacated by the crown.

There are some caveats to how much significance one should read into the argument from political hubris. The feeling that God is needed to fill a vacuum above politicians was not raised by every speaker on recognition at the 1998 Convention, nor by everyone who discussed the topic with me. It is one strand among several threads which together make up the pattern of Australian understandings of the relationship between God, crown, Parliament and people. Its broader significance comes from a comparison between the way in which it was drawn—without opposition—at the end of the twentieth century and its absence from the much more extensive God debates a century earlier.

Further, the political hubris argument for constitutional recognition of God can be understood in the context of other discussions about political authority. When the 1998 Constitutional Convention discussed political authority per se, delegates (politicians and non-politicians alike) had no difficulty with the proposition that it derives from the people. For example, Professor Patrick O'Brien went unchallenged when he declared, in the context of the Preamble debate but without specific reference to the recognition clause, that:

\[\text{I would imagine there would be no disagreement amongst republicans that the source of all political power lies in the people.}^{178}\]

Victorian Shooters' Party delegate Mr Eric Bullmore repeatedly tried to use the Preamble as the basis for 'a Bill of Rights ... to establish the people's sovereignty.'\textsuperscript{179} In the same vein, the Constitutional Centenary Foundation reported its Quest respondents' 'overwhelming preference' for 'an assertion that the Constitution and system of government draw their authority from the people.'\textsuperscript{180} The Prime Minister's first Preamble draft alluded to the principle, albeit on the controversial basis of the people's individual rather than collective sovereignty—'the Commonwealth of Australia is constituted by the equal sovereignty of all its citizens.'\textsuperscript{181} Although that phrase was lost in the subsequent draft, while God remained, it does not appear from the media or public commentary at the time that the elision was due to any rejection of popular sovereignty.
The fact that participants in the various forums of debate about the Preamble had no difficulty with the concept of popular sovereignty when it was explicitly the topic of discussion only highlights its absence from the arguments about God's inclusion. That loud silence suggests that Australian republicanism still has some thinking-through ahead of it.

We can gain an insight here from educational theory. Teachers are familiar with students who absorb a concept well enough to answer persuasively when directly asked about it in an essay or exam. But another level of learning is required before the concept is 'internalised', built into the student's knowledge base effectively enough for it to inform the discussion when the ostensible topic is something else. The significance of the political hubris argument in favour of God's preambular recognition, then, is not that everyone raises it, or that some people make it and others do not. Rather, it is significant, first, because it is raised by (many) republicans and (many) monarchists alike, suggesting that monarchists no longer give the crown, and republicans have not yet given the people, the central status their respective theories require. Second, the political hubris argument for God is significant because of the ease with which this particular strand of conceptions about the relationship between God, crown, Parliament and people goes unchallenged, even though democratic—and, especially, republican—theory has at hand an alternative answer to the need for 'something higher than politicians'. Australia's shift to a republican consciousness may have begun, but, the God debates suggest, it is still some way from being internalised.

God of the (Constitutional) Gaps

Taking our cue from Turner, we could say that Australian political consciousness is itself in a liminal state: it has left behind the old assumptions of monarchy, but has not yet become reintegrated in a new republican structure. This is, then, another part of the answer to why 'God had a good Convention'. Turner reminds us that liminality, and the communitas it engenders, derives its meaning from its relationship to structure. Structure and communitas exist in constant movement, 'juxtaposed and alternating'. Excess of one gives rise to the other, only to revert when the corrective becomes overemphasised. However, Turner's
Chapter Two: With Hope in the Electorate: God and the Constitution

pendulum metaphor belies the fact that, in his conception, structure is by nature always dominant, with communitas a fluctuating counterculture, never (at least, outside of extreme social upheaval) in the ascendant. If the 'generic God' embraced at the 1998 Convention is a liminal expression of hoped-for multicultural, multifaith communitas, the 'God of the constitutional gaps' is a reassertion of structure. As in Turner's model, a term from the liminal language of the sacred overflows into structure, investing it with an aura of stability and inviolability, in this case filling the power vacuum which would otherwise be left by the crown's removal.

This second constitutional function of God, as a reassertion of structure, is well-illustrated by the 1998 Convention's only explicit coupling of God with the idea of popular sovereignty. Then Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Most Reverend George Pell, raised the issue not in relation to the recognition clause but in his 'general speech', the point in the Convention proceedings where delegates set out their overall position on the republic. He noted that 'Catholics and Christians, like many others, recognise that in a democracy the people under God are the source of authority'. His speech did not spell out in what way the fact that the people are 'under God' affects democracy. Elsewhere, Archbishop Pell has suggested that the effect is significant, God setting limits on what 'the people' may decide. Classical republicanism gives that central, limit-setting place to its particular concept of liberty. However, it is worth noting that that, too, owes at least its historical form to a theological view of the person, often informed by a view of the divine associated more closely with the radical egalitarianism of communitas than with the hierarchical ordering which characterises structure.

In addition to partially-percolated republican consciousness, the God of the constitutional gaps may also be filling a bigger 'gap' in Australians' national self-confidence. The people's lack of faith in themselves to fulfil their classical republican role as the source and limit of political authority may indicate the seeming impotence of democratic institutions to buffer citizens against the effects of globalisation. As weakening national institutions make existing structure increasingly problematic, without any corresponding communitas in a world increasingly organised around competition and reliance on mobile and capricious international capital, the
Constitutional Convention’s ‘generic God’ might embody a last hope for both order and community.

**Humbly Relying on Which God?**

In the Australian civil theology propounded at the 1998 Constitutional Convention and in the surrounding public debate, there are at least two distinct strands. One ties the concept of divinity to hierarchical political arrangements, with God ousting politicians from the top layer. Theological language wards off the threat that, without God to ensure continued hierarchical stability, our suspect representatives would run still more untrammelled than populist imagination and popular press now fear. That conception vied with a less fearful, more open strand in which God stands for ‘who we are and what we might become’, conceived in terms of tolerance and welcome. In the more open strand, God is an expression of national identity, but not in any narrow nationalistic sense. Rather, it is an identity always permeable, allowing both the incorporation of difference and the maintenance of distinct identities within it.

The Preamble debate uncovers a seldom-seen face of secular Australia, revealing, largely unconsciously, its deepest longings and greatest fears. The themes of a need for hierarchically-ordered stability (on one hand) and tolerance and welcome (on the other) will reappear throughout this story. As we observe secular Australia’s attempts to contain, accommodate and respond to religion in the parliamentary arena, the sacred remains liminal: in Bacchi’s terms, the sacred is hardly ever explicit in Australian political ‘problem representation’. But, Turner reminds us, we ignore at our peril those repressed elements which he calls ‘liminal’. They break ‘through the interstices of structure’. The present study sets out to recognise and foreground this significant liminal element in Australian political life, as it breaks through, ultimately either counteracting or reinforcing the claims of structure.
Endnotes

1. With the notable exception of the United States, where levels of religious attendance remain at around 60 per cent.

2. For one influential analysis along these lines, see B. Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World*, Times Books, New York, 1995.

3. For example, M. Porter, *Hand of the Spirit?*, op. cit.

4. For example, the official 'No' case on the Preamble question did not mention God, focusing instead on popular distrust of politicians and the Preamble’s circumlocutory recognition of Indigenous peoples. See text of the official 'no' case, appended to Peter Andren MP, *Press Release*, 9 September 1999, 'Official Preamble 'NO' Case Released'.

5. The republican objective became part of the ALP platform in 1981.


7. The remaining recommendations for the Preamble were: introductory language in the form 'We the people of Australia'; reference to the origins of the Constitution, and acknowledgment that the Commonwealth has evolved into an independent, democratic and sovereign nation under the Crown; recognition of our federal system of representative democracy and responsible government; affirmation of the rule of law; acknowledgment of the original occupancy and custodianship of Australia by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders; recognition of Australia’s cultural diversity; affirmation of respect for our unique land and the environment; reference to the people of Australia having agreed to re-constitute our system of government as a republic; and concluding language to the effect that '[We the people of Australia] asserting our sovereignty, commit ourselves to this Constitution'. Three additional points were recommended for consideration by Parliament: affirmation of the equality of all people before the law; recognition of gender equality; and recognition that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have continuing rights by virtue of their status as Australia’s indigenous peoples. See Resolutions B 1–10, C 1, 2 and 4, D2 and 3, Minutes of Day 8, Constitutional Convention, Old Parliament House, 2–13 February 1998, [http://www.dpmc.gov.au/convention/report2/minutes8.htm](http://www.dpmc.gov.au/convention/report2/minutes8.htm). The Convention also passed two restraints on a new Preamble: 'the Preamble should state that it not be used to interpret the other provisions of the Constitution'; and 'care should be taken to draft the Preamble in such a way...
Endnotes continued

that it does not have implications for the interpretation of the Constitution' (ibid.).


11. His appointment as Governor-General was announced in May 2001.
15. The existing phrase, 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' is known as the recognition clause, following the nineteenth century constitutional conventions' debates as to whether God should be 'invoked' or only 'recognised'.
16. Report of the Constitutional Convention, 1998, vol. 3, Transcript of Proceedings, 6 February 1998, p. 422. In addition, it produced a majority report recommending the inclusion of values such as democratic government, rule of law, equality before the law and environmental values, and a minority report which opposed their inclusion. The minority opinion was that 'there should be no mention of civic values' for fear that 'the High Court will employ the values named in the Constitution and will or may interpret these values in unexpected ways' (ibid., p. 423).
17. ibid., p. 425.
18. The Eastern Orthodox family includes Russian, Greek, Macedonian, Ukrainian and Serbian Orthodox; Oriental Orthodox churches include Syrian, Ethiopian, Armenian and Coptic. Overall, 2.8 per cent of 1996 Census respondents identified with some branch of Orthodoxy. Of those, only 6.7 per cent were the children of two Australian-born parents, while 40.9 per cent were Australian-born children of at least one overseas-born parent, and 51.7 per cent were themselves born overseas in a non-English-speaking
Endnotes continued


19. For statistics, see ibid., passim.

20. Adding together the numbers for all the broadly 'theistic' answers to the religion question in the 1996 Census produces a figure of around 69 per cent identifying with a Christian denomination and around 4 per cent nominating a non-Christian theistic tradition. This figure does not include those who did not answer, or who answered 'no religion' but who do believe in God. However, it is broadly consistent with other findings. For example, an *Age* Saulwick poll in 1994 recorded 75 per cent of respondents claiming belief in God (*Age*, 17 October 1994).


22. The other recommended additions were reference to 'our developing way of life', expanded reference to environmental concerns and 'consciousness of our responsibilities to future generations', ibid., pp. 435–436.

23. ibid., p. 435.

24. ibid.

25. Other members of the Subgroup were Mr Adam Johnston, Ms Dannalee Bell and Ms Lucinda Bell, who was note-taker.


27. ibid., p. 426.


29. Held in Old Parliament House immediately before the official Constitutional Convention.


31. ibid.

32. ibid., p. 427.

33. ibid.
Endnotes continued

34. ibid., Archbishop Hollingworth’s elipses.
35. ibid., I return to the topic of prayer in Parliament in chapter three.
36. ibid., pp. 427–428.
37. ibid., p. 428.
38. ibid.
39. ibid.
40. ibid.
41. ibid., pp. 428–429.
42. ibid., p. 429.
43. ibid.
44. Interjection by Brigadier Alf Garland, ibid., p. 429.
45. Dr Pat O’Shane, ibid.
46. ibid., p. 427.
47. ibid., p. 429.
49. ibid., vol. 3, Transcript of Proceedings, 6 February 1998, p. 430, the reference is to Exodus 3:14.
50. ibid.
52. ibid., pp. 230ff.
54. Interview with Baden Teague, College Park, South Australia, 2 July 1999.
Endnotes continued

60. ibid., p. 526.
61. ibid.
62. ibid., pp. 486, 519.
63. Mr Phil Cleary, ibid., p. 483. Elsewhere in the Transcript, 'God' is capitalised, even when reporting Ms Hewitt's suggestion that it should take lower case (p. 430). It is not clear why the Hansard reporters opted for lower case in Mr Cleary's speech. I have followed convention in capitalising throughout, except when quoting text which departs from that practice.
65. Richard Ely reports Downer's speech in the South Australian Parliament, between the Adelaide and Melbourne Conventions, as saying that, although he maintained his personal opposition to 'recognition', respect for others' opinions meant that he 'would not now oppose' it (R. Ely, Unto God and Caesar, op. cit., p. 49). The Melbourne amendment was carried on the voices and no individual votes are recorded, so it is impossible to tell from the Convention records how far he carried this tolerance into practice. His Melbourne speech gives no indication of any change of heart from Adelaide.
68. For example the single-sentence speech by New South Wales Premier Mr George Reid: 'I desire simply to say that I strongly support the position of Mr Glynn'. Official record of the debates of the Australasian Federal Convention; third session, Melbourne, 20th January to 17th March 1898, Govt. Printer, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1741. Hereafter cited as Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898.
70. ibid., p. 1186.
Endnotes continued

73. Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1733.
74. ibid., p. 1740.
75. ibid., p. 1736.
77. On the similarity of nineteenth and twentieth-century periods of
globalisation, see for example S. Gill, 'Globalization and Crisis at the End of
the Twentieth Century' in D. B. Moore, ed., *Embedding Globalisation*, Centre
for Development Studies, Flinders University of South Australia, Adelaide,
1999, pp. 1–10. On globalisation's nineteenth-century form, see K. Polanyi,
*The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*,
Beacon Press, Boston, 1957 [1944].
78. Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1733.
79. ibid., p. 1733.
80. ibid., (emphasis added).
81. ibid., p. 1737.
82. Personal communication, Galatians Group conference, Melbourne, 26 July
1999.
84. Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1733.
85. ibid., p. 1736.
88. ibid.
89. ibid.
90. ibid.
92. ibid., p. 1735.
93. ibid., pp. 1740–1741. In fact, Downer's 'I should think' was more tentative
than necessary: that Christianity 'in its broadest sense' forms part of colonial
law had already been stated in a judgment by Sir James Martin, Chief
Justice of New South Wales, in 1884. See W. Phillips, *Defending 'A Christian*
Endnotes continued

*Country*: *Churchmen and Society in New South Wales in the 1880s and After*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Qld, 1981, p. 15.

94. ibid., p. 1736.

95. ibid., p. 1737.


97. The convention-goers certainly found no lack of piety in a city whose reputation for staid worthiness, even then, denied delegates the 'pleasurable anticipation' elicited by a visit to Melbourne (Alfred Deakin, quoted in Ely, op. cit., p. 31). See also Ely's quotation from Garran, ibid.: 'Adelaide at nine fifteen a.m. on Sunday, where we disappointed the press by preferring cleanliness to godliness, and not going to church'. Garran had a point: in 1895, the city of Adelaide had 908 churches, while the whole of South Australia had to make do with 770 hotels. In 1899, a single vantage point in the middle of the South Australian mining town of Moonta gave a view of seventeen church buildings (S. Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996, p. 49).

Easterners' opinion of Adelaide's reputation for staid virtue forms a fairly constant strand, from Thistle Anderson's 1905 comprehensive damning of the 'holy village' of 'many whitened sepulchres'. According to Anderson, 'those who come on pleasure bent should be relegated to asylums for the insane', while 'should they remain here long enough, the insanity will follow' (T. Anderson, *Arcadian Adelaide*, Modern Printing Company, Adelaide, 1905, p. 16).

Easterners' disdain sometimes finds an echo even among South Australians themselves, as evidenced by the musical declarations by Redgum singer John Schumann (later Australian Democrat candidate for the South Australian federal seat of Mayo), that 'It's one more boring Thursday night in Adelaide, and it looks like everybody must have died', and Paul Kelly's:

> Find me a bar or a girl or guitar where do you go on a Saturday night?

> And the streets are so wide everybody's inside

> Sitting in the same chairs they were sitting in last year

> All the king's horses all the king's men

> Wouldn't drag me back again

> to Adelaide, Adelaide, Adelaide, Adelaide...

Endnotes continued


100. ibid., p. 20.


103. ibid., p. 21.

104. ibid.

105. Readers of A. Trollope's, *Barchester Towers*, know the eminently lampoonable passion with which English evangelicals embraced this cause.


107. ibid., p. 38.


109. See for example ibid., pp. 3, 11.


112. Although the Convention's final recommendation was only for a 'reference' to God, the Preamble Quest question was couched in terms of the existing recognition clause.

113. ibid.

114. ibid.

115. M. Shermer, *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science*, W. H. Freeman and Company, New York, 2000, pp. 84–84. One caveat to Shermer and Sulloway's results is that (at least as reported by Shermer) they do not break down the responses about why other people believe according to whether the respondents themselves have religious convictions. One might
Endnotes continued

anticipate that those who do might be more sympathetic to fellow-believers, while atheists might see any and all religious belief as irrational. However, Shermer does quote from a number of responses, which he says are representative, in which respondents identify themselves as having 'moderately strong', 'strong' or 'very strong' religious convictions. In the quoted examples, the respondents attribute others' faith to 'emotional need', a need for 'rules of conduct', a 'sense of security', 'purpose' or 'hope', or to 'blind faith' (pp. 86–87).


119. ibid., p. 211.


121. ibid., p. 96.

122. ibid., p. 125.


125. ibid.

126. V. Turner, ibid., p. 128.

127. See R. Ely's, *Unto God and Caesar*, (op. cit., p. 67) assessment that, populist rhetoric and political expediency aside, the separationist position was shared by recognition advocates and opponents alike.


129. ibid., p. 1739.

130. ibid., p. 1737.


132. ibid. p. 1187.
Endnotes continued

133. Interview with Senator John Quirke, Glenelg, SA, 10 September 1999.
135. ibid.
137. Interview with Ms Gallus, Glenelg, SA, 16 September 1999.
138. Respondent #376, Mr Peter Crayson (St Ives, NSW), quoted in Constitutional Centenary Foundation, ‘We the People of Australia …’ Ideas For a New Preamble to the Australian Constitution, op. cit., p. 9.
140. Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1740.
141. R. Ely documents comparable arguments in the colonial legislatures, especially of South Australia and Tasmania, where separationist sentiment was the strongest and some sitting clergy joined their lay Parliamentary colleagues in making the secularist case. See R. Ely, op. cit., p. 50–51.
145. ibid., For a rare political interview which directly addressed the separation issue, see Mike Jeffries’s radio interview with Prime Minister John Howard, 2GB, 1 November 1999.
146. Interview, Parliament House, 6 August 1999.
147. See her discussion of oath-taking in chapter three.
151 Interview, College Park, SA, 2 July 1999.
Endnotes continued

156. ibid.
158. Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1740.
165. Interview, Centre for Public Policy, Melbourne, 29 July 1999.
168. ibid.
170. ibid.
171. Interview, College Park, SA, 2 July 1999.
174. The democratic argument need not, of course, be atheistic; it just says that the nature of political power is a question of a different order from theological debate. Thus, as has been repeatedly pointed out by observers at least since the early nineteenth-century visit of Alexis de Tocqueville, American republicanism has historically been underpinned by religion. However, Christianity fulfilled its role as (in de Tocqueville’s words) ‘the first of [America’s] political institutions’ by providing a guiding framework for individual citizens. It did not, therefore, undermine the idea of the people as
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the source of political power. See de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, (2 vols), Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1953 [v. 1 1835, v. 2 1840].

175. A similar argument for God's inclusion which avoided the implication of politicians' supremacy was put to me by Dr Brendan Nelson. He argued that God is needed as a curb not for our leaders but for the nation as a whole:

It doesn't matter if you're a Hindu, atheist or whatever; people and nations who make themselves the centre of the world get into trouble. We need to recognise that there's something more important than ourselves. We're becoming an anything-goes society, and we need something beyond ourselves.

However, he maintained, 'the Preamble is not the place to do it. You can't do justice to important things in a Preamble' (Interview, Parliament House, 29 June 1999).

176. Significantly, all who proposed this argument referred to 'politicians' (or an equivalent term such as 'our leaders') implying a collection of individuals, rather than speaking collectively of 'the Parliament'. The political hubris argument seems to reflect public distrust of individual 'egos' rather than the more traditional liberal suspicion of top-heavy political institutions.


179. ibid., p. 806.

180. 'We the people of Australia …', op. cit., p. 5.


182. Its occasional mentions in public discussion tended to be at the level of throwaway lines, such as when James Murray, ('Keep Creed Out of Constitution: God Should be Above Politics', op. cit.) wrote that 'I thought we were rid of the divine right of kings several centuries ago'.

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183. Perhaps the clearest expression of his normative view of structure is in his rebuke to what he sees as the utopianism of Lewis Henry Morgan, in whose honour the lectures which make up The Ritual Process were first given: op. cit., pp. 129–130.


189. op. cit., p. 128.
Chapter Three: So Help Me God: Religious and Political Vocation

The Sacred and the State

If one way of understanding the God-language at the 1998 Constitutional Convention is as an upwelling of the sacred from its position in the interstices of secular social structure, we need to turn our attention now to better understanding the ways in which religion is invoked and suppressed within that structure itself.

This chapter first surveys formal procedures and semi-official activities through which religion manifests itself in the Australian Parliament. Then it invites self-reporting from religiously-committed Senators and Members about the place of religion in their political work.

Section 116

Most directly, relations between religion and the Commonwealth are specified in s. 116 of the Constitution:

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.
It is a weaker provision than, say, the US Constitution's protection of religious freedom: the Australian Constitution limits itself to a 'negative' protection against Commonwealth interference.¹

Despite the fact that this section is included in the Constitution's chapter on the powers of the States (it comes between s. 115, 'States Not to Coin Money' and s. 117, 'Rights of Residents in States'), the States are pointedly omitted, an anomaly which Ely explains by tracing the array of deals needed to get s. 116 past the Australasian Conventions.² Ely sums up the debate:

So, by little more than a whisker, those who had wanted a constitutional guarantee of strict Church-State and Religion-State separation in the Commonwealth sphere, made their point against those, such as Barton, who considered such separation desirable but did not wish to achieve it that way; and also against those, such as Fraser, who did not think separation desirable at all.³

The result is that the States are left to legislate for themselves, or not. A 1988 referendum proposal to make good the founders' omission, by extending the section's scope to include the States, went the way of four-fifths of Australian constitutional referenda.⁴ Of the States, only Tasmania protects religious freedom and prohibits religious discrimination in its Constitution. Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia, as well as the Northern Territory and ACT, have specific laws prohibiting religious discrimination. New South Wales lacks specific religious freedom protection, but achieves some coverage (for instances where religious identity is closely tied to ethnicity) via its Anti-Discrimination Act 1977.⁵ South Australians are the least protected, their Supreme Court having found in 1984 that 'there is no legal remedy available to any person who believes that his or her right to freedom of religion or belief has been violated by that State's Parliament or Government'.⁶

Minimalist constitutional provisions are matched by minimal normative debate. Unlike, say, the United States, neither our institutional arrangements nor our founding narratives have so far generated much substantial discussion about the proper relationship between religion and the state. The founders, debating such matters as the Constitution's
recognition of 'Almighty God' and the practice of Parliament opening with prayer, relied less on considered philosophical positions than on under-articulated assumptions in which English establishment and American church-state separation featured with equal prominence. The resulting document, with a religiously-framed Preamble preceding a minimally separationist Constitution, accurately reflects their eclecticism. Subsequent generations, when they thought about it at all, have taken the Constitution’s prohibition of establishment as the definitive expression of Australian religion-state relations. To that extent, we may say that Australia’s political instincts about the place of religion are broadly liberal separationist. However, what it means to identify Australia as liberal remains a matter of contention.

Liberal Australia

The difficulty of pinpointing an Australian liberal tradition is illustrated by the fact that the three book-length studies on non-party Australian liberalism to appear in the 1990s use comparative biography as their major tool to achieve varying degrees of philosophical analysis. Stuart Macintyre traces *A Colonial Liberalism* via the lives of George Higinbotham, David Syme and Charles Pearson. Macintyre discerns a distinctive tradition, emphasising the disjunctions between his subjects' 'lost world', with its distinctive 'visionary' liberalism, and our own. Gregory Melleuish paints a bigger picture, identifying a tradition of *Cultural Liberalism in Australia* via the thought (and, to a lesser degree, the practice) of such diverse figures as Ernest Burgmann, Vance Palmer, Frederick Egglestone, Vere Gordon Childe and Marjorie Barnard. Melleuish’s quest for commonalities among widely disparate thinkers led one reviewer to exclaim, ‘With this degree of inclusiveness, who with half a brain would be left out?’ Ian Cook’s *Liberalism in Australia* seeks even greater breadth through ten lives, from Victorians such as Pearson and William Charles Wentworth to living exemplars Sara Dowse and John Hewson. If Melleuish seems at times to want to gather the full diversity of pre-1950s Australian thought under the 'liberal' banner, Cook is inclined, instead, to diffuse 'liberalism' throughout a disparate culture. He is suspicious of quests for 'some totalising or holistic account of the life of a doctrine in Australia'. Instead, he seeks 'to represent
liberal thought as it has been expressed by people I have chosen to
designate as liberals'. 10 Perhaps anticipating charges of circularity, Cook
sums up his findings: 'I have reached no conclusions about liberalism in
Australia', 11 even dispelling possible doubts with the subheading, 'This Is
Not A Conclusion'. Indeed, he hedges off any inference 'that there exists
some form of thought, in this case one called liberalism, that inhabits the
mind of particular thinkers at particular times'. 12

In all three studies, the approach via selected individuals addresses a
double methodological problem. On one hand, liberalism itself is such a
broad church, spanning (for example) welfarist interventionists and small-
government libertarians, that any attempt to identify a distinctive
Australian liberal mainstream is likely to find itself becalmed in a sea of
disparate interpretations. On the other hand, the lack of any one
outstanding Australian political theorist has led, as Cook points out, to the
widespread (in his view, mistaken) perception either that there is no
Australian political philosophy at all, or at least that there is no coherent
and systematic Australian political tradition.

Whether rooted in anti-ideological pragmatics or postmodern decentring,
the interpretations which see theoretical innocence as the overriding
feature of Australian political thought are not without challengers. 13 To
Graham Maddox, the characterisation of Australian politics as an easy and
minimally-theoretical liberalism is, itself, ideologically driven:

Construing Australia as a 'liberal' (i.e., in this context 'individualist')
society seems to foreclose upon the argument and allows, for example, an
easy reinterpretation of labour history to accommodate the particular
application of labour policies—interpreted as a species of liberalism—
favoured by the Hawke-Keating Governments. 14

An over-emphasis on liberalism obscures 'equally strong communitarian
(collectivist?) traditions,' he writes. An over-emphasis on pragmatism
means that those traditions, and their contributions to debate about 'the
good life for citizens', are too easily 'ruled out by constraining epithets or
currently dominant ideologies dressed up as empirical common sense'. 15

Appreciating the divergent strands within Australian political thought
helps explain how the constitutional separation of religion and the state has
accommodated religious pressure groups from time to time. Thus, the state has sometimes proved itself ready to interest itself in religion both positively (for example, by providing financial aid to church schools) and negatively (for example, by exempting religious bodies from aspects of anti-discrimination law). The conventional ‘pragmatic liberalism’ view of Australian political thought is to see such instances as momentary aberrations or populist accommodations, triumphs of pragmatism over theory. As this chapter and the next detail, however, such departures from liberal separationism are not as exceptional as that picture supposes. On the contrary, high-profile controversies such as the state aid debates are better understood as the sharp end of a series of religion-state interpenetrations which suffuse Australian political life, demanding more comprehensive scrutiny.

God and Parliamentary Formalities

Parliament’s formal procedures include a number of practices with religious reference. Their language and rituals refer mainly (but not, as we shall see, exclusively) to the dominant religious tradition, Christianity. To that extent, then, the religious references suggest a church-state alliance belied by constitutional separation. Within that broad distinction, the Parliament’s religious practices can be read in a variety of ways, including as empty formalities, as inappropriate incursions of religion into the public arena, or as valuable opportunities for the devout to express their devotion.

The various interpretations they attract cast into further relief the distinction outlined in the last chapter. Here, again, we find religious language and symbolism being used on one hand to reinforce hierarchically-ordered stability, while on the other hand providing a means of expression for a sense of ‘who we are as a nation’ oriented towards communitas.

Prayers

Since Federation, both houses of the Commonwealth Parliament have opened with prayer. A successful campaign by colonial Councils of Churches ensured that each sitting day would commence with the Lord’s Prayer, preceded by the prayer composed by Lord Tennyson, Governor of
South Australia (and subsequently Governor-General), for the opening of the Commonwealth Parliament. That the prayer is still used today may or may not be taken as evidence that Hallam Tennyson inherited some of his poet laureate father's poetic spark:

Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee at this time to vouchsafe Thy special blessing upon this Parliament, and that Thou wouldst be pleased to direct and prosper all our consultations to the advancement of Thy glory, and to the true welfare of the people of Australia.17

The churches' campaign got underway even before Federation had been agreed upon, overcoming a degree of cynicism from the Australasian Conventions. Adye Douglas, President of the Tasmanian Legislative Council, declared that the reading of prayers in his home State, as in the House of Commons, 'was soon found out to be a perfect piece of mockery'. When Victoria's Alexander Peacock recounted that 'in our Legislative Council the President reads the Lord's Prayer', Deakin struck in: 'And nearly all the members know it now'.18

That sentiment did not entirely dissipate with Federation. However, as in the Federation Conventions, Senators and Members in the First Parliament framed their concerns in terms of their own religious convictions, which they saw as one of the safeguards of Parliament's integrity. Prime Minister Edmund Barton invoked the advice of 'a very high teacher, who told us to pray in our closet'.19 Similarly, when the Senate debated the motion for prayers, South Australian Senator Gregor McGregor declared himself for 'the religion that is in the heart' and against 'the religion that is on the coat-sleeve'. Real religion does not need 'to be paraded, either in the Parliament House, the theatre, or at the street corners'. Properly contained, however, it is an invaluable component of public life, making 'Senators as well as other individuals behave as brothers toward each other and as Christians in all things'.20

By the same token, some feared that abuse of prayers could bring devotion, and the Parliament itself, into disrepute. King O'Malley questioned how long Members would retain their 'deep-seated reverence for prayer' if they were forced to listen to 'a Speaker with whom we had been on the "spree" the night before praying for us when we ought to be praying for him'.21
Senator McGregor feared that, if the wrong person were delegated to pray, Senators might have to 'sit here and listen to somebody committing what to my knowledge may be an act of blasphemy'.

In reply, advocates, such as Senator Major Albert Gould, tended to rely on English establishment:

In the highest court of our realm we are given to recognise that there is a God above us, and we should at all times lead the people to believe that we are following out what we claim to be the principles of a Christian country. We know that Christianity is regarded as [a] portion of the law of Great Britain, and ... it is a proper thing to recognise the power of the Almighty when we are going to attempt to legislate in the interests of the people of this country.

The issue of church-state separation was not prominent in the debates over prayer, but was alluded to in Senator Josiah Symon's wry reminder that 'though we are prepared to open our proceedings with prayer, we prohibit the same course from being adopted in the schools of the states'. Rather than addressing separationist concerns directly, therefore, supporters of prayer devoted themselves instead to reassuring Senators and Members that the ritual would not exclude those outside the English church. William Knox, the Member for Kooyong (Vic.), who introduced the motion for prayers in the House of Representatives, defended the Lord's Prayer as being 'entirely unsectarian in character', referring 'only to the fundamental truths acknowledged and professed by all Christian people'. Barton went further, finding it 'a prayer which can be accepted by the Unitarian, and which contains no request of the Almighty which a member of the Hebrew faith could not readily accept'. In the other chamber, Western Australian Senator George Pearce went even further: 'I believe that the principles and precepts contained in that prayer, even if uttered by atheists, are worthy of the concurrence of honorable senators, and would do no harm'. Indeed, the briefly-serving Member for Darling Downs (Qld), William Groom, seemed to doubt that the Lord's Prayer was religious at all: 'It is socialistic, and was drafted by the greatest social reformer that the world has ever known'.

111
The skeptics conquered their scruples, as in relation to the recognition clause, with the help of a large measure of populism, agreeing with Barton that:

A large number of those who have their doubts as to the propriety of these ordinances are not so offended in their religious susceptibilities if they are carried out, as those would be who demand that ordinances of this kind should be observed if their wishes were not complied with. That being so, I am inclined to give way to the course which is least offensive to the religious susceptibilities of the public.\textsuperscript{30}

The same view carried the Senate:

I am happy to have ascertained that almost all honorable members are disposed to allow [the motion for prayer] to pass in deference to the views of outsiders, even if honorable members themselves have not very strong opinions upon the subject.\textsuperscript{31}

A century on, the founders’ concern with trivialisation or abuse continued to worry some with religious convictions. Despite ALP Leader Kim Beazley placing a high value on his private prayer life and faithfully attending the annual church services for the opening of Parliament, he avoided attending daily prayers. He did not object to their being said, but:

I always have a pretty fair idea about what we are going to do to each other during the course of that day, and to have prayers as a sort of justification to those proceedings is something which I think is a bit rich.\textsuperscript{32}

However, such sentiments are harder to find now than in the debates of a hundred years earlier. Instead, as with the Preamble debate, the late twentieth century saw a considerable intensification of the concern to be inclusive. What in 1901 was ‘unsectarian’ for Christians and accessible equally to Jews and atheists was, a century on, seen by some as too tied to a single tradition. Retiring as President of the Senate after the 1996 election, Senator Michael Beahan fired a parting shot for a reform which he had been unable to carry:

I believe the Prayers in our standing orders are an archaic and anachronistic form of words that really should be changed. I believe that the South Africans have the best idea with a minute’s contemplative
silence. That appeals to all faiths, or non-faiths. Or you could have an evocative poem, or something like that.33

Similar concern motivated Australian Greens Senator Bob Brown, a year later, to send a reference to the Senate Procedure Committee. He wanted to:

Make the observance at the beginning of the day more relevant, more interesting and more appropriate to each of us as we make some connection with what Senator Harradine describes, I think, as the higher order or the almighty and what I would describe as the life force and what other people might describe using other terminologies.34

He proposed replacing the existing prayer with an invitation by the President: 'Senators, let us in silence pray or reflect upon our responsibilities to the people of Australia, to the States and Territories which we represent, and to all future generations'.35 The Committee recommended against any change. Echoing Barton's compromise stance in the First Parliament, it argued:

It is clear that many senators who join in the prayer regard its retention as important, but among those who do not join in the prayer there does not appear to be a strong view that its proposed abolition is a significant question which should occupy the time of the Senate.36

Senator Harradine welcomed the decision, tying the practice of prayer to the Constitution's 'recognition clause'37 and the idea (discussed in chapter two), that Parliament needs to be subject to something higher than itself:

The Prayer for Guidance and the Lord's Prayer, publicly recited by the President on behalf of senators, is a humble, public acknowledgment that the parliament itself is subject to a higher law; that unjust and immoral laws are unjust and immoral, even if correct procedures are followed.38

Senator Harradine explicitly rejected the argument that prayers are inappropriate to a secular Parliament: 'To be secular is one thing; to seek to deliberately and publicly expunge recited prayer in the Senate is quite another'.39

It is possible that one factor in the failure of Senator Brown's reform was the changed tenor of the Senate in the wake of the 1996 election. On the
new Senate's second day, Senator Beahan's successor as President, Senator Margaret Reid, reported that:

Some senators have asked if I would have any objection to their saying the Lord's Prayer with me. I have no objection, and, if any senator wishes to, he or she may do so.40

According to at least one observer, Victorian Labor Senator Kim Carr, they did:

You just get a sense in which there is a growing body of opinion in that Senate that feels the need to mumble very loudly their religious convictions every morning ... It strikes me—I've only been here six years—I get the feeling that there are now more people attending prayers from the conservative side of politics than there were when I first started ... And the volume—! They actually put their hearts into it. Under a Labor regime perhaps they were a little bit shyer.41

Prayer in Parliament remains a significant concern in sections of the electorate, as it was when the matter was debated by the First Parliament. For example, in 1988, an estimated 50 000 Christian protesters surrounded Parliament, 'inspired by a leak from Canberra suggesting that there were to be no prayers at the opening of the New Parliament House'.42 However, the religious susceptibilities of the public ('outsiders', in the First Senate's terms) seem not to have been an issue for Senators in the Thirty-Eighth Parliament in the way that they were for the First. By the close of the twentieth century, Parliamentarians' focus (at least as far as their discussions in the chamber were concerned) had shifted to the function which prayer would (or would not) perform in the psychic lives of individual Senators and Members. In keeping with the twentieth-century trend towards increasingly privatised religion, they looked for effects of prayer on themselves, rather than to any significance which their prayer might have for the wider society.

Swearing-in

At the opening of each Parliament, Senators and Members are sworn in, with the choice of an oath or an affirmation, as set out in the schedule to the Constitution:
OATH

I, A.B., do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Her heirs and successors according to law. SO HELP ME GOD!

AFFIRMATION

I, A.B., do solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Her heirs and successors according to law.

(NOTE–The name of the King or Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the time being is to be substituted from time to time.)

Ministers, including the Prime Minister, take an additional oath or affirmation, referring to their portfolio. The wording is not prescribed in the Constitution, and successive Ministries have used varying forms, retaining the basic distinction that oaths conclude 'So help me God!' and affirmations do not.

The distinction is underlined by the associated ritual: oaths, unlike affirmations, are sworn on a Bible. No particular text being stipulated, the oath-taker can request scriptures of their choice. So, for example, Professor Peter Baume, as a Senator, was sworn in on the Hebrew Bible. A new Bible is used for each swearing-in, and the person sworn keeps it as a memento, leading, in some cases, to a degree of religious dilettantism. Long-serving Members, for example, have been known to take advantage of successive ceremonies to collect alternative translations, or a Bible for each grandchild. There have been instances where someone sworn, in successive Parliaments, on various translations of the Christian scriptures, branched out in later ceremonies to request the sacred texts of other traditions, beginning with the Koran.

The choice of oath or affirmation has existed since Federation, the Australasian Conventions simply assuming their equal legitimacy without debate. There is no difference in legal force. Records are not kept of who takes which, but oaths are more common. Affirmation-takers have traditionally been found more often on Labor than Coalition benches. For
example, Methodist minister turned ALP Member for Wilmot (Tas.) Gil Duthie reports (apparently with regret) that at the Whitlam Government’s swearing-in, ‘Nine of our fellows took the affirmation rather than the oath of allegiance on the Bible. No-one on the Opposition side took an affirmation’.47

It is sometimes suggested—as, indeed, Duthie implies—that the choice provides an index of religiosity. One evangelical Christian account from the Hawke-Keating era blames ‘the grey cloud of secularism’ for the fact that ‘half of those now sworn to high office in the Government refuse to swear on the Bible’.48 The assumption is that the religiously-committed would naturally swear on the Bible, while those without religious convictions would demur at asking the help of a God in whom they do not believe. In fact, the situation is considerably more complicated. The option of taking an affirmation was imported to Australia out of English law, where it has existed since the Act of Toleration of 1689.49 The 1689 provision formalised what was in any case becoming common practice in at least some areas.50 However, it was introduced out of respect for the consciences not of atheists, but of Quakers. They, and later Christian objectors to oath-taking, cite a biblical justification:

Again, you have learnt how it was said to our ancestors: You must not break your oath, but must fulfil your oaths to the Lord. But I say this to you: do not swear at all, either by heaven, since that is God’s throne; or by the earth, since that is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, since that is the city of the great king. Do not swear by your own head either, since you cannot turn a single hair white or black. All you need say is "Yes" if you mean yes, "No" if you mean no; anything more than this comes from the evil one.51

It was not until 1888 that English law unequivocally extended the same choice to atheists.52 Similar reservations applied in nineteenth-century Australia. For example, Indigenous witnesses could not be called in courts because, according to one early judgment, no reliance could be placed on oaths sworn by those without faith in ‘a Supreme Being and a future State’.53 By Federation, the affirmation’s applicability to atheists had gained a measure of acceptance, so that Douglas assured the Melbourne
Convention, ‘Any person can make an affirmation who has no belief in Almighty God’.54

The changed perception of the significance of the affirmation (as opposed to an oath) is illustrated by the experience of ‘unreconstructed Methodist’ Liberal Ms Kathy Sullivan. As a Senator, she chose to be sworn in by affirmation rather than by oath, emphasising that she had done so for theological reasons in keeping with her Dissenting traditions. When she moved to the House of Representatives (as Member for Moncrieff), an unauthorised leaflet circulated in her electorate implying that her use of the affirmation indicated impiety. After careful thought, she decided that if her rural electors were upset by the affirmation, she would change, and has taken an oath ever since.55

Declaration of Interests

In 1983, during discussion of declarations of interest, some Senators and Members raised the possibility that religion should be declarable. Western Australian Senator Fred Chaney, a (then rare) Liberal Party Roman Catholic, pointed out that religion may even overlap with financial interests:

The question of a man’s religion might be relevant. A great deal of the issues debated in this place contain elements which give rise to questions of religious concern—prejudice, if you like. Support for church schools is a case in point. I support them because I support that system. No doubt that is something which is related to the particular religion that I profess.56

The same point was raised in the House of Representatives by a Labor atheist, the Member for Prospect, (NSW) Dr R. E. Klugman:

One’s beliefs and the question of whether there is a conflict of interest are probably relevant. If one is a Catholic, a Jew, or an atheist like I am, certain conflicts of interest occur naturally. One has to support certain pieces of legislation which, because of one’s beliefs, one cannot possibly support even if one believes them to be in the interests of the country.57

South Australian Senator Chapman pointed out that, although the Registers of Senators’ Interests does not demand a declaration of faith, it
does open the way for disclosure under the heading 'Being an Office Holder Of or Financial Contributor Donating $200 Or More In Any Said Calendar Year to Any Organisation'. Senator Chapman himself lists twenty-six such organisations. Sporting, social and political clubs are joined by a parish church (identified by saint and suburb) and a number of evangelical organisations. While such a list reveals (at least, to anyone determined enough to explore the Register) their representatives’ financial donations, it does not, of course, say anything about the beliefs which inspire that dedication. Consequently, it provides at best a limited foundation for exploring the kinds of issues to which Senator Chaney and Mr Klugman adverted.

'Conscience' Voting

Another way in which religious convictions are taken into account in the workings of Parliament is through free or 'conscience' votes. The literature on conscience voting in Westminster-style systems is scanty, and tends to offer little more in the way of analysis than the somewhat circular definition that certain issues gain conscience votes because they are commonly designated 'moral'. (This area deserves a separate treatment, beyond the scope of the present chapter.) In practice, conscience votes are often taken to be a way of circumnavigating religious sensibilities which cut across party lines. Free votes in Australian federal politics are extremely rare (their avoidance perhaps helped by the fact that the kinds of issues which commonly attract them often fall to the responsibility of the States). The most recent free vote was on the Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996. Before that, the last time the Parliament had seen a full conscience vote was on Stephen Lusher’s private member’s bill on abortion funding in 1979, although when the degree of dissent in Coalition ranks became apparent, Liberal Senators and Members were also given a free vote for the Sex Discrimination Bill 1984.

Officially, policy differs between the major parties: the Liberal party in theory accords its Senators and Members freedom to vote with their conscience on every issue. In practice, this philosophical commitment is tempered by the needs of party discipline. Thus, while Liberal Senators and Members are technically freer to cross the floor than their opponents, any
decision to do so is likely to prove no less momentous. Another way of putting the tension would be that party solidarity (and, particularly, the risk of damaging the party by breaking solidarity) exerts its own demands which also make claims on a Member's or Senator's conscience. This dilemma for sitting Liberals was spelled out in the following exchange in the House:

MRS VALE:  ... I abhor these mandatory sentencing laws, and I abhor them for a very important principle.

MRS IRWIN:  Vote against them.

MRS VALE:  That will not help. All it will do, Member for Fowler, is hurt my government.

(Opposition members interjecting--)

I am sorry; we have done some great things for all Australians in this country, and I must balance that out.60

The debate over mandatory sentencing which gave rise to Mrs Vale's dilemma followed the death in gaol of a boy convicted of a minor theft. As comparably draconian sentences for other petty offences were publicised, pressure mounted for federal intervention to overturn the laws. The Prime Minister declared his opposition to mandatory sentencing, but ruled out federal intervention. At one point, media reports suggested that up to thirty Coalition Senators and Members were prepared to cross the floor,61 prompting speculation that the issue could become the subject of a free vote. The occasion provided a rare opportunity for public discussion of the criteria which engender a free vote. Prime Minister John Howard set out his position in an interview on ABC TV's Lateline program:

TONY JONES:  Now, why have you refused to give your own party members a conscience vote on this?

JOHN HOWARD:  Because it’s not a conscience issue—it’s not. I mean, it is not—it is not—the question of whether you have mandatory sentencing is quite different from something like euthanasia or abortion. Those things go to the very essence of somebody’s religious or philosophical or moral view, whereas mandatory sentencing, although people feel very strongly
about it, is of a completely different category and there won't be a conscience vote. If you have a conscience vote on mandatory sentencing then you might as well have a conscience vote on just about everything …

TONY JONES: Let me ask you this, though: when you heard of the death of that young child in the prison, did it not strike you that this might be a moral issue?

JOHN HOWARD: Well, I—Tony, when I heard of the death of that young child I was distressed like any other Australian, but … you can't just say, on the basis of that one very sad and tragic incident, that that of itself justifies overturning what is—if you believe in any kind of Federation—is traditionally one of the things that states do, and that is manage their criminal laws.

The lack of clarity concerning what qualifies any given issue as a matter of ‘conscience’ can be read as reflecting a more general uncertainty about the relationship between ‘political’ and ‘moral’ questions, a matter I take up in chapter four.

Public Figures, Private Commitments

Beyond the formalities, Senators and Members have a number of means to express their personal religious convictions within, or at least on the fringes of, parliamentary life.

Parliamentary Christian Fellowship

When Gil Duthie entered Parliament as Labor Member for Wilmot in 1946, he resigned the post but not the convictions of a Methodist minister. From his parliamentary early days, he had imagined a cross-party Christian parliamentary group, but was advised by Kim Beazley (senior) to 'to wait for the move from among my colleagues'. He waited for twenty-two years, founding the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship in 1968, with Liberal Member for Lalor Merv Lee. Since then, the Fellowship has continued along the lines they established, with biannual dinners and breakfasts, guest speakers, and an ecumenical church service in a local Canberra church to
Chapter Three: So Help Me God: Religious and Political Vocation

mark the opening of each parliamentary year. The Fellowship aimed, according to Duthie:

To bridge party and creedal frontiers, to create a common form for prayer, discussion and worship, to demonstrate that there was always something spiritual and powerful over-reaching all the policies of all the political parties, without which the nation could go under.

Beyond political memoirs, there is little published about the Fellowship. It exists, after all, to benefit Senators and Members rather than for any extraparliamentary role, and thus keeps a deliberately low public profile. Orders of service for public events such as the National Prayer Breakfasts include brief self-descriptions of the Fellowship, information which the group also took online in late 2000, when it opened its own worldwide web page. 'Members only' prayer links, password-protected against casual surfers, suggest that the web-page, like the group itself, is intended primarily for insiders' benefit.

The Fellowship's stated aims are to:

• Provide a forum for Christian Senators and Members to meet together on a regular basis during federal parliamentary sitting weeks.

• Provide a forum for Senators and Members to be regularly inspired and encouraged by Christian Speakers.

• Provide a link between Christian Churches, organisations and associations and Federal parliament.

• Encourage and facilitate prayerful support for federal politicians.

The Fellowship meets for breakfast on the second Wednesday of each sitting fortnight. The fresh starts can be a deterrent, as Foreign Affairs Minister and Liberal Member for Mayo Alexander Downer reported:

I'm not a regular attender ... They're much too early in the morning. What do I do when I hear my flatmates clattering around, going off to the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship? I turn over and go back to sleep.

Those who brave the iced wind screens of a Canberra dawn meet, in the words of former Fellowship President and Liberal Member for Berowra (NSW) Harry Edwards, 'across Party lines for fellowship and prayers in the
name of Jesus Christ, and to hear and reflect on the Word of God. In addition, they hear a speaker; during 2000, for example, breakfasters were addressed by Baptist Union President Rev Tim Costello and Woolworths CEO Roger Corbett, among others.

In practice, the Fellowship’s aspiration to cross-party lines has proved harder to fulfil than other aspects of Duthie’s vision. Anticipating the make-up of the Fellowship in later Parliaments, Duthie was the only ALP member on the first executive, although he reports that, under the Whitlam Government, each side’s frontbench was equally represented. The Fellowship’s Presidency has traditionally alternated between the two major parties, with Nationals such as Mr John Forrest and one former Democrat, Senator John Woodley, also in the ranks of past Presidents. However, the ALP has typically had fewer Fellowship members overall than the Coalition parties. Membership lists are not made public, but some interviewees for the present project estimated the number of ALP regulars on one hand, out of the current membership of sixty or so. A larger number of Labor Senators and Members described themselves as irregular attenders, drawn more by interest in particular guest speakers than by commitment to the group per se. Thus, Tasmanian Senator and Labor Deputy Whip Kay Denman commented:

I’ve been a few times when there are interesting speakers—I’d go more often if it wasn’t so early!—but recent speakers have been too conservative. I like someone more radical. I enjoyed Tim Costello, for example.

Some present and former Labor Senators and Members described their involvement partly in defiance of the group’s conservative tone. For example, Mrs Mary Easson, former Labor Member for Lowe (NSW) and a practising Roman Catholic, recalled:

I didn’t go to the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship all that often, but I went now and again ... I always felt that the people on the other side ... were sincere about their Christianity, they were people of integrity and sincere in their beliefs, but I didn’t think that they should be left with ownership of Christ—why should the name of Christ always be associated just with one point of view?
Some attributed low ALP attendance to the Fellowship's evangelical flavour, making it culturally alien to the ALP's Catholic contingent. Others, pointing to the collapse of sectarian party alignment, suggested instead that Christian adherence is demographically less likely in the ALP's younger, tertiary-educated, 'caffe-latte' generation than among the more working-class cultural roots of earlier parliamentary cohorts. A further explanation might be that, given the bitterness of religious divisions in ALP history, Labor Senators and Members are more reluctant than their Coalition colleagues about bringing religion into public focus.

Beyond that, some of the religiously committed in the ALP and from the 'wet' end of the Liberal Party argued that the Fellowship's very commitment to political non-partisanship pushes it, in practice, towards a highly privatised and personalised kind of religion which is, itself, politically charged. Thus former ALP Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe, a Uniting Church minister, used an image from the campus divisions of his university days to explain that the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship was too much an 'EU kind of organisation', referring to the Evangelical Union's emphasis on personal salvation. He would have felt more at home in 'an SCM kind of organisation', recalling the Student Christian Movement's focus on the social implications of Christian faith. With a similar sentiment but a different metaphor, Fred Chaney, former Aboriginal Affairs Minister and veteran of both Houses, found the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship to be too dominated by 'the forces of darkness from Queensland'. He speculated that the Queensland Nationals were probably the most religiously devout grouping in Parliament, but:

> It concerned me that conservative Christians were more concerned with censorship and abortion than with the fundamental Christian imperative to be on the side of the poor and dispossessed—in fact, conservative Christians are often the reverse! 

In the biography released around the time of her move to the ALP, former Democrat Leader Cheryl Kernot went further:

> She was asked if she believed in God and she said that while it might seem a funny thing to say, the change in government had presented her with something of a test of faith. 1997 was the first year in which she did not attend the church service for the opening of parliament. And she had
stopped going to Parliamentary Christian Fellowship meetings. She said she couldn't stand the hypocrisy of people who put in place policies that hit the vulnerable and then turned up in church, as if they could be divorced from the consequences of their decisions.\textsuperscript{77}  

She found the contrast a threat not just to her religious practice, but to the faith which underpinned it: 'While she had always believed in the teachings of Christ, she feared Canberra had made her into a bit of an agnostic'.\textsuperscript{78} She voiced the fear repeatedly:

\begin{quote}
Now, I am a Christian, although whether I leave this place with any faith after some of the budgets and legislation that we debate in this place is a matter of some concern to me.\textsuperscript{79}
\end{quote}

For others, Parliament brought conversion in the opposite direction. Liberal Member for Hughes Mrs Danna Vale recalled:

\begin{quote}
I always knew about God, I just didn't bother him very much. But I woke up with the strong feeling that, if I didn't stand for preselection, I'd one day have to explain to God why not ... I didn't go to church, but ... since my election, I've been on a spiritual journey rather than a political one ... Since the election, I've developed a personal relationship with Jesus, which wasn't how I was brought up. But here, you have to learn to do it on trust. You're always on the edge of the plank and someone's wobbling the other end. There's only one person in this building I can trust, and that's Jesus Christ—and he's never let me down ... Now I don't worry about anything any more. I've never felt so protected, but I have to surrender. I feel like the eye of the storm: quite calm.\textsuperscript{80}
\end{quote}

The question of what is a religious and what a political question can sometimes prove painful. Fellowship President for 1999 and Labor Member for Franklin Mr Harry Quick recalled the House of Representatives debate over an appropriate statement of reconciliation. Some Fellowship members from both sides of the chamber considered it an issue which should have transcended party divisions. The result was a tension between party discipline and religious solidarity:

\begin{quote}
There were a lot of people from the PCF [Parliamentary Christian Fellowship] who had tears in their eyes, saying, 'What we should have done was all of us collectively abstain, and stood at the back of the chamber, to send a message to people.'
\end{quote}
In fact, the pressures of party made such a demonstration of religious unity impossible: 'But, you know—when we get to that stage, it’ll be fantastic'.81

Yet the Christian solidarity which so many regard as a plus has kept others away. Former Senator Chris Puplick is an Anglican, but theologically far-removed from the evangelicalism of his home diocese, Sydney. To him, the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship’s strong articulation of a Christian identity amounted to exclusivism: 'I was good friends with Peter Baume. Now, if something advertises itself as a "Christian Prayer Breakfast", what's it saying to him, a Jew? If it had advertised itself as a theological prayer breakfast or something I might have felt differently; but its message to non-Christians was, "You're not welcome.'82

Opening of Parliament Services and National Prayer Breakfast

The services for the opening of Parliament, established by Duthie and Lee, are organised by the Fellowship executive, in collaboration with Canberra clergy. In contrast to the Fellowship’s fortnightly meetings, the services seek a congregation beyond the chambers. As in Duthie’s day, they continue to attract community leaders and local church members, as well as Parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. In 1971, according to Duthie:

The Government officially recognised the fellowship as an integral part of the Parliament and took over the cost of printing our orders of service and invitation cards. The President of the Senate and the Speaker gave it their full blessing.83

Since 1986, a more evangelical dimension has entered the Fellowship’s program in the National Prayer Breakfast, designed 'to reach out to the "unchurched" among Senators and Members and in all walks of life and from all parts of the country', to 'encourage Australians to recognise their privileges and responsibilities before God'.84 In fact, 'Breakfast' is something of a misnomer for an event which begins with a series of evening events and concludes with lunch the following day. For example, on the first Sunday in September 2000, five hundred or so attendees registered in the Parliament House Foyer at five-thirty, proceeded to a Welcome Reception in the Members Hall at six, then to the Great Hall forty-five minutes later. There they were addressed by Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson at a
Welcome Celebration, billed as ‘a coming together of our national leaders, the local Canberra community and those who join us for the Prayer Breakfast from all over Australia’.\textsuperscript{85} They were back in the Great Hall at seven-fifteen the following morning, to eat breakfast and hear former Australian Wallabies Captain Nick Farr-Jones, before spending an hour and a half in seminar groups, an hour in a concluding session and winding up with lunch in the Mural Hall.

Speakers, both for the Prayer Breakfast and church service, are chosen by the Fellowship executive, so that the occasion is likely to bear the stamp of whoever holds the key positions at a given time. Thus, in contrast to the recent list of sporting figures (in addition to the Wallabies Captain, former speakers have included jockey Darren Beadman, for example) former Senator Woodley’s presidency marked a more overtly political period:

I liked to ask speakers who were controversial. For the National Prayer Breakfast, I got [Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn] George Browning. He talked about reconciliation, and some people said it was too political. So for the opening of Parliament service, I got Jill Tabart, who was President of the Uniting Church at the time. And, blow me down, she spoke about reconciliation, too! She was very strong, in her gentle way.\textsuperscript{86}

\textbf{Monday Night Group}

If some found the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship’s theological focus too individualistic, to others it was not individual enough. Those wanting a still more personal take on faith meet late on sitting Monday nights for prayer, bible study and discussion. According to Labor regular and Member for Griffith Mr Kevin Rudd, ‘it’s the narrow church as opposed to the broad church, not in terms of evangelical fervour, but in terms of people who are reasonably comfortable talking about issues of personal faith’.\textsuperscript{87} The main aim is mutual support. That is even harder in Parliament than elsewhere, Mr Quick reflected, ‘Because one of the things in this place is that if you show any sign of weakness, of humanity, people use it against you for a whole variety of reasons’.\textsuperscript{88}

The group was started by Liberal Member for Parramatta Ross Cameron, who entered Parliament at the 1996 election. It stands in a longer tradition
of informal prayer groups distinct from the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship—for example, a similar one was hosted, until his 1993 defeat, by Liberal Member for Macquarie Mr Alasdair Webster. The present Monday Night group attracts varying numbers on any given night, from a pool of between twenty-five and thirty.

The conservative dominance of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship is at least as strong a feature of the Monday night group. Mr Rudd described himself as ‘probably the only leftie there’. In the group’s meetings, issues of personal faith and practice take over from immediate political concerns. Mr Rudd recounted:

> The value-added of the group is that everyone here finds it a personal struggle, and that’s what it’s about. How do we reconcile the pressures of this place and the dynamics of politics and its requirement of self-promotion with Christ’s calling, which is to play the part of a servant?

Although the group’s focus is personal rather than political, Mr Rudd agreed that the Monday Night group’s existence has a discernible effect on the Parliament’s processes:

> One of my Labor Party colleagues said to me, ‘Kevin, never pray with the bastards, because if you do it makes it harder to hate ‘em. And half of the business of this place is hating them, because we want their jobs’. And in part, the observation is right, because if you get to know these guys, they’re just like me, flawed human beings. And while you will not resile from fundamental policy differences, because you know them and realise that they are, within their own paradigm, struggling in terms of their perception of truth and their perception of political praxis—albeit often restricted to questions of private morality—then you have some respect for them, as opposed to people who are not restrained by anything. So that’s a longwinded way of saying, yes, you tend to have a greater respect for them. And does that have a political consequence? You’re more likely to listen with some respect.

Not only do group members see themselves as more likely to listen to each other, but some even treat one another differently in the political rough-and-tumble. According to PCF treasurer and Liberal Member for Hughes Mrs Danna Vale, mutual involvement in Christian activities cannot help but change the way political antagonists relate: ‘Of course it does, that’s
human. And people don’t want to see always and only the antagonism. Parliament’s such a boy thing’. To the parties, however, a desire to avoid antagonism may seem merely weak. Mr Quick recalled:

There was an opportunity last week where, rather than call the media out and do a television interview and heap it on Tony Abbott, I worked with him because of our Monday night thing, to try and get the result for my constituents, rather than point score. But a lot of my colleagues would say you’re mad, because you’ve lost the opportunity to get your name in the paper or on TV ... It worries the whips!

National Student Leadership Forum on Faith and Values

The Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Monday night group are activities internal to the Parliament, in the sense that they are activities of Senators and Members, although not part of the official functions of the Parliament (in the way that, say, a Parliamentary Committee is an official function). The annual National Prayer Breakfasts and services for the opening of Parliament are activities hosted by the Parliament but which also involve people from outside. Through them, citizens can show their support for the Parliament. Another para-parliamentary activity is the National Student Leadership Forum on Faith and Values. Beginning in February 1997, a group of Senators and Members from all parties has hosted a gathering of students in Parliament House to explore leadership. As outlined in letter of invitation to 1998 participants sent out over the signature of Liberal Member for Bradfield and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence Dr Brendan Nelson, the forum:

Is not so much a ‘how to’ seminar about the technical aspects of leadership. Rather, it is an interactive forum to consider the spiritual values and faith perspectives which underpin effective leadership.

It finds those values through ‘the lives and ideas of leaders such as Jesus of Nazareth and MK Ghandi among others’. Other ‘servant leaders’ whose ideas have been studied at past forums include German missionary Albert Schweitzer and Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Such positive examples are contrasted with alternative leadership styles such as those of Adolf Hitler and Mao Zedong. The forums are hosted by a cross-party group of Senators
and Members, with a heavy weighting towards the House of Representatives and the Coalition parties. Practical organisation comes largely out of the office of Mr Ross Cameron, with much of the less public work done by his brother, Mr Jock Cameron. Mr Ross Cameron described his brother as 'a fulltime lay worker', who spends two or three days out of every sitting week attached to the Member for Parramatta's office. According to Mr Ross Cameron, the forum's purpose is two-fold. On one hand, it facilitates an exchange of views between politicians and young potential leaders. On the other hand, it plays an evangelising role within the Parliament, providing, like the Prayer Breakfast, a chance to reach the 'unchurched' in the chambers:

'It's as much a way of engaging the politicians as the students. It gives us a context to go and say, 'we're talking about faith and values, we're using the life of Jesus of Nazareth as a paradigm of leadership'. So, for example, Mark Latham comes. He's an atheist, but he's happy to see Jesus as a paradigm of leadership."

At times, the Cameron brothers' associations have proved controversial. Out of their efforts to develop 'a network of Christian MPs in Australia, Fiji, the USA and around the Pacific', they became friends with Fiji's then Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka. He was a key-note speaker at the 1998 forum, prompting questions in the House as to how appropriate a coup leader was as a leadership role model for Australian students. Members might have added that Mr Rabuka's push, as Prime Minister, for compulsory Sabbath observance and his view of the coups as divine will make unusual models for secular Australia. However, Mr Jock Cameron, to whom Mr Rabuka has been 'a good friend for many years' responded to criticism of the invitation by observing that Mr Rabuka's 'public image might be one thing, but when you get to know the person, when you get to see what's underneath, you find something totally different.'

The emphasis on personal qualities rather than political commitments is a general feature of the forums, which, although hosted by politicians in the nation's political nerve-centre, go to some lengths to avoid political content. For example, past attendees report being encouraged by organisers to ask personal questions of political leaders, including the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition, but discouraged from raising questions about
policy. As with the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Monday night group, the effort to avoid 'politics' produces an emphasis on individual spirituality and personal achievement which strikes some as, in itself, political.

**National Mourning**

Sad and violent things happen every day in every country, but some capture public attention and become the focus of national attention. Destruction which involves large numbers of people and comes 'out of the blue' upon an unsuspecting community seems to create a need for collective expressions of grief. The Thredbo disaster and the Port Arthur shootings are instances where Christian liturgy and language have provided forms into which a range of shared and individual meanings could be poured. National political leaders and the Governor-General issue statements and take part in the proceedings less in their capacity as individuals (although they may also feel personally involved) than as embodiments of the nation. They take part ex officio, so to speak, regardless of personal religious convictions. In doing so, they become part of a form of religious practice which is intended to speak to all observers, regardless (in turn) of the observers' personal religious convictions. This potential tension between personal conviction and national need was explained by Opposition Leader Kim Beazley in a doorstop interview outside All Saints Anglican Church in the Canberra suburb of Ainslie, after a service held to pray for two Australian Aid workers under arrest in Yugoslavia:

**JOURNALIST:** How important do you think this service is …?

**MR BEAZLEY:** Look, I think it's terribly important that when there is concern, when you have concern for your people, be it after national tragedies, be it in circumstances like this, I think it's a good thing for the nation to come together and focus prayerfully on it. I would think that because those happen to be my beliefs. But there are a lot of people who don't hold my beliefs who also, I think, find it appropriate that there is some sort of national getting together to think about it and to express a view. And I think this church service is helpful in that way.\(^{101}\)
Deliberation and Debate

In the USA presidential election campaign in 2000, Republican candidate George W. Bush nominated Jesus Christ as his favourite political philosopher, while Democrat Al Gore pledged to ask himself every day in the Oval Office, 'WWJD?' ('What Would Jesus Do?'). The religious intensification of political debate in the USA over the last two decades is well-documented.102

It has been matched by increasingly anguished academic soul-searching. How should religiously-minded citizens and office-bearers in a pluralist, democratic society conduct themselves? May they draw on religious values to formulate political positions, or must they leave their theology at the gate when entering the public square? The liberal requirement of separation between religion institutions and the state is usually taken to entail (at least) a formal separation between religious institutions and the institutions of government. This, in turn, is often (and increasingly) interpreted as requiring also a separation in the practice of elected representatives. Their 'private' selves (who may or may not have religious commitments) are expected to stand aloof from their 'public' personae, who operate by secular norms in the secular public square. A representative survey of the last decade's contributions on this question from political philosophers would be a major study in itself.103

Among the most influential sources for contemporary statements of the need for separation between religion and politics is John Rawls's 'political liberalism'.104 Beyond his own work's significance, he has influenced a wider school who appeal to the related 'liberalism of reasoned respect'.105 For Rawls and his followers, citizens in a plural, democratic society hold different, often incompatible 'comprehensive doctrines', religious, moral and philosophical, which guide their private decision-making. Entering the public realm, they join a 'political conception' which holders of 'reasonable' comprehensive doctrines can endorse.106 The condition for joining is that they keep their comprehensive doctrines in the background.

Some revisers of this standard position agree that the liberal 'gag rule' on religion disadvantages those who choose to live a 'religiously integrated life'.107 A further complicating factor is the finding of a number of recent
American studies, such as that by Sidney Verba and his colleagues (discussed in chapter one) that active participation in a religious community is a good training ground for political skills. According to such observers, a high proportion of people who are practising adherents of a religious tradition are also politically active, making religious participation an asset rather than a threat to democratic, civil society.

In Australia’s more religiously tranquil atmosphere, such questions have received comparatively little serious discussion. From time to time, however, queries have been raised about the place of representatives’ religious beliefs in their political deliberations, and about the place of religious observance in parliamentary practice. Journalists have tended to consider politicians’ religious convictions at the level of personality profiles. When discussions go beyond superficialities, they often express unease about the apparent intrusion of religious beliefs into the political forum. What little public commentary is available generally assumes that religiously-committed parliamentarians should fit Rawls’s ideal type of citizens who hold comprehensive religious doctrines but enter public debate bracketing their religious beliefs. On the other hand, as I pointed out in chapter one, both anecdotal evidence and the available empirical data, born out by the present study, suggest that the American correlation between religious and political commitment is broadly transferable—if in a somewhat muted form—to Australia’s Parliament.

Should Religious Convictions Shape Political Views?

At Federation, the assumption was that most politicians would have religious beliefs; that they would exercise them politically; and that having representatives who behaved ‘as Christians in all things’ was one among the range of safeguards which citizens in a democracy could expect to protect the political process. These days, we may have slipped, without articulating or even noticing it, to the opposite assumption. The expectation underlying much public commentary is that, while Senators and Members may have religious beliefs, they should not exercise them politically; and the absence of religious convictions from Parliament is one safeguard of the political process.
In discussing these issues with Senators and Members, I found no one who agreed with the conventional view in liberal political philosophy that religious beliefs should not form a basis of a Senator's or Member's political judgment. Some denied that religious views played a part in their own deliberations, but all, religiously committed or not, defended the right of others to draw on religious considerations when forming judgments on political questions. Rejection of the Rawlsian liberal consensus came from the Parliament's full religious spectrum. South Australian Labor Senator Chris Schacht is one of the very few self-confessed parliamentary agnostics ('I'm almost an atheist, but atheism is as much a metaphysical position as any religious belief, so I prefer agnostic'). He has no problem working with Labor colleagues who draw political inspiration from religion, even though: 'From my point of view, I find it odd' that they should do so. Nor does he have any objection to their articulating their theological motivations. Employment Services Minister and Liberal Member for Warringah, practising Roman Catholic and former seminarian Mr Tony Abbott reaches similar tolerance from very different grounds:

MR ABBOTT: I have never made a political decision on religious grounds. And I wouldn't.

MM: Why not?

MR ABBOTT: Anyone who approached a political issue from a religious perspective, that would be as foolish as approaching a religious issue from a political perspective.

MM: So you see them as entirely separate spheres?

MR ABBOTT: No, no I don't, I don't ... But you come to any decision as the person that you are, that doesn't mean that if you are a religious person, or an irreligious person for that matter, that your religion, or your lack of religion, is a prime, or even a significant influence in any particular decision that you take. You come to it as you are. But, no, I've never brought anything other than a political judgment to the political issues that I've considered.

MM: Unlike what you've been saying, some people have said that their politics derives directly from their faith. Do you think that's legitimate—
MR ABBOTT: Well, that certainly wouldn’t be true in my own case.

MM: What about when other people—

MR ABBOTT: Well, if that’s their view, if that’s their way, fine. But it’s not mine.115

Former Deputy Prime Minister and National Party Leader Tim Fischer cited Edmund Burke to the effect that Senators and Members draw on their best convictions in reaching a political conclusion; such convictions may well include religious ones, and there is no reason to worry about their involvement in a secular polity. Mr Fischer saw greater dangers in the reverse influence, when government interferes in matters religious:

There are many clashes. For example, Catholic Education Offices take government funding, so teachers with a certain moral approach will survive when, all things considered, they shouldn’t.116

Although himself lapsed (as a Roman Catholic), Labor Member for Braddon Mr Sid Sidebottom saw no problem with Senators and Members drawing on theological commitments in forming political opinions: ‘It all depends on what motivates you, what your core values are. You can only represent people by being yourself, so you can’t keep it [religion] out.’ However, sometimes institutional imperatives defeat individuals’ religious commitments: ‘The party machine people on both sides have no morals’.117

Why Are We Here? Religious and Political Motivation

Senators and Members commonly felt that religious motivations formed part of the overall tangle of life orientations which might propel a person into a political career. For example, Mr Andrews speculated:

I don’t think you’ll find many people around here who’ll say that their primary motivation is overtly religious. It would be a matter of trying to tease out a set of values from their childhood, their upbringing, and other experiences, but then it’s a question of how you integrate that into the practical day-to-day decision making about events most of which don’t have any religious connotations whatsoever. You know, what you decide about a tariff bill or a customs amendment, all those sorts of things are—it’s pretty hard to draw a religious argument into any of that. So I think
it’s a matter of how people are formed, and I suppose the different ways in which beliefs and value systems go into the way in which they approach problems and approach issues.\footnote{118}

Nonetheless, some went so far as to declare their own reasons for being in politics as fundamentally religious. According to Liberal Member for Parramatta Mr Ross Cameron, ‘In relation to religion and politics, the aim is to lift up the person of Christ’.\footnote{119} Similarly, on the Labor side, Member for Franklin Mr Harry Quick saw his political career as ‘a form of ministry’.\footnote{120}

The same interpretation has a more formal meaning for former Australian Democrat Senator for Queensland Rev. John Woodley, the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Parliaments’ only member of the clergy. On his election to the Senate, ‘I wanted to stay a minister, so the [Queensland Uniting Church] Synod debated it, and made me a Synod appointee to the Senate. They found a regulation to fit—we weren’t creating a precedent, it is similar to what happens in the case of armed services chaplains.’ The Synod organised an induction service, the ceremony in which the church formally charges any Minister of the Word taking up a new parish or other clerical appointment. From his Church’s point of view, Rev. John Woodley remained in active ministry: the Senate is his pastorate. The roles are not necessarily so different: ‘I do a lot of counselling, with staff, Democrats and Senators from other parties’\footnote{121} while, as we see below, former Senator Woodley’s Hansard appearances reveal even the odd excursion into preaching and Bible study.

For others, like Labor Member for Griffith Mr Kevin Rudd, religious convictions formed a more or less explicit source of inspiration for political work:

\begin{quote}
My view is that my Christianity—however flawed a Christian I am, and I'm substantially flawed—shapes, as a belief system, my beliefs about the proper role which I play as an individual in society and the views which I hold about the proper allocation of the resources of society, which is a political judgment, and a matter of personal morality and public ethics.\footnote{122}
\end{quote}

Liberal Member for Macquarie Mr Kerry Bartlett not only draws on religious inspiration for his political work, but laid out his reliance in his first speech. He branched out from the usual acknowledgment of family and
supporters to thank ‘God for the opportunity of serving in this place and for the ultimate direction and meaning I believe He gives to our endeavours’.123

Fellow Liberal, Member for Hughes Mrs Danna Vale, not only found her religion an inspiration for her politics but regularly drew on it at every stage of debate, from party room to the chamber:

An example is the Holsworthy airport. We were called to the Party Room. I had just got in, and I thought, ‘Isn’t this nice, they’re inviting all the new people along!’ Then the Minister announced the plan, and I realised it was in my electorate! Sitting there in the Party Room, I said, ‘You’d better help me, Jesus—you put me here, so you give me the words’. So I thumped the table and said, ‘Over my dead body!’ I got a standing ovation. The Prime Minister said, ‘In 23 years in Parliament, I’ve never seen anything like it!’ But I thought that was just what you did. I’ve been a very positive member of the government ever since!124

She found even more direct connections between faith and politics in the debate over whether the federal Parliament should intervene to override the Northern Territory’s mandatory sentencing laws:

A pastor came to see me here, a lady. She showed me Psalm 91, and since then I’ve had Psalm 91 in the morning and Psalm 91 at night. It says, ‘For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone’ … When the Party decided not to intervene, I went to Plan B: the power of prayer … I contacted as many as I could of the churches in my electorate, asking them for prayers for guidance for the Prime Minister and Cabinet. I even asked [Anglican] Archbishop [of Sydney] Harry Goodhew. I also sent letters to the Prime Minister and Cabinet, so they’d know they were being prayed for … And I sent around copies of Psalm 91. Well, it was Shane Stone who brought in mandatory sentencing, after all—so I put the two crucial verses in bold type, and where it says, ‘You will not strike your foot against a Stone’, I spelled ‘Stone’ with a capital S, just in case some in the Party Room were a bit slow!

When it came to the debate in the House … I didn’t have a speech ready, so I just said, ‘Help me, Jesus’. The speech went down so well, but I hadn’t been prepared—I think God put the Spirit on the ears of the hearer.125
A number were reluctant to make their religiosity so overt, yet found it a fertile source for political values. Labor Senator Barney Cooney rejected any approach which would see politics as a means to implement, item by item, a political program adduced from church teachings. On the other hand, he found a useful framework in 'a general set of religious values'. Those included universal brotherhood, equality and the need to 'give everyone a place in the sun', which, for him, guided his decision to join the ALP at a time when 'many Catholics obediently joined the DLP in response to instructions from the pulpit'.

For many, religious involvement gave not only a framework for personal reflection but also a model of civic commitment. That has been a particularly strong feature of some strands of Australian Judaism. It perhaps helps explain the proportionally high numbers of Jewish Senators and Members, from the First Parliament through to the presence in the 1970s and 1980s of people like Joe Berinson, Moss Cass, Barry Cohen, Senator Sam Cohen and Professor Peter Baume. Mr Michael Danby entered Parliament in 1996 as Labor Member for Melbourne Ports, becoming the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments’ only sitting Jew. For him, traditions of civic engagement were at least as important as direct theological formation:

We went to synagogue on Jewish holidays. There were no great religious revelations, but two people from the rabbinical side were great influences. One was Rabbi Dr Herman Sanger. He was a founder of Reform Judaism. He fled Berlin to Australia. Menzies called him Australia’s greatest orator. His speeches were full of current events, relating the religious festival to the affairs of the day. He was an opponent of injustice—but he wasn’t only on about solving the problems of the world. The other was Rabbi John Levi. He comes from the same tradition as Sir Zelman Cowen. It’s a tradition that emphasises being very involved in public life and civic responsibility.

However, while religion can provide a frame for political involvement, Mr Danby warned against any tendency to see religion as determining political outlook:

It would be foolish to claim that any theology brings a particular politics—there are good people on all sides.
Should Religion Show in Debate?

Views varied substantially as to whether it is acceptable to publicly refer to religious beliefs (as opposed to consulting them privately) in defending a political judgment. Some regarded it as entirely appropriate. Former Senator Woodley reflected, 'I don't see my contribution as a minister as entitling me to any special attention—my contribution should be judged on its quality'; nonetheless, he added, 'I regularly make an explicit connection between theology and political argument in the Senate'.

So, when Senators debated the Migration Legislation Amendment Bill 1996, he had no hesitation in admonishing them:

SENATOR WOODLEY: My great fear that we will, by hastening this legislation, contravene some principles that go back to the very beginnings of the Judaeo-Christian ethic ... This passage from the Old Testament—and there are many—is typical: 'The Lord defends the rights of orphans and widows. He cares for foreigners and gives them food and clothing. And you should also care for them, because you were foreigners in Egypt' ... If we pretend in any sense to follow the Judaeo-Christian ethic, we have a special obligation to care for those within our own country who are foreigners, who are migrants, who are refugees. It is a phrase that occurs over and over again in the Old Testament.

SENATOR MCGAURAN: —What about the New Testament?

SENATOR WOODLEY: —I will come to that in a moment. I want to work through the Old Testament and then the New Testament, Senator McGauran, so don’t worry about it …

In one of the parables of Jesus we have the words: 'You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry . . . thirsty . . . a stranger and you did not welcome me . . . Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not
Do it to me.' Foreigners and strangers are regarded fundamentally as those whom Jesus would have us care for.

Such exposition was quite legitimate, he explained, 'because Christian theology is foundational to our society, even though we are now so secular'. Moreover, other Senators welcomed it: 'Even atheists (sometimes especially atheists!) recognise what I'm saying for its place in the tradition'. Sometimes they even contributed ideas: after the refugees speech quoted above, 'the Labor whip came over and whispered to me, "You've forgotten the Passover!"'. As for his Democrat colleagues, 'They love it. They're always saying, "Can you do the Bible again, John?"'

NSW Labor Senator Michael Forshaw, too, enjoys something of a reputation for spicing Hansard with theological references:

**SENATOR FORSHAW:** The symbolism is ironic. Guard dogs, men in balaclavas, weapons in the middle of the night. And it happened right on the eve of Easter, the time when most democratic nations in the world celebrate one of the most significant events in the history of Christianity, the death and resurrection of Christ. On this occasion, the irony is quite significant because what we had was the employer, Patrick, on the eve of the Easter holidays and with the full support and connivance of the John Howard Government, engaging in an illegal and deceitful action to destroy a trade union.

**SENATOR MCGAURAN:** —Make your biblical comparisons!

**SENATOR FORSHAW:** —I have referred to history ... what Senator McGauran refuses to accept and understand is that, in all democratic societies throughout history, it is often the trade union movement and the organised churches that are first attacked whenever despots or tyrants take over.

I asked him whether such outbreaks of parliamentary theology were mere rhetorical flourishing, or had their basis in active commitment. He replied that his strong Catholic family background and de la Salle Brothers
education had instilled a commitment to social justice. Today, 'I'm not the
greatest practising Catholic, but I still hold some religious beliefs. I'm not a
regular churchgoer, but I certainly wouldn't call myself lapsed.' On some
issues, theological argument was particularly appropriate, for example
when it was a matter of pointing out what he saw as inconsistencies
between belief and action. Thus, he told the Senate on another occasion:

The Prime Minister says that he is a Christian. I accept that he is and I
accept that he fervently holds his Christian beliefs. My knowledge of
Christianity is that the greatest act of Christianity was the crucifixion,
when Christ gave his life for the sins—past, present and future—of
mankind. If Christ could do that, the least the Prime Minister could have
done as a Christian was to apologise for the sins and injustices visited
upon our indigenous people.

In the debate over the Euthanasia Laws Bill, on the other hand, he had
consciously decided not to argue theologically: 'I wanted to emphasise that
people's religious views are integrated with other views. So I tried to look at
the issue omitting religious arguments, and concentrate instead on human
rights. The law should not be about enacting legislation to kill'.

Others, such as Liberal Member for Menzies (and sponsor of the 1996
Euthanasia Laws Bill) Mr Kevin Andrews, though holding strong religious
convictions, consistently refrained from drawing them explicitly into debate.
For Mr Andrews, the reason was not theoretical but strategic:

MR ANDREWS: I don't think it ultimately gets you anywhere or solves
anything because there [are] religious people on both sides
of the debate ... I mean, I'd be very loath to use a religious
argument in any political debate ... because there's always
a religious counter-argument.

MM: So that's a pragmatic reason for not drawing a religious
argument. Is there anything stronger than that?

MR ANDREWS: Oh, no, I don't think it's improper. In fact, even though I
don't do it myself, the view that somehow religious
arguments can't be advanced I think is a nonsense.

Others were less compromising, as my interview with the Labor Member for
Griffith found:
MM: What about when other people call on a theological position in public debate—do you think that’s legitimate?

MR RUDD: It makes me vomit. Would you like me to be more graphic?139

What is a Religious Issue?

There were substantial differences about what might count as a ‘religious’ issue in politics. A few saw a religious dimension in every political decision. Liberal Member for Hughes Mrs Danna Vale was one: ‘Everything is a religious issue. If the good Lord wants me here, I’ll be here no matter what.’140 With the scars of the 1997 Andrews Bill still fresh, almost everyone I spoke to nominated euthanasia. Less predictably, given their long absence from the federal canvas, abortion and capital punishment were also popular contenders. A smaller number of interviewees, spread evenly across the parties, included Native Title and reconciliation.

There were some direct disagreements. Tax reform provided one flashpoint for differing views of how religious and political concerns interact. Mr Kevin Andrews, Liberal Member for Menzies (Vic.), agreed that religious reflection has a place in political deliberation on some issues, but cautioned:

> There are not issues on which I think a religious view concludes the matter. Take the taxation debate … I don’t think there’s a religious view that says, the GST is right or wrong.141

That position echoed the stance of then Roman Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne George Pell, who entered the tax debate to contradict those Catholic social justice agencies which had spoken against a GST. Former Senator Woodley, whose party was instrumental in seeing the GST implemented, had encountered similar views in his own denomination. His disagreement, though, was not over whether the GST was a proper subject of religious deliberation but rather over the extent to which laudable religious ideals can be expected to be carried out in practice:

> My main disagreement with the Uniting Church has been over tax. It’s been a bit of a break in fellowship. Politics is not about getting what you want, it’s about compromise—unless the government has total power.142
On the other hand, Mr Rudd considered:

I regard the consumption tax as anathema to poor people because it’s a regressive redistributionist tax … I believe it is against the continuing Old Testament and New Testament tradition of prophetic concern for the poor, the weak, the oppressed, shown in Jesus’ concern for those who couldn’t look after themselves.143

Mr Ross Cameron was equally prepared to extrapolate a Biblical position on tax, but leading to a substantially different conclusion:

People are entitled to the fruits of their labour, so we need minimal taxation … Every impost on capital reduces the opportunities of those with the least, so we need to remove restraints on capital. Most church leaders are slaves to defunct economic thinking—and those who suffer most are the poor. At the deep inner core of the left is the belief that profit is morally wrong. But the two most offensive parables are the talents144 and the labourers in the vineyard.145 The parable of the labourers is challenging the view that says, ‘You shouldn’t be allowed any more than me, especially if you got it on the basis of a privilege I don’t enjoy’. I was giving a talk to secondary students a while ago, and one of them asked a question to the effect, ‘Isn’t it immoral that Company X posted Y billion dollars profit this year?’ They were saying, ‘Shouldn’t there be a limit on profits?’ That’s the kind of thinking that Christ was challenging.146

This was in keeping with his general philosophical orientation:

I’m on the right wing of the Liberal Party on most issues. My political view is about development of the human person. The heart of Christ was freedom—and freedom comes through having the confidence, skills and optimism to take control of your own life. The state is too often a short-circuiting mechanism in the development of the human person against the circumstances of the market. I take a capital-P Puritan view that Australia is capable of much more. I want the least possible reliance of citizens on the state. I’m against the welfare state on humanitarian and religious grounds. The early church had welfare, but it was also tough—Paul said, ‘ Whoever does not work, does not eat’.147 I’d pretty much repudiate the concept of social justice, it does more harm than good … I visited an Aboriginal community five hundred kilometers west of Alice Springs—the dependency I saw there was produced by the strategy of social justice. I’d almost call it evil.148
Mr Cameron’s extrapolation of an economic position from Christian theology was unusually strong, both in the thoroughness with which he related his philosophical and theological positions, and in the uncompromisingly rightwing stance to which the philosophy pointed. Overall, however, his response was typical, to the extent that those on the religious and political right articulated a theological grounding to their position both more readily and more consistently than those on the left. As recently as the Hawke-Keating era, this might not have been the case, as figures such as Brian Howe, Michael Tate and John Langmore attest. In the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments, representatives of a Christian left are harder to find, and, as Mr Rudd reflected, may feel themselves constrained by pressure from the right:

Where is the articulate, theologically-informed Christian left today? Well, I belong to it. But because, in a way, one becomes so concerned about the abuse of Christianity by the Christian right, one becomes even more reluctant to invoke the divine in justification of a series of policy positions.149

The shift towards greater theological articulateness on the right might be partly a reaction to one legacy of ‘the articulate, theologically-informed Christian left’, namely, a tendency for churches’ interventions in economic and policy debate to incline to the left, a matter I take up in the next chapter. That tendency has been met with a push from the economic right to reclaim the theological ground. As one indication, the economic libertarian Society of Modest Members, though not itself a religious organisation, occasionally includes Christian theologians in its speakers program. The society, formed in the 1981 by a group of Coalition MPs ‘suffering under the yoke of the Fraser socialist Government’,150 takes its name from the newspaper nom-de-plume of the late Member for Wakefield (SA), Bert Kelly. Its objective is ‘to promote the use of the competitive market as the best means of providing for human well being’.151 It argues ‘the case for personal advancement through initiative and hard work in a society that provides opportunities, as opposed to one with an anti-success culture and a focus on redistribution’.152 To that end, its guest speakers in recent years have included theological free market advocates. One was Dr Sam Gregg, Director of the Centre for Independent Studies’ Religion and
the Free Society Program (discussed in chapter one), who encouraged the Modest Members to see neoliberal economics as a response to the Christian doctrine of sin. Another was Rev. Dr Max Champion, President and co-founder of the Melbourne-based Galatians Group, a non-denominational body whose national conferences aim to undo what it sees as 'the strait-jacket fitted by the judges of current fashions in political correctness', translating, in the realm of economics, to a commitment to free market principles along the lines advocated by F. A. Hayek. The increasingly articulated theology of the neo-liberal economic right, together with the fading of an articulated Christian socialist vision, has meant that religiously-couched politics and economics in Parliament is, these days, more likely to come from right than left.

For a sharper view of this ideological shift in the Australian Parliament, we need to turn to the long-evolving, and now rapidly-changing, relationship between Christian churches and government, which is the subject of the next chapter. There, we find a succession of controversies raising both religious and political temperatures, which has included immigration, alcohol prohibition, anti-communism, abortion, state aid to church schools and sex discrimination. The relationship between the religious right's libertarian economics and conservative social agenda, as manifested in the Thirty-Eight and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments, I take up in chapter five. There, as in the various practices examined in this present chapter, we see the difficulty, in real life, of the clear religion-politics divide advocated by liberals since the seventeenth century.

Structure, Anti-structure and Parliamentary Religion

Parliamentary formalities include a range of overtly religious activities, which may or may not be given religious significance by the individuals who enact them. Thoroughgoing secularists might see prayers and oath-taking, for example, as anomalies in modern Australia. However, the struggles of those seeking to live 'a religiously integrated life' in the corridors of power suggest that simply removing religious formalities would do little to satisfy secularists' real concerns. The inevitable political effects of activities such as the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, Monday night group and (more
indirectly) the National Student Leadership Forum on Faith and Values, even as they endeavour to be non-partisan, indicates the degree of interplay between religious and political commitments. (By the same token, of course, any secularist push to proscribe such groups would be no less superficial a response than removing prayers and oath-taking). Given the ever-present need to reconcile religious and political convictions for those who hold them, if, in Schillebeeckx's words, the holders 'are not to experience some dichotomy or schizophrenia', Senators' and Members' universally tolerant attitude to people drawing on their faith in forming policy decisions is, arguably, more realistic than liberal philosophers' demands that religious reasons be rigorously excluded from decisions in the public square. Putting it another way, the role of religious convictions in political decision-making appears to be one area in Australia's version of the liberal-democratic compromise in which the balance swings towards the 'democracy' end rather than the 'liberal' end.

In the religious aspects of parliamentary formalities, we have seen one dimension of Turner's picture, namely, expressions of the sacred which uphold structure. Indeed, once we enter the parliamentary arena, we are in the heart of structure: here, where laws are passed and executive decisions taken, is where structure takes its sharpest form. In Turner's terms, religious manifestations in Parliament can be understood as liminal in the sense that they appear as anomalous intrusions or quaint historical hangovers in the secular public sphere, yet they support, endorse and embellish the hierarchical ordering on which structure relies. Even without overt religious markers, parliamentary procedures are likely to carry an aura of the sacred; they fit the kinds of social requirements Durkheim has in mind when he points out:

The ways of action to which society is strongly enough attached to impose them upon its members, are, by that very fact, marked with a distinctive [religious] sign provocative of respect.158

Consequently, even in a highly secular polity such as Australia, activities such as openings of Parliament, installation of new Ministries and other moments of parliamentary ritual carry religious forms of expression without glaring anomaly.
At the same time, when we move from formal procedures to the informal deliberations of Senators and Members and their para-parliamentary religious activities, we see a second, more unstable and less predictable incursion of the sacred into the secular workings of the Parliament. In contrast to the dynamics which reinforce structure, we see liminal religiosity, emerging through the interstices of the secular party system, leading members of the parliamentary Christian groupings to accord each other greater respect and pursue each other more circumspectly. In that movement, we might discern (in Turner’s terms) communitas, with its characteristics of weakening traditional hierarchies and oppositions.

Nevertheless, a number of this chapter’s findings should warn us against any too-easy interpretation of parliamentary religion as an outbreak of egalitarian anti-structure. First, only a minority of Labor Senators and Members regard themselves as Parliamentary Christian Fellowship regulars: according to some reports, Labor participation in this officially bipartisan body in fact accounts for only about ten per cent of the Fellowship, or even less. The anti-structure tendencies of shared religiosity, while real and significant for those who participate, are not, apparently, evenly distributed.

A further set of qualifications comes from (among others) Christian abstainers from parliamentary religion and those whom we might call reluctant or marginal participants. Here, it is helpful to turn to the recollections of former Senators and Members, whose relative distance from the fray perhaps allowed them room for franker reflections than those currently sitting. Recall Mr Puplick’s interpretation of explicitly Christian parliamentary activity as excluding Senators and Members of other faiths. He implies that an activity which appears, from one point of view, to fit Turner’s picture of anti-structure (by weakening party antagonisms), from another angle, reinforces elements of hierarchically-ordered structure and militates against embrace of the other. In this case, it reinforces Christian exclusivism; perhaps even anti-Semitism.

We should take additional caution from the observations of those who stayed away from parliamentary religious activities on political grounds (such Mr Chaney and Mr Howe) and those who participated, as it were,
under protest, to prevent any impression that the right (in Mrs Easson’s words) have ‘ownership of Christ’. To such dissenters, the very elements which allow parliamentary religion to take on an appearance of bipartisan anti-structure—especially its privatisation, to the exclusion of directly political concerns—in fact endorsed and reinforced one political position, namely, that of hierarchically-ordered structure.

We can gain more purchase on this issue by broadening the theoretical resources to include those of Turner’s critics who supplement his model’s ‘ahistorical and apolitical’ dimensions. According to Donald Weber, for example, Turner’s picture of liminality is insufficiently sensitive to ‘a conception and recognition of culture as political contestation: the battle over narrative power, the fight over who gets to (re)tell the story, and from which position’. The liminal, although ‘outside’ structure, draws its significance from the very power relations which structure reproduces. One person’s anarchic, celebratory communitas is another person’s exclusion.

The remaining chapters look outwards from the parliamentary arena and find these dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, within the same phenomenon, played out in contexts as diverse as outsourcing government social services, the resurgence of the socially conservative ‘family values’ right and secular Australia’s attempts to come to grips with Indigenous claims for protection of sacred heritage.

Endnotes


3. ibid., pp. 86–87.

4. Of forty-three constitutional referendum proposals put to the people since 1901, only eight have succeeded. For a summary of successful and unsuccessful proposals prior to 1995, see D. W. Lovell, et al., *The Australian...*
Endnotes continued


6. Grace Bible Church v Reedman.


11. ibid., p. 220.

12. ibid., p. 222.


15. ibid., p. 207.

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Endnotes continued

17. This form is still used in the Senate (see Standing Orders and Other Orders of the Senate February 2000 Senate Table Office, Canberra, 2000, p. 37). The House of Representatives uses a slightly edited form: 'Almighty God, we humbly beseech thee to vouchsafe Thy blessing upon this Parliament. Direct and prosper our deliberations to the advancement of Thy glory, and the true welfare of the people of Australia.' (See House of Representatives Standing and Sessional Orders As At 1 February 2000, Department of the House of Representatives, Canberra, 2000, p. 14.) Both Houses use the form of the Lord's Prayer from the Book of Common Prayer (1662).


20. ibid., 14 June 1901, p. 1138.

21. ibid., 7 June 1901 p. 818.

22. ibid., 14 June 1901, p. 1138.

23. ibid.

24. ibid.

25. ibid., 7 June, 1901, p. 817.

26. ibid., p. 819.

27. Senate and House of Representatives, Debates, Hansard, 14 June, 1901, p. 1140.


29. Senate and House of Representatives, Debates, 7 June, 1901, p. 820.

30. ibid., 7 June 1901, p. 819.

31. ibid., 14 June 1901, p. 1137.


34. ibid.


36. The Senate Procedure Committee Second Report of 1997, November 1997, p. 4. The texts of the Senators' responses on which this finding was based are
Endnotes continued

unfortunately not available for research (personal communication, Clerk of the Senate’s office, 7 April 2000).

37. The connection between prayers and recognition was regularly made in the Federation-era debates, both at the Constitutional Conventions (for example, in the exchange between Douglas and Peacock quoted above) and in Parliament, where the point was raised both by numerous letters from church leaders which were read into Hansard in the course of the debate and by speakers to the motion. See Senate and House of Representatives, Debates, 7 June 1901, pp. 816, 820.


39. ibid., p. 1139.

39. ibid.

40. ibid., 21 August 1996.

41. Interview with Senator Kim Carr, Parliament House, 30 June 1999. In fact, as the previous quotation indicates, the invitation to ‘mumble’ (loudly or otherwise) was not extended until after the Labor regime’s demise.


43. See Constitution, Section 42 and Schedule. Capitals in original.

44. Until 1993, Ministers pledged allegiance to the reigning sovereign and the sovereign’s heirs and successors. From April 1993, Ministers in the Keating administration swore to serve the Commonwealth of Australia, without reference to the sovereign (or heirs). In 1996, Prime Minister Howard and his Ministers reinstated allegiance to the Queen, but not to her heirs or successors (See House of Representatives, Debates, Questions on Notice, (Question no. 140), 2 December 1998).

45. Interview, Australian National University, 8 July 1999.

46. For discussion, see Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 2 March 1898, p. 1736.


Endnotes continued


61. For example *7:30 Report*, ABC TV, 4 April 2000.


63. Duthie's autobiography records how the Methodist church found his endorsement as a Labor candidate incompatible with remaining in the ministry. See G. Duthie, *I Had 50,000 Bosses: Memoirs of a Labor Backbencher 1946–1975*, op. cit., pp. 20–21. It did not make the same demand of later clerical politicians such as Brian Howe and (after church union) John Woodley.

64. ibid., p. 241.

65. ibid.
Endnotes continued

66. ibid.


68. ibid., and various photocopied orders of service.


70. Australian Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, A Federal Parliamentary Association of Senators and Members of all political parties who gather together to encourage one another in God, op. cit.

71. The first executive was: Merv Lee (Liberal Member for Lalor) President; Primary Industries Minister Charles Adermann Vice-President; Dick Cleaver (Liberal Member for Swan) Treasurer; Duthie Secretary.


73. Interview, Parliament House, 12 August 1999.

74. Telephone Interview, November 2000.

75. Interview, Centre for Public Policy, Melbourne, 29 July 1999.

76. Interview, Parliament House, 6 August 1999.


78. ibid.


82. Telephone interview, 28 December 1999.


Endnotes continued

89. As described by Karin Sowada, Interview, Sydney University, 21 July 1999.
93. Form letter signed 'Dr Brendan Nelson MP, Federal member for Bradfield, on behalf of the Parliamentary Hosts', 23 February 1998.
94. ibid.
95. For example, publicity materials for the 1998 forum list 42 Parliamentary Hosts: 27 Liberal, 4 National, 3 Democrat and 8 ALP.
100. Interview, Mr Jock Cameron, Parliament House, 6 December 1999.
Endnotes continued


Endnotes continued


114. Telephone interview, 10 June 1999.


125. ibid.


128. ibid.


Endnotes continued

147. 2 Thessalonians 3:10. The reference is to Paul's instruction to itinerant Christian missionaries to earn their keep rather than living on the charity of their hosts.
150. Mr Peter McGauran, quoted in N. Savva, 'Mutterings Over A Modest Dinner', Sun, 18 October 1986, p. 6; see also G. Sturgess, 'Move for a Body of Modest Members', The Bulletin, 2 June 1981.
Endnotes continued


156. The phrase is from Wolterstorff in Weithman, op. cit.


159. Telephone Interview, November 2000.

Then they watched for their opportunity and sent spies, who pretended to be upright, in order to catch him in his speech … These people asked him, ... 'Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, or not?' He perceived their trickery at once, and said to them, 'Suppose you show me a silver coin. Whose image and inscription does it bear?' 'Caesar's', they answered. So he said to them, 'Well, then, pay to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s'.

This story is frequently quoted in discussions of religion and the state. For example, it provides the title for a number of major studies. Those who quote it usually take it as a straightforward instruction to keep religion clear of the state. Politicians see in it a divine mandate to act free of clerical carping. But few biblical scholars accept that the Gospel writers intended the story to inaugurate a theory of religion-state separation. To Jesus’ hearers, the meaning would have been the opposite. Caesar’s image marks the coin as Caesar’s property. Since human beings bear God’s image, all human affairs belong to God.

The story of Jesus and the coin encapsulates longstanding Australian tensions over the proper role of religion in public debate. To many in the public sphere, that sphere’s autonomy should be preserved from religious interference. To many in the churches and other religious organisations, there is no sphere separate from ‘what is God’s’.
The separation of church and state is foundational to liberal political philosophy. Historical accounts of liberalism's genesis frequently identify religious liberty as foundational. For example, Will Kymlicka's entry on 'Liberalism' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* states as conventional the view that:

Liberalism grew out of the recognition that toleration was the only alternative to the Wars of Religion. After innumerable wars, both Protestants and Catholics accepted that the state could not assume or impose a shared devotion to a single faith, and that the only stable basis for a political regime was to separate Church and State.

True to that interpretation, liberal political thought advocates secularisation of the public sphere and a corresponding privatisation of religious commitments. However, debate continues about what this means philosophically and how it plays out in public policy.

This chapter examines two categories of crossover between church and state in the life of the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments. Government representatives firstly resist church incursions into what they see as their own policy domain, only to return the favour by outsourcing to the churches tasks which were once responsibilities of the state.

**Churches in the Marketplace**

From time to time, political leaders charge that churches should 'keep out of politics' or 'stick to their proper job'. This is often said to be new: in the past, church leaders stuck to spiritual matters, and when they now venture into politics it is as a result of new theology, misguided priorities or 'trendy' influences.

Such exchanges (minus the word 'trendy') are older than the Commonwealth. By Federation, church leaders were well-established—though not uncontroversial—players in public debate. Often, this was in their best-known roles as co-enforcers (with the state) of colonial authority and wowser opponents of secular pleasure. For almost as long, however, church leaders have played a contrary part, as irritants to the political establishment.
At first, such interventions tended to be by individuals, rather than on behalf of any still embryonic church structure. Nevertheless, in the books, pamphlets, journalism, letters to the authorities and presentations to government committees through which they made their views known, they did not hesitate to state their arguments' religious foundation. Thus Australia's first Roman Catholic vicar-general, Rev. Dr William Ullathorne, fought against transportation in pamphlets entitled *The Catholic Mission in Australia* and *The Horrors of Transportation*. On the strength of that campaign, he was invited to give evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Transportation, chaired by Sir William Molesworth.

Opposition to the treatment of transported felons was a point of political agreement transcending the doctrinal differences between Ullathorne and the vehemently anti-Catholic Presbyterian cleric Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang, who similarly published on the subject and also gave evidence to the Molesworth Committee. Lang was then just beginning his political transition from Tory bourgeois moralist to the radical republican who eventually took his seat in the New South Wales Legislative Council on a platform of no transportation, no gerrymander and greatly extended franchise. The constant in his public career was the confetti of representations, letters, petitions, newspaper articles, books and pamphlets with which he showered the public and government officials in Australia and the United Kingdom. These regularly invoked his authority as 'senior minister of Scots Church' and from time to time spelled out how he understood the relationship between his roles as a political activist and minister of religion. Critics urged that 'a professed minister of religion' should not 'meddle' with politics but 'mind your own proper business and leave these things to other people'. He replied that politics was as much the clergy's business as anybody's. For example, he claimed republicanism, underpinned by political equality, universal suffrage and popular election, as the only biblically-endorsed form of government. When detractors labelled his ideas 'Chartism, Communism and Socialism', he replied that in that case, those 'isms' must, like his own 'objectionable principles', have originated in 'that Word of God which endureth for ever'.

Churchmen also took the state to task on matters of race. Henry Reynolds has recently drawn attention to the role of Australian and English
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evangelicals, the 'Exeter Hall' reformers, in nineteenth-century campaigns for Indigenous peoples. Lang's efforts at loosening the restrictions on Chinese immigration brought five hundred Chinese mourners to the head of his funeral procession. Similarly, Congregationalist Rev. Dr James Jefferis argued in the 1870s for equal wages for Chinese and Australian workers.

The 1890 Maritime Strike returned clerical political interventions to the public eye. The formation of ecumenical Councils of Churches in that decade enabled the churches, lacking the privileges of establishment, to speak with the authority of a shared position. The qualified pro-unionism of Roman Catholic Cardinal Moran, the moderate socialism of Anglican Bishop Barry and the full-blown Christian socialism of Congregationalist Rev. Dr Thomas Roseby and Anglo-Catholic Rev. H. L. Jackson alike drew the charge that social questions do not belong in the pulpit.

Richard Ely describes the active engagement of clergy in the debates prior to Federation, both locally and on the national stage. Their interventions covered not only the predictable topics of the 'recognition clause', religious freedom and the status of clergy in the new Commonwealth, but also the nature of social justice and the desirability of Federation itself. As Bathurst was preparing to host the 1896 People's Convention, for example, its churches observed a 'Federation Sunday' on which sermons with titles such as 'The Federal Lord' interpreted the fellowship of colonies as an expression of Christian ideals of love and unity. Church services focusing on social issues—and promoting a particular view on those issues—remained common after Federation. For example, A. E. Talbot, Dean of Sydney's St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral from 1912 to 1937, made the Cathedral the venue for an annual Eight Hour Day Service.

A third strand of churches' civic activity, beside providing charity and producing clerical pronouncements on social questions, was the fostering of active citizenship on the part of their members. In that respect, Australian historical data anticipates the American findings of Verba, Schlosznan and Brady discussed in chapter one. For example, before compulsory voting, churches encouraged the idea of voting as a sacred trust and religious duty, its neglect as a 'sin'. South Australian Methodists even floated the idea of requiring each church to have an 'electoral agent' to oversee the enrolment
of all eligible voters. At the same time, their Mutual Improvement Societies provided a forum for working- and lower-middle-class men to hear lectures and take part in debates on the political issues of the day. One historian of Australian Methodism notes that, addressing often overtly political themes, 'many future leaders in the community first learnt to reflect on abstract ideas and to argue a case before others within a church Improvement Society'. J. D. Bollen reports similar activities among New South Wales Anglicans:

St. Barnabas, Sydney, debated with Christ Church, Enmore: 'Should a Land Tax be Imposed?'; the Young Men's Union of St. Paul's, Redfern, commended the Australian Workman for articles on social injustice which it had spent a night examining.

Church and para-church women's organisations (such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union) played a comparable role in women's political education. Such events, and a more general concern with the relationship between labour and capital, growing out of nineteenth century theology and practice, derived new force from the 'social gospel' strand of Christian theology which developed during the first decade of the twentieth century and remained influential until the outbreak of World War II.

In the past, as now, churches did not always agree with one another on the appropriate response to social questions. For example, Roman Catholic opposition to conscription in World War I is well-documented. By contrast, the Methodist Church of South Australia not only campaigned vigorously for the 'yes' case in the two conscription referenda, but directly attacked the Roman Catholic anti-conscription stance. The editor of the denominational newspaper at times found mere prose inadequate to convey the strength of Methodist passions:

Speak plain at the next Referendum,
   Reply by a thunderous 'Yes!'
And show Dr Mannix' Sinn Feiners
   They cannot—yet—answer for us.
Show those who would hoodwink the workers,
   The manifold pro-German crew,
That tricks for betraying the soldiers
   Have no inch of quarter with you.
The front page of a subsequent issue carried the simple message, 'VOTE YES'.

If such poetic outbursts are rare, churches have always used whatever means were available to make their points, including books, the religious press, and columns in the secular press, supplemented by radio appearances when that medium developed. The staging of a 'media event' to attract the attention of the wider public as well as a church's own members is also not a new phenomenon. One dramatic example is the *Call to the People of Australia*, which was read out in radio news bulletins in 1951, with 1.5 million copies circulated within a year. The *Call* owed much to methods developed by the Roman Catholic bishops' annual Social Justice Statements, which, from 1940, aimed to shape public attitudes and policy, as well as to inform lay Roman Catholics.

Churches' public interventions have seldom gone forward without internal dissent. For example, Joan Mansfield describes the early years of the ideological divide in the Anglican diocese of Sydney which led to the conservative evangelical dominance which still distinguishes it. In the 1930s, two separate Anglican committees addressed social evils along the lines of the emerging tensions. The conservative evangelical Sunday Observance and Social Reform Committee battled specific failures of personal morality. The Social Problem Committee, drawing on 'social gospel' ideas, gave itself a broader brief: 'the Social Problem, rather than specific evils such as gambling, drink and vice, except in so far as these are bound up with the structure of society'. According to Mansfield, the latter group explicitly rejected a distinction between the 'moral' and the 'political'. The presence of dissent within their own denomination did not delegitimise their activities, since they understood their political concern in a broader sacramental context. For these High Church Anglicans, Christian social concern was epitomised in the eucharist, which they saw as:

> the whole Christian community, Sunday by Sunday, lifting up the whole social order—which the Bread is symbolizing—lifting it up to God to be redeemed.
What is a Moral Issue?

The mid-century debate among Sydney Anglicans reflects a wider, and ongoing, controversy about the proper delineation of 'moral' and 'political' questions. As emphasised in chapter one, the quest for a political or ideological 'line' in church pronouncements on social issues leads not onto a single orthodox highroad but into a maze of often incompatible recommendations. Like Mansfield’s Anglicans, modern churches of whatever denomination are likely to experience tension between those who see the church’s social mission in terms of restraining individual behaviours (such as is likely to go along with a prohibitionist stance on drugs, conservative sexual morality and advocacy of censorship, to name a few touchstone issues) and those who see it rather in terms of a critique of economic inequality, advocacy of a pro-union stance on industrial relations and a social agenda built around multiculturalism and reconciliation.

Of course, having sketched two broad positions which can fairly be said to mark a cleavage in Christian social ethics, one must point out that it is not unusual for individuals to combine elements of both. For example, some Roman Catholic advocates of left-wing industrial relations oppose abortion. Tasmanian Independent Senator Brian Harradine’s political mystique is partly due to his boundary-crossing in this regard, his vehemently conservative stance on sexual and biomedical ethics matched by his equally well-known support for Aboriginal reconciliation and opposition to what he saw as an unduly regressive GST. A similar combination of progressivism on Indigenous affairs and conservatism on sex characterises some evangelical Protestants: for example, both sets of values contributed to former Member for McPherson (Qld) Mr John Bradford’s shift from the Liberal Party to Christian Democrat (and, after an unsuccessful 1998 Senate bid in that guise, his departure from the federal scene).

Nonetheless, despite considerable crossover, these not-too-misleading stereotypes help us map the religious and political scene. To understand the impact of church involvement in Australian public life, we need to keep an eye out for both the conservative and progressive dimensions. Governments, in other words, can find themselves simultaneously blessed and anathematised by different churches on different policies—or even by
different parts of the same church, on the same policy. So, on one hand, we see the Howard Government drawing support for its 'zero tolerance' drugs policy from Salvation Army Major General and National Council on Drugs chair Brian Watters; while, at the same time, the Melbourne command of the Salvation Army distanced itself from his advice.43

In the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Parliaments, both strands achieved public visibility. The Howard Government drew considerable support for socially-conservative moves in the areas of censorship, drugs and sexual morality from those in the first strand. I explore one aspect of this relationship further in chapter five. At the same time, the second strand has left some conservative Senators and Members feeling besieged on economic, industrial and race-related issues. The Native Title Amendment Bill drew substantial church attention in the Government’s first term. For example, the Uniting Church New South Wales Council of Synod passed a resolution declaring 'that extinguishment or diminution of currently existing native title would be discriminatory and unacceptable on moral, legal and financial grounds' and calling the Government 'to abandon the amendments proposed in the Native Title Amendment Bill 1997' and 'to enter into negotiations in good faith with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders' to produce a replacement Bill.44 Indeed, church reaction was so widespread that Anglican Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn George Browning observed:

I can't remember any other issue in recent times which has gained such a broad consensus of opinion amongst church leaders. We're very difficult to get on with in many ways! We argue about … a host of other issues, but on this one the unanimity of mind is quite extraordinary.45

That unanimity led the Executive of the National Council of Churches in 1997 to call on the federal Parliament, in amending the Native Title Act, 'to refrain from treating the rights of Native Title holders in a discriminatory way'.46 Its words were mild compared, for example, with Anglican Archbishop Peter Carnley’s 1993 admonition that the Coalition’s reaction to the Native Title Act was 'reminiscent of Adolf Hitler’s strategies to deprive Jews of their properties', a comparison which prompted West Australian Liberal front-bencher Mr Wilson Tuckey to threaten resignation from the church.
It is not unusual for church statements to address policy specifics. Reconciliation attracts many such interventions, such as when Rev. Tim Costello, President of the Baptist Union of Australia, Most Rev. Peter Carnley, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, Colin Wendell-Smith, Presiding Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends, and Barry Ryall, National President of the Churches of Christ in Australia, cosigned an open letter on 6 April 2000, urging Prime Minister John Howard to 'think again' about an apology to members of the stolen generation and not 'allow his minister to trivialise the pain, documented so well in the *Bringing Them Home* report, by arguing about statistics'.

So does economic policy: thus the Uniting Church in Australia New South Wales Synod’s Board for Social Responsibility in April 1998 criticised the Government for inadequate response to the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which it found 'from a Christian point of view … idolatrous'. Mr Peter Reith’s 1999 proposals on employment were declared by the National Council of Churches to ‘fall far short of what is required’ to achieve a long-term solution to unemployment. Two Uniting Church agencies, UnitingCare Australia and National Social Responsibility and Justice, comprehensively damned a range of welfare reforms, calling aspects of mutual obligation ‘unacceptable’ and ‘inappropriate’, while extending the activity test to people with disabilities it found ‘morally repugnant’.

Human rights is another such area, as when Uniting Church Victorian Moderator Rev. Pam Kerr used her Good Friday sermon in 2000 to urge the federal Government to show ‘Easter generosity’ towards Kosovo refugees. The waterfront dispute and tax reform are other areas in which church criticism of government was particularly stringent during the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments.

During my interviews, Senators and Members universally supported the right of churches to speak on ‘moral’ questions. Mr Tony Abbott, Liberal Member for Warringah and Employment Services Minister, was typical:

> Well, I think churches are perfectly entitled to make statements about issues that involve faith or morals, where those things impact on the political arena.
However, there was substantial disagreement about what such issues might be. A small number were at pains to point out that the economy, racism, unemployment and welfare provision are moral issues. To by far the majority, 'moral' was shorthand for an area roughly marked out by the landmark issues of euthanasia, abortion, censorship and perhaps divorce, reproductive technologies and homosexual law reform—in other words, broadly bioethical and sexuality-related questions. Some extended the 'moral' to include gambling. To the extent that these are areas classically held in liberal thought to be matters of personal choice in which the state should not interfere, the 'moral' designation might be taken as upholding a general division of the world into personal concerns on which churches may legitimately guide individuals (on one hand) and state concerns which should be left to the unimpeded operation of public institutions (on the other). In fact, however, the narrow definition of 'moral'—along the lines described above—was frequently proffered by advocates of increasing state regulation in the very areas of personal lifestyle and values from which liberals have classically held that government should abstain.

This functional definition of 'moral' is not unusual: in over a decade of discussing ethics with tertiary students, I have routinely found that the invitation to a class to 'Give me an example of a moral issue' almost invariably produces the same list. (Rephrasing the question as '... an ethical issue' does not substantially alter the result.) In other words, the usage of 'moral' by Senators and Members, while widely different from that of moral philosophers and theologians (as discussed in chapter one), reflects everyday language. To those accustomed to voting on party lines, the limited delineation of 'moral' perhaps takes additional credibility from the fact that the issues it encompasses are also those likely to be accorded a free vote (popularly called a 'conscience vote'), should they reach the floor of Parliament.

Interviewees who took that narrow (and conventional) definition of the 'moral' mapped another realm, which they termed 'political'. There they were more likely to place economic, welfare and social issues. Churches' intervention in public debate on 'political' questions was much more controversial than it was in the 'moral' arena (as usually defined). Some
had no difficulties with church involvement. To Labor Member for Griffith Mr Kevin Rudd:

The role of the church is to act as a constant irritant in the body politic, and to exercise a continuing, but informed, prophetic role. Anyone, from either party, who suggests for a minute that it should be otherwise is asking something impossible of the church if the church is to remain true to its historical calling.53

Dr Brendan Nelson, Liberal Member for Bradfield (NSW) and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, not only agreed, but has written a paper with the subtitle, 'Why We Need More Rather Than Less Church Involvement in Policy Formation'.54

Some defended churches' right to speak on matters beyond the narrow definition of 'moral', but wanted to maintain a distinction of emphasis between religious and political responsibilities. When I asked Mr Abbott to explain his comment (above) about 'issues that involve faith or morals, where those things impact on the political arena', he replied:

Well, for argument's sake, I think churches are entitled to have a viewpoint on reconciliation, they're entitled to have a viewpoint on human rights, I think they're entitled to have a viewpoint on some aspects of the criminal law. But, again, you know, their specialty is man's relationship with God. Their specialty is what flows from our status as God's creatures. That is their specialty, I think. They make judgements about that. Our specialty, as politicians, is trying to manage the affairs of the nation in ways that advance peace, order and good government. And sometimes there's an intersection, but it's hard to say in advance or in isolation what that intersection is.55

Some who accepted that churches have a legitimate role to play in 'political' areas objected that they sometimes play it in ways that break the rules. In the view of Labor Member for Grayndler Mr Anthony Albanese, church leaders:

have a responsibility to say what their view is, and say what is the view of their parishioners. But I think it's a bit much for them to be involved directly, such as endorsing candidates or stacking ALP branches! I don't think that's appropriate ... I think it's a bit much when, during the voluntary euthanasia debate one of the Catholic priests in my electorate
stood up and announced from the pulpit, in his sermon on Sunday, that we'd elected a murderer as our local member.

He emphasised that the proper rules of engagement include theological as well as political restraint: churches 'have ... also got to not expect that they have the ultimate sanction of you going to hell if you don't agree with them'.

Many, particularly from the Coalition parties, hesitated about whether churches should be speaking on 'political' matters at all, arguing that their responsibility is spiritual, and anything else is a damaging distraction. It was not a view that Senators or Members were keen to express on the record; but a number privately expressed opinions along the lines of the view recorded by Queensland National Party Senator Ron Boswell at the time of the Native Title Amendment Bill:

The churches ... have been very negligent ... in their promotion of one side of the Wik debate. They have alienated their flock ... They are driving people away from Christ.

Objections to church pronouncements centred around the issues of churches' expertise, partisanship and legitimacy. The prevalence of such hesitations on the political right, and especially the variety of assumptions on which they relied, invites separate analysis of each set of concerns.

Who can Comment?

Many Senators and Members insisted that, while religious organisations might have the right in principle to comment on policy, that comment should be based on expertise. A common complaint, put in one form or another by almost every Coalition interviewee, was that churches are inclined, in practice, to argue from economic ignorance. South Australian Liberal Senator Grant Chapman was typical:

I think it's reasonable for the churches to be involved in public debate, but I think [on] some of the issues they get involved in, they need to be better informed ... I think the church has a moral role, and therefore has a role in encouraging people to assess issues from a moral standpoint, but I don't think the church has got any particular expertise in economic analysis.
And sometimes some of their statements on economics are just wide of the
mark.\textsuperscript{58}

This complaint resonates with the view discussed in chapter one, from the
Churches and the Free Society Program of Sydney-based rightwing think-
tank the Centre for Independent Studies, that church social justice
spokespeople are 'dominated' by what it considers outdated 'state-welfarist
and interventionist' economics. So insistent is this objection that its targets
are acutely sensitive to it. Consequently, church statements on social
questions go to considerable lengths to document their recourse to
recognised economic experts, and church social justice spokespeople rush to
cite their sources. The Catholic Social Justice Council, for example, draws
attention to its expert members such as University of New England political
economist Dr Tim Battin, who wrote its materials on full employment,\textsuperscript{59} and
ANU political scientist Professor John Warhurst. In addition to justifying
their own positions, churches have been known to turn the attack on their
critics: the expertise complaint led the Uniting Church New South Wales
Synod's social justice spokesperson, Rev. Harry Herbert, to retort, 'Of
course we can't be experts on everything—but then, neither can MPs. In
many cases, we know at least as much as they do!'\textsuperscript{60}

At issue, though, is more than a dispute over expertise, or even a debate
between competing schools of economics. The more fundamental question is
what kind of evidence should be admissible. To economic libertarians, no
rolcall of eminent advisers can allay the suspicion that churches are
relying on outdated economic theory: the test of credibility is adherence to
neo-liberal economic orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{61} To the Christian left, theoretical purity
runs second to on-the-ground experience. Marist Brother Mark O'Connor
has a long involvement in Catholic social justice activity, and, when I spoke
to him, was in the process of completing a PhD thesis on the development
process of a key statement by the Roman Catholic Bishops, \textit{Common Wealth
for the Common Good}. On his assessment, the weight of Roman Catholic
social justice teaching arises directly out of the church's experience as 'the
largest non-government organisation in the world, with millions of people
all over the world working with and seeing the poor'. By contrast, the free
market advocates draw their arguments less from direct experience than
from 'their think-tanks funded by mining companies'. He argued:
If they were more prepared to agonise over real suffering, I’d be more prepared to listen to them. To them, the free market is a religion and the Bishops have been kidnapped by an intellectual elite. But from my knowledge, no, the Bishops listen to the poor, not an elite.\textsuperscript{62}

Each side interprets the other’s strictures as hurtfully \textit{ad hominem}: no one welcomes charges of economic illiteracy, while free market advocates aver that they are no less prepared than anyone else to ‘agonise over real suffering’. Meanwhile, political representatives, regardless of economic orientation, cannot remain oblivious to the depth of local distress in their electorates.

\textbf{Who is a Partisan?}

As well as the charge of economic ignorance, politically-outspoken church representatives were often accused by their political targets of ‘political motivation’ and ‘partisanship’. Indeed, charges of ‘partisanship’ by church leaders predate the federal Parliament itself. In 1877, for example, newspapers alleged a Wesleyan Methodist attempt to take over the South Australian Legislative Council. Such charges were not new, even then: the \textit{Methodist Journal} was ready with a reply from the 1820 Liverpool Minutes, read annually to Wesleyan ministers, that ‘we as a body do not exist for the purpose of party’.\textsuperscript{63}

One hundred years later, their successors, entering the fledgling Uniting Church in Australia, seemed to anticipate that the new church would continue to attract such allegations. At any rate, the first meeting of its Northern Synod resolved that:

\begin{quote}
The Synod adopt this statement as a statement of its position on the relationship between the Synod and political agencies:

The Northern Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia recognises that among its God given responsibilities is its duty to speak prophetically on moral and justice issues. Individual members and Church Councils at all levels have both the freedom and the responsibility to make statements and to take appropriate action in obedience to Christ.
\end{quote}
When an individual Church member or a Council of the Church declares a stand on an issue, this in no way removes the right of other individuals or Councils to hold different views.

While individuals may be members of particular political parties, Church Councils will normally take a stand on issues rather than align themselves with particular parties. The allegiance of Christians is ultimately to Christ and not to any particular ideology or philosophy, for such would be idolatrous.

When Christians take a stand on any issue in obedience to Christ then they should be able to expect tolerance, support and respect from others within the Church including those of different opinions'.

The charge of partisanship has not disappeared with the passing years. For example, former Liberal Leader and, at the time of interview, Foreign Affairs Minister and Liberal Member for Mayo, Mr Alexander Downer, responded to Uniting Church criticism of his Government’s actions by arguing that Rev. Harry Herbert, the church’s NSW Synod officer responsible for speaking on social justice questions, ‘is a bourgeois leftie’. As such, Mr Herbert appeals, in Mr Downer’s view, to a constituency more political than theological:

There are people who are of the centre right in religious groups and there are people who are lefties. ... Day in and day out, Harry Herbert comes out and kicks the shit out of the Liberal Party ... Activist bourgeois lefties like Harry Herbert, because he’s part of their sort of paradigm. Lefties run the anti-GST line. That’s just part of the left-wing baggage they carry around with them. So, some of them are in churches. I think exactly the same of them as I think of people who are not in churches, which is that they wilfully do not wish to understand how the tax system works and how it’s being changed. And nothing will persuade them that the Howard Government is anything but a cruel and wicked instrument of wealth redistribution in favour of the mega-rich.

Former Liberal Aboriginal Affairs Minister Mr Fred Chaney has repeatedly made the accusation—indeed, in one publication he extends the charge of ‘partisanship’ beyond the local Catholic hierarchy to find ‘an agenda more related to the agenda of the political Left than to the Gospels’ in a number of Papal encyclicals.
'Partisanship', at least when the reference was to Australian instances, uniformly meant that Coalition politicians detected among church leaders a tendency to favour Labor policies over their own, and that they felt such preference to be illegitimate. The general complaint, with respect to Australian churches, was repeatedly made to me by Coalition Senators and Members I interviewed, although most preferred not to have their names associated. By contrast, some Labor interviewees, while agreeing that there is a greater ground of agreement between themselves and church social justice agencies, argued that that in fact exposed them to more stringent church scrutiny. Thus, South Australian Labor Senator Nick Bolkus expostulated:

Churches have more say, and push harder, when the ALP is in power. They never would have let us get away with what the Liberal Party has done with migration. The churches did well on Indigenous affairs until Wik, then they suddenly went soft. It's as if they've given up on the Howard Government. If we'd been in power, they would have demanded more—and we would have given it to them.68

And church social justice advocates, alive to the 'partisanship' charge, were at pains to point out the frequency with which they criticise Labor policies. Mr Herbert pointed to the environment as one issue among many on which 'I've dished it out to [NSW Labor Premier Bob] Carr and [former Prime Minister Paul] Keating'.69

One curious aspect of the 'partisanship' charge against churches is that it substantially parallels public cynicism about politics. It is a commonplace, at least to readers of opinion polls, that the public at large views politics with suspicion and partisanship as slightly shameful; but we might reasonably be taken aback to find the degree to which politicians themselves seemed to regard 'politics' as a pejorative term, and the holding of fixed political opinions as ipso facto suspicious (at least when expressed by religious leaders).

The implication would seem to be that those whose convictions lead them into a systematic pattern of political commitment are less virtuous political actors than swinging voters, who do not hold fixed—let alone ideological—political positions, but instead vary their political alignment according to
particular issues. Churches, presumably, would be expected to decide between parties less on grounds of self-interest than swinging voters are typically held to do, and more according to which party best reflects a conception of Christian values; but those Senators and Members who issue the 'partisanship' charge would seem to anticipate that this kind of reflection would not issue in any consistent party position.

If this is indeed the view of politicians, it reflects a remarkable attitude to their own party organisations. After all, political parties are made up of people whose partisanship and political motivation allows the party to survive and its parliamentary representatives to keep their preselection. Equally, since preselection is only the first step to office, Senators and Members owe their political survival to 'partisans' beyond party structures: fortunately, therefore (from the point of view of electoral longevity), such settled loyalties extend well beyond the party organisations. Despite recent declines in party identification, Ernie Chaples finds that a majority of Australian voters retains either 'strong' or 'moderate' major party identification. Moreover, although the number of those with 'weak' or 'no' major party identification has risen steeply since the 1960s, genuine swinging voters who decide between major parties issue-by-issue make up only a small proportion of those. Those desirable voters who begin with no preconceptions and decide every contest rationally on the parties' merits therefore make up, overall, only a tiny proportion of a Member's or Senator's potential supporters. For the most part, he or she must accept the support of the 'partisan' and even of the 'politically motivated'.

Some accommodated this apparent contradiction by arguing that churches should not pronounce on policy detail, restricting their comments to general matters of principle. So, recalling church responses to the Coalition's Fightback! policy in the lead-up to the 1992 federal election and subsequent criticism of the Howard Government's Native Title amendments, Senator Abetz complained that churches:

Invoke the Bible on issues where I believe the Bible is silent—for example, saying the GST is unchristian ... The church has an important role in general terms to say what is the measure of a fair tax system, or the measure of a fair Native Title regime; but to say 'a tax on food is immoral' is bordering on being immoral itself. It is politically motivated.
The implication is that 'political motivation' is wrong, or at least mischievously disguised. Senator Abetz's proposition, that church statements should take the form of general guidelines rather than specific policy recommendations, has strong echoes of much Protestant theological ethics. It has been especially clearly articulated (if not always adhered to) in the tradition of ecumenical social ethics which has become associated with the World Council of Churches. J. H. Oldham, a seminal figure in the development of ecumenical social thought, revived the scholastic term 'middle axiom' to mean the area which lies between general statements of principle (for example, 'great social inequality is wrong') and specific policy pronouncements (such as, in the context of the Thirty-ninth Australian Parliament, 'there should be no GST on food'). Presumably, to someone who thinks religious ethics should take the form of 'middle axioms', any statement by churches that aligns them with particular policy positions would be 'partisan'.

Not all Senators and Members took this approach. Some were happy in principle for churches and other religious organisations to make—or at least to endorse—specific policy proposals. However, in practice, organisations issuing such proposals or endorsements were still liable to be chided for 'partisanship'. The criticism raises questions about perceptions of 'partisanship', and indeed of what 'politics' is taken to be.

In its strongest form, the statement that churches can make policy recommendations but not ones which are 'politically motivated' or 'partisan' might translate as stipulating that churches' policy recommendations are acceptable as long as they do not accord with the stated policy of any existing party. This could be one way of enacting (from the churches' point of view) a strict religion-state separation, but would make religious bodies' position doubly difficult: they would be always in the position of advocating policies which no one was ever likely to implement, and at the same time would be precluded from endorsing policies with which they agreed. Indeed, if, for example, a political party were persuaded by a church's arguments and adopted the church's policy proposals, the church would thereupon have to abandon the policy since it would, by the fact of its adoption, have become 'political' and 'partisan'.
If the requirement for churches not to be 'politically motivated' or 'partisan' does not preclude their espousing actual policy commitments, it might be taken to mean that churches may advocate policy positions but that their pattern of advocacy should not conform to any settled political alignment. (Churches should, in other words, operate like corporate swinging voters.) Such an argument might accept that it is legitimate for individuals to develop settled patterns of political opinion and behaviour, but maintain that collectivities should adopt a 'swinging' stance. (On the other hand, in a single-member electorate voting system such as that used to elect Members to the House of Representatives, voters are, in fact, treated as parts of a collectivity rather than as individuals. If settled collective preferences were proscribed, the concept of a 'safe seat' would come into question!)

A cynical interpretation of the 'partisanship' charge would be that politicians are ready to welcome support regardless of its source and decry opposition, even to the point of questioning their critics' good faith. If this is the correct reading, it surely points to no more startling conclusion than that politicians are as prone to human frailty and a tendency to self-justification as anyone else. It is only to be expected that people whose present job security, ongoing prestige and putative place in history is dependent on continued public support should be quick to cast doubt on their detractors' bona fides. Less pejoratively, people who believe deeply in a particular policy program might be understood as doing less than their job if they did not use every available resource to persuade others of its rightness and deflect criticism. However, the particular form which many politicians' resistance to their church critics takes—accusing them of 'partisanship' or being 'politically motivated'—is revealing insofar as it implies that the electorate's suspicion of the political process is apparently reciprocated by those they elect.

Who is a Representative?

Another common criticism of church leaders made by Senators and Members who had been on the receiving-end of adverse church comment was that the religious leaders who make pronouncements on social and political issues are out-of-step with their denominations. As Mr Downer cautioned:
You’ve got to try to understand that if you’re actually a minister in a government, you get to start to understand what really is happening. And when you say ‘the churches’, this means Harry Herbert from the Uniting Church in Sydney. So, what do we think if Harry Herbert is on television saying Howard is a shocking person and Downer is a dickhead? We think, ‘There goes Harry Herbert’. 'The churches' does not mean Harry Herbert.74

A telling instance in this regard was a number of Christian churches' criticism of the Howard Government's 'Ten Point Plan' for amending Native Title legislation. A number of conservative Senators and Members expressed frustration with church leaders' public statements. Mr Warren Entsch, Liberal Member for the rural seat of Leichhardt (Qld), took a particularly strong position, urging rural church members to 'boycott' their churches:

What I’m suggesting is that they go to their local churches and they ask them to state their position on this, to listen to their side of the argument, and also to represent their views as well. If they’re not prepared to do that, then I would suggest that they not bother to attend their churches.75

His reasoning presupposed a decidedly parliamentary ecclesiology:

I think that the churches are there to represent all of their congregation, and I think that if they’re going to be prepared to take a biased view on this, then I think that the people in the country have the right to have their voices heard. And if they don’t want to listen to them, then I think that the only way that they can do that is by looking at boycotting the churches.76

The boycott proposal caused a certain amount of party embarrassment at the time; but many of Mr Entsch’s colleagues took a similarly strong view of the need for churches to be representative, although, given the perceived electoral sensitivity of criticising churches, not all were willing to be named. Given the differences of opinion on political questions within churches, church leaders ‘should only offer personal opinions’, one Liberal Minister argued off the record. 'There is no problem with people having an individual view, but not unelected people speaking on behalf of an entire denomination'. In fact, many church leaders, including Anglican archbishops and Uniting Church moderators, are elected to their positions (although, the former holding their positions for life and the latter for a
non-renewable fixed term, they do not typically have to face re-election). Even church offices which do not involve direct election are typically filled through constitutional procedures which allow considerable transparency and varying degrees of lay participation in the decision. Nevertheless, a common perception among interviewees who had recently been on the sharp end of church criticism was that they had been attacked by 'unelected' spokespeople improperly claiming the backing of a dissenting constituency.

In some ways, the insistence on representativeness is not surprising, coming from people who have to fight for their own re-election. However, many interviewees expected clergy to be, if anything, more strictly 'representative' of a 'constituency' than they themselves. Describing their own processes of decision-making, Senators and Members from all parties uniformly emphasised the need to avoid populism and exercise individual leadership, even if that at times places them against the grain of public opinion. As Mr Tim Fischer argued, paraphrasing Edmund Burke: 'You have a licence to lead as well as be led in your discharge of your duties to your electorate'. A number, especially of those who had borne the brunt of recent religious criticism, were less willing to extend the same right to religious leaders.

Whether elected or appointed, church leaders characterise their roles through a range of descriptions including 'teaching', 'prophetic' and 'pastoral' (the last a metaphor whose sheep-and-shepherd reference, when translated into political terms, should strike conservatives as reassuringly Burkean). None of these images suggests that arguments based on populist notions of representation are likely to silence clerical critics of government policy. Instead, so substantial a mismatch in interpretations of the basic categories of debate seems more likely to ensure continuing impasses.

Whose is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory?

One interpretation of Senators' and Members' suspicion of the motives underlying church criticism is that it reflects the classical liberal objection to the totalising tendencies of a culturally dominant and politically privileged established church. When seventeenth century liberals declared the necessity for the mutual independence of civil and religious authorities,
they were reacting to their world's bloody alliance between preacher's dogma and law-enforcer's sword. When nineteenth century South Australian colonists set out to create a paradise for dissent, the religiously-spilled blood might have dried, but wounds of civil and political disenfranchisement outside the established church remained raw. From the turn of the twenty-first century, liberal separationists can look back over four centuries' sustained political gains, coupled with two centuries' accelerating cultural secularisation. Church critics might still sway a few votes (although, as discussed in chapter one, their electoral effects seem, if anything, to be paradoxically in contrast to the thrust of many official pronouncements). Overall, however, churches, once the guarantors and guardians of structure, occupy a much more ambiguous position, making their voices heard through the interstices and at the margins of secular structure.

In from the Margins: New Blends of Church and State

In the issues canvassed so far in this chapter, the various protagonists assume a sharp distinction between religion and the state. Government acts (or fails to act); churches criticise (or advocate action); government responds (or resists). However, as previous chapters have shown, the divisions between religion and the state in Australia are not as sharp as we might conventionally suppose. When churches seek to influence governments, the liberal wall of church-state separation is revealed as more permeable than some Senators and Members prefer. The wall is being breached with pressure from the other direction, too. Recent policy changes have made it weaker than ever, with a move towards explicitly involving church agencies in delivering services once the domain of government.

One of the longest-standing strands of churches' public activity in Australia is social welfare services. For almost as long, Australian churches and statesmen have debated whether responsibility for welfare belongs more to religious organisations or to the state. Early in the nineteenth century, the general assumption was that welfare activities belong in the realm of 'charity' or 'philanthropy', dictated by individuals' generosity rather than being part of government's duty to its citizens. In any case, state aid to
religion and the churches’ disciplinary function in the convict colonies meant that the lines between church and state were, at that time, scarcely even notional. Stronger church organisation and increasing financial resources through the nineteenth century meant greater independence and an end to state aid. It also led churches to more hands-on involvement in the lives of the poor, resulting in philosophical changes. For example, churches extended their welfare activities in the wake of the 1890s depression. In turn, increasing first-hand observation of working-class conditions led to a revision of the assumptions which had prompted overwhelming Protestant opposition to the 1890 shearer’s strike. A sharper view of the relationship between labour and capital led to stringent criticism of inequality, and a renewed interest in the ideas of Christian socialism which had flourished in England in the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, some churchmen began to rethink the basis of charitable welfare provision, coming to the conclusion, to quote one historian, that, in place of private philanthropy or church charity, it was for ‘the State itself … to direct and finance welfare work’, but ‘acting within guidelines drawn by the churches’.

In practice, expanding government welfare activity has never absorbed all of those whose needs are not adequately taken care of by the market; although the state share increased dramatically with the rise of the ‘welfare state’, non-government organisations have remained one important haven. Different governments’ varying philosophical commitment to greater or lesser state involvement has altered the balance from time to time. The Howard Government has a longstanding commitment to moving ‘coal face’ social welfare services out of the public sector and into the hands of community organisations. In particular, religious organisations have been encouraged to take up much of the void left by shrinking government. The trend towards increasing involvement of ‘faith based’ organisations in delivering previously government services has subsequently been taken up in the social policies of US Republican President George Bush and British Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair. The international embrace of a policy departure already well underway in Australia gives an added reason to pay detailed attention to some hitherto little-examined ramifications of its antipodean form.
One striking instance of this shift in Australia was replacing the Commonwealth Employment Service with a Jobs Network of competing government and private agencies. In late 1999, Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott announced the results of the second round of tenders for job placement services: $700 million worth of contracts had been won by church employment services, out of a total of three billion dollars awarded.83

No sooner was the announcement made than observers began to discuss the propriety of government money, once used for public sector activities, being channelled to religious organisations. The most-publicised area of controversy was the possibility that religious bodies, exempt from some key human rights legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, might prove less even-handed employers than a publicly-accountable government agency. Beyond immediate employment equity concerns, the increasing fusion of church and state implied in such moves calls into question the justification for maintaining such exemptions.

Employment equity fears were fuelled when one highly successful tenderer confirmed that it preferred employing practising Christians because 'those who share a commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ' are 'the best staff'.84 Civil libertarians and Jewish spokespeople were among those to question both the legality and the morality of taxpayers’ money being spent according to such explicitly faith-based criteria.85 Critics feared such a requirement would disadvantage non-Christians previously employed by the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) or the rapidly-shrinking Employment National and seeking work with church agencies as their old positions were lost. Beyond that, some observers raised the possibility that job-seekers’ agencies which believed Christians make better employees would automatically recommend Christian clients more highly than others to potential employers.86

A further ground of controversy was the question of whether, even aside from the possibility of religious discrimination, general services to the community, provided with taxpayers’ money, should be delegated to religious organisations. To some, it breached the principle of church-state separation (one of the rare instances of that Jeffersonian principle being explicitly raised in Australian public debate).87 Some warned that churches
could be compromised by appearing 'to be cooperating with a government eager to use the church’s fund of goodwill to overcome its own failures with a section of the long-term unemployed'.

Critics also pointed out that, as churches become increasingly built into government activity through receiving government funds, they find it harder to criticise government policy. Indeed, refraining from criticism is increasingly one of the terms of a contract. In the view of Melbourne City Mission Chief Executive Ray Cleary, such restraint:

- eats at the very heart of the mission and the value base of church-based agencies, which are there to demonstrate God’s preferential or special interest for the marginalised and those at risk.

A further implication of the tendering out of government services to charities received only passing mentions in media discussion of the issue. One of the grounds for awarding tenders was price. One reason why church tenders may have been more successful than those of commercial operations is that, as not-for-profit organisations, they could provide cheaper services than private enterprise. Wesley Mission’s Gordon Moyes made a virtue of this in his defence of the agency’s record, arguing that it can ‘plough any surpluses back into benefits for the clients, not to shareholders or owners’.

There are further dimensions to the differences of organisation, practice and organisational culture which might make church agencies cheaper. One advantage which churches enjoy is tax exemption, leading a commentator to speculate that:

- It may well be that all but volunteer organisations are ultimately cut out of the market because the relative cost advantages of charities—with their multiple tax exemptions—will sorely test private-sector organisations’ capacity to compete.

Differences of culture may be less obvious than formal arrangements such as tax exemptions, but are at least as significant. Churches and other charitable organisations have a long history of providing much-needed services on tight budgets. Moreover, as beneficiaries of voluntary donations, their budgets are liable to fluctuation along with their donors' available
surplus. As a result, they have historically relied heavily on the labour of volunteers, and paid workers have often been employed at lower rates than they could command in comparable secular employment. A sense of vocation is, in some ways, the unofficial trade-off for reduced pay and conditions, to the extent that, in many areas, 'volunteerism and amateurism are two hallmarks of church life'. In addition, managers have often been appointed ex officio on account of other church positions rather than because of any particular management expertise, so the cultural norms governing worker-management relations in secular industries may be missing.

For these historical and economic reasons, church agencies have arguably developed a culture in which employment relations are structured around a philosophy of selfless service. Indeed, that, according to the Minister, was one key to the religious tenderers' success:

The fact is, these agencies do an extremely good job and why shouldn't people who work for organisations like the Salvation Army and Mission Australia be expected to uphold that ethos of love and compassion and the brotherhood of man, which helps to give them their very unique and special and magnificent identity.

Churches justify their shoestring operations on more than economic grounds. As Mr Abbott pointed out, a theology of love and compassion challenges narrowly-economic thinking. But this ethos, transferred to the employment market, raises problems of its own. The problems are thrown into relief when the church is acting as an agent for government.

We can see both the tendering advantage and the industrial pitfalls more clearly by considering one example. Rev. Tim Costello's *Tips From A Travelling Soul-Searcher* describes the highly successful WorkVentures project, which:

Has created a lot of employment for disadvantaged people, achieving a multi-million-dollar turn-over and becoming a successful tenderer for the recent JobNetwork contracts with the government.

Costello attributes the success of WorkVentures to its workers' integration between working and private life. One calls her work 'a career without a salary'. The founder dreams of the project evolving into 'a "living-working" village', where 'work is so meaningful and integrated with life that the
distinction between the two disappears’. Costello cites a study of WorkVentures by Melbourne theologian Gordon Preece, who, in Costello’s words, ‘sees the WorkVentures success as due in large part to its workers’ approach’. This includes being ‘willing to blur the lines between paid and unpaid work’.

That view is apparently shared by the Government. Christian agencies, according to Mr Alan Cadman, Liberal Member for Mitchell (NSW), were successful because they were the ones ‘prepared to go the extra miles and spend the extra time’ to see results.

The Government’s view is that such willingness makes for a better quality of service. The implication is that high quality service involves high staff input—‘extra miles’ gone and ‘extra time’ spent. But the issue in tendering is not quality alone, but a relationship between quality and cost. One way to offer high quality for a low cost is to make some of that staff input unpaid. In the Jobs Network tendering system, WorkVentures and similar organisations are pitted against commercial job placement services, which are required to operate at a profit and whose employees do not have the luxury of pursuing ‘a career without a salary’. Translating ‘extra miles’ out of Mr Cadman’s New Testament phraseology, it is hard to see what it means other than that the successful Christian agencies were the ones whose employees did more work than they were paid for.

Although Tim Costello applauds WorkVentures, another section of his book indicates that he is as aware as anyone of the ambiguities involved. The book in which he advocates blending work and life also warns against believing ‘the GDP story’, his shorthand for a view of life centred around economic gain. According to that ‘story’, the Gross Domestic Product is the sole indicator of national success, and from it flows an ideology of ‘hard work leading to reward and material wealth for the individual’. This ‘GDP story’ damages both individuals and communities, as the pressure to ‘do it faster, smarter and more efficiently’ leads to the ‘ratcheting up of tension and stress’. Individuals see no choice but to try to out-compete one another. This leads, Costello reminds us, to spiralling working hours, a vanishing sense of security and decimated families where no member has time to attend to the others. If we apply Costello’s critique of the effects
of believing the 'GDP story' to the job network issue, we might see similar patterns, even though motivated by an entirely different 'story'. There is, of course, nothing wrong with individuals choosing, out of a sense of vocation or for personal fulfilment, to 'blend work and life' or undertake extra, unpaid work in their paid position. However, if that choice becomes a requirement, either explicitly or as a result of the transformation of an entire sector through the competitive advantage of agencies staffed by people who have taken such a choice, then we would surely see workers experiencing similar personal and family pressures (without, in this case, even the chimerical compensation of material wealth offered by the 'GDP story'!)

One traditional bastion against such pressures has been trade unions. Church agencies' mix of volunteer workers and paid workers organised around a volunteer ethos has meant that church employees are among the least likely in the Australian workforce to be unionised. One effect of the Commonwealth Employment Service's replacement by the Jobs Network, not picked up in media discussion of the church-state fusion fostered by the move, has been to reduce substantially the rate of unionisation among job placement workers. Anecdotal reports suggest that up to eighty per cent of CES employees were union members, making CES the Community and Public Sector Union's 'flagship portfolio'. By contrast, the parcelling out of job placement services has led to many being redirected to church-based agencies, in which unionisation is estimated at a fraction of that rate. If that effect did not stand out in public commentary, it did to the move's initiators: according to the Minister, one of the Jobs Network's achievements was its departure from 'the … union-dominated, bureaucratic monolith of the CES'.

In this instance, the gradual incorporation of religious organisations into secular government structures has had substantial effects on secular arrangements. In Government accounts of the transition, the liminal elements of religion feature strongly. Religious organisations treat everyone equally, demonstrate love and compassion, break down conventional barriers between paid and unpaid work. The shift might be read, then, as an attempt to incorporate these elements of religious communitas into secular structure.
In practice, however, the closer association between government and Christianity arguably intensifies the strand of religion which aligns it, in the public arena, with a drive towards hierarchically-ordered stability. This occurs in at least two ways. The first is by weakening the church agencies’ hand as ‘irritants in the body politic’ (to borrow Mr Rudd’s phrase), either by ‘no-criticism’ clauses in church agencies’ contracts, by the fear of loss of future contracts, or because the church agencies, being increasingly built into the same set of mechanisms as the government departments they previously challenged, find it harder to distinguish government’s goals from their own.

A particular, and little-noticed, instance of that weakening is the way church agencies have come to function as a wedge to reduce union power (at least, on the Minister’s account of one of the Job Network’s achievements) in a once comprehensively unionised sector. One result is that religious agencies are open to being construed as actors in a political agenda beyond the immediate question of delivering job placement services. That result may not have been anticipated by the church agencies themselves.

Although churches are notable employers of non-union labour, they have typically been among society’s stronger advocates for protecting working conditions. The irony is not lost on many church people: indeed, the Uniting Church Assembly in 1991 passed a resolution deploring what it saw as the ‘serious threat’ to trade unions in the ‘political, economic and industrial climate’ of that time, and affirming ‘the need for Christians to express their discipleship in trade unions and professional associations’. Alert to logs in its own eye, the Assembly also resolved that ‘Synods, Assembly agencies and other Church bodies be requested to encourage employees to join and be active in an appropriate trade union and/or professional association’. With decisions such as these on the books, not to mention their longstanding commitment to solidarity with the poor and marginalised, it is hard to imagine church agencies deliberately embarking on an explicitly anti-union exercise. At the same time, however, the cultural aspects of church employment described above remain a point of potential contradiction. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that, in practice, the Uniting Church Assembly resolution is more rigorously carried out with respect to professional associations than with respect to trade unions.
One reason, of course, is that many church employees work in areas whose union affiliation is not immediately apparent. It may be difficult to suggest off-hand which union a Minister of the Word should join. However, the pattern remains even among church employees whose union eligibility is more obvious. For example, Andrew Dutney, Principal of the Uniting Church’s South Australian theological institution, Parkin-Wesley College, guessed that ‘very few’ academic theologians employed by the church as tertiary lecturers would be members of the National Tertiary Education Union:

The reasons would include the fact that the Colleges are separate from Universities (even if linked in a variety of ways according to local arrangements) and the union has traditionally been seen to be a University matter. Another reason is the cost of membership ... A further factor may be the ‘all hands to the pumps’ attitude that has developed in recent years. People who make their living out of the church are willingly accepting reduced working conditions out of a sense that the church needs its members and leaders to make sacrifices in this period of decline/change.110

The "'all hands to the pumps' attitude' is perhaps the professionals' version of the spirit of 'volunteerism and amateurism' noted as general characteristics of church work above. From corner cake stalls to internationally-recognised tertiary institutions, church activities have undoubtedly benefited from the willingness of volunteers and employees alike to go mile after extra mile; and the communities they serve have benefited as a result.

If those aspects of church culture which make unionisation harder are built into the working relationship between churches and government, at the same time as government is handing over increasing amounts of its own services to church agencies, the effects may go well beyond the working conditions of employment service personnel. Among such effects may be to make it harder for churches subsequently to oppose anti-union moves (as many church agencies did, for example, in the case of the waterfront dispute discussed by Senator Forshaw in chapter three).

A second dynamic which tends towards reinforcing religion's role in reinforcing structure rather than nurturing communitas is politicians'
harnessing of the language of 'love and compassion' and 'going the extra mile' to explain the church agencies' tendering success. Sociologists of religion sometimes make the distinction between 'civil' and 'confessional' religion. Confessional religion is the practice of explicitly religious people and organisations—church, synagogue and so on. Civil religion is the phenomenon of religious language and rituals being borrowed out of their confessional context to reinforce the ideology and structures of the state. We might say that 'love and compassion' have become part of a quasi-religious lexicon which imparts a spiritual aura to one set of government-preferred political and economic arrangements. In the next chapter, we see a further development of this interweaving of explicit and implicit religion.

Endnotes

5. Liberal theory conventionally speaks of 'church and state'. I write about 'religion and the state', to avoid the specifically Christian reference of 'church', except when referring to the conventional liberal position.
6. W. Kymlicka, 'Liberalism' qv in T. Honderich, ed., The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Oxford UP 1995. Kymlicka's interpretation has widespread support among liberal political philosophers who otherwise disagree about the proper relationship between religion and the state. Supporters of John Rawls's 'political liberalism' find in it a basis for an approach which 'applies the principles of toleration to philosophy itself' (see J. Rawls, Political Liberalism, op. cit., pp. 9–10). Critics of Rawls, such as William Galston, maintain that liberalism needs a stronger defence of religious diversity (see Galston, 'Two Concepts of Liberalism', Ethics, vol. 105, no. 3, 1995, pp. 516–534, at pp. 518–520). Nevertheless, they share the root assumption 'that religious diversity ... undergirds, and eventually sets in motion the
development of, our wider conception of individual and cultural difference' such that, even today, 'any reasonable understanding of diversity will have to include (though in modern circumstances cannot be restricted to) religious commitments' (ibid., p. 526).


8. See, for example, the various contributors to P. Weithman, ed., Religion and Contemporary Liberalism, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1997.


10. The classic study of this phenomenon in the convict era is A. M. Grocott, Convicts, Clergymen and Churches: Attitudes of Convicts and ex-Convicts Towards the Churches and Clergy in New South Wales from 1788–1851, Sydney University Press, 1980.

11. The first clergy in Australia were Church of England priests employed by the colonial administration to be a force for order among convicts. See R. Border, Church and State in Australia 1788–1872, SPCK, London, 1962.


13. Richard Coyne, Dublin, 1838.


17. ibid., p. 208.
Endnotes continued


20. ibid., p. 130 (italics in original).

21. See for example Frontier: Stories from White Australia’s Forgotten War, ABC TV, Sydney, 1996.


28. ibid.


Endnotes continued


34. ibid., p. 25.

35. In Australia, this included literature such as H. N. Baker, *The Church and the Social Outlook*, Melbourne, 1918.

36. This includes both denominational newspapers such as the Roman Catholic *Southern Cross* and Catholic Worker and the Methodist *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, and ecumenical publications such as the Australian Student Christian Movement publication *Australasian Intercollegian* (Australian Intercollegian after 1926), later renamed *Crux*.

37. Regular press and, later, radio appearances by clergy became less common during the course of the twentieth century, their place to some degree being taken by religious affairs programs such as ABC TV’s *Compass* and Radio National’s *The Religion Report*.

38. For an assessment of the impact of the *Call to the People of Australia*, see D. Hilliard, 'Church, Family and Sexuality in Australia in the 1950s', *Australian Historical Studies*, 109, October 1997, pp. 133–146.

Endnotes continued

interesting to all our fellow-citizens’ (1990, op. cit., p. 7). Hogan’s 1990 collection reproduces the *Call to the People of Australia* as an appendix.


41. ibid.

42. quoted ibid., p. 418.


47. 'Please Think Again, Mr Howard', Letters to the Editor, *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 April 2000.


Endnotes continued

60. Interview, Sydney, 21 July 1999.
71. ibid., p. 358.
72. Others with no strong major party identification come under categories Chaples identifies with headings such as 'religious fundamentalist protesters', 'greenies', 'left-Labor Senate protesters' and 'third party voters'—that is, people whose major party preferences do not fall into predictable patterns but whose vote is nevertheless the product of a determined political agenda. Another subset lacks political predispositions but lacks likewise much knowledge or understanding of the issues at stake in any election.
Endnotes continued

Chaples dismisses them with headings such as 'local candidate inconsistents', 'alienated voters' and 'airheads and drongos'. (ibid., p. 361).

75. 7:30 Report, ABC TV, 20 November 1997.
76. ibid.
80. See for example J. Howard, 'Fair Australia: Address to the Australian Council of Social Service', (Headland Speech 3), Sydney, 13 October 1995.
86. See A. Gordon, 'We Ought to Have Faith In People, Not Their Religion', Sydney Morning Herald, 8 January 2000.
Endnotes continued


89. For example 'Churches Blur Roles on Jobless Deal', *Canberra Times*, 8 January 2000.


91. ibid.


98. ibid.


101. Mr Cadman's allusion is to Matthew 6:41.


103. ibid., p. 131.

104. ibid., p. 65.

105. ibid., p. 176.

106. J. Gardener, Community and Public Sector Union, telephone interview, Friday 19 May 2000.
Endnotes continued

107. Personal Communication, Jim Pietrowski, Australian Services Union. It is difficult to arrive at a precise percentage, since, owing to the categories in which Australian Bureau of Statistics figures are recorded, the number of workers for church and charity organisations overall is not available. Moreover, the direct and indirect impact of volunteer workers in church and charity organisations is difficult to assess, given that volunteers are not eligible for union membership. Thus, Mr Pietrowski calculated a unionisation rate of, at most, twenty per cent, but cautioned that, for the reasons outlined, this is likely to be a substantial overestimate.

108. ABC TV, 7:30 Report, 7 January 2000.


'The Coalition's Conservative Christian Faction'

In 1992, a new pressure group was formed within the Federal Coalition, with a program of regular dinners and addresses. Called the Lyons Forum, it rallied under a slogan borrowed from the maiden speech of one-time United Australia Party Member for the Tasmanian federal seat of Darwin Dame Enid Lyons (who borrowed it from King George V): 'The foundation of a nation's greatness is in the homes of its people'.

Assessments of the Forum's influence vary. Some, such as Age journalist Niki Savva, subsequently media officer to Liberal Treasurer Mr Peter Costello, have attributed to it a formative role in the 1996 Family Tax Package.¹ Some, such as former Northern Territory Chief Minister, subsequently Liberal federal President, Mr Shane Stone, see in it the driving force behind the Euthanasia Laws Act 1996, which overturned the Northern Territory's Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995.² It has been credited with the Coalition's 1996 election promise to tighten film and video censorship and the ensuing April 1997 Cabinet decision to tighten restrictions on pornographic videos by replacing the X-rating with NVE (non-violent erotica).³

In 1997, Savva called the Forum 'a powerful force within the Howard Government'. She attributed its influence partly to its impressive rollcall of
Ministers—at that time, some fifteen, ‘including the Treasurer, Mr Peter Costello, and the Primary Industries Minister, Mr John Anderson’ and ‘all three parliamentary secretaries to the Prime Minister—Mr [Chris] Miles, Mr Tony Abbott and Senator Nick Minchin’. Overall, Age economics editor Kenneth Davidson, writing in the Australian Rationalist, judged the Lyons Forum of 1997 to be:

Far more influential within the ranks of the government than the Left faction of the ALP was at any time during the currency of the Hawke-Keating governments or is now that the ALP is in opposition. But so far the Lyons Forum has only had a fraction of the attention given to the factions of the ALP.

By contrast, Lyons Forum members play down claims of influence. According to Liberal Member for Menzies and instigator of the Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996 Mr Kevin Andrews, 'A lot of the commentary about the Lyons Forum is nonsense. I only wish I had the power people say I did!'

Some Federal Coalition members who are not associated with the Forum agree. Mr Downer recalled:

I've been to one meeting of the Lyons Forum, but I didn't think it seemed very interesting, so I never went to another one. It just didn't seem very interesting. But, there again, it was just another beat-up by the political left that the Lyons Forum was this powerful group ... I was Shadow Treasurer. I went along to talk to them about family tax policy.

The Lyons Forum prepared a major submission on family tax, but completed it after Mr Downer had moved to the Foreign Affairs portfolio.

MR DOWNER: The Lyons Forum struck me as being—does it still exist?

It does, although its role in the party after two terms in government is different from the part it played in the early 1990s. This chapter explores that evolving role. It represents one distinctive instance of religious themes accruing around a set of civil concerns. The Forum’s statements draw particularly on the strand of religious language which emphasises hierarchical stability in response to diversity. Yet its religious motivation is more often asserted by its critics than its members. The ambiguity about its religious identity enables the Forum to cross easily the boundary (discussed...
in the last chapter) between civil and confessional religion, ensuring that its support is not limited to a conservative Christian minority.

Conservative Christian or Just Plain Conservative?

The Lyons Forum's standard description in daily newspapers runs along these lines: 'the Coalition's ultra-conservative Christian faction',9 'the Howard-backed fundamentalist Christian faction',10 'the conservative Christian faction—Australia's answer to America's religious right'11 or 'a group of right-wing Christian MPs'.12 Prime Minister John Howard's authorised biography calls the Forum 'a semi-secret Christian faction within the coalition parties'.13

No connection with Christianity is immediately apparent from reading the Forum's statements and public relations material. The group's motto and self-descriptions emphasise family values. They generally avoid overtly religious identification. One exception is a printed promotional brochure. Two versions of the same brochure declare, respectively, 'we believe that the family is the fundamental unit of society' and 'we believe that the family is the God-ordained fundamental unit of society'.14 Both versions omit God when it comes to government action: 'We believe that the government through its activities should promote the family as the fundamental unit of society'.

Forum members dispute the 'fundamentalist' characterisation. Asked why such descriptions continue, they cite media reluctance to correct misreporting, or the perennial complaint of the reported that, in the eyes of reporters, subtleties spoil a good story. A further possibility is that there is a genuine difference of opinion between Lyons Forum members and those who report on it as to what makes a group 'fundamentalist Christian'.

The more technical meaning of 'fundamentalist' refers to the core beliefs of conservative evangelical Protestantism as set out in the USA between 1910 and 1915 in a series of booklets, The Fundamentals. In this sense, a 'fundamentalist' is someone who believes in the virgin birth and physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and in substitutionary atonement, biblical inerrancy and the authenticity of all biblical miracles. Nothing in the
Forum's statements of belief suggests any commitments of the kind; Forum members could reasonably reject that meaning of 'fundamentalist'.

In general parlance, 'fundamentalist' means (to borrow a political term) something like 'hard line'. The statement that 'the family is the God-ordained fundamental unit of society' might well fall within that definition—that is, it represents one conservative position within the range of possible theistic statements about the family. (It is a harder position, for example, than one which sees the family as the fundamental unit of society, but without claiming that it has been ordained by God; or than one which sees the family as one form of human relations among others, all of which are ordained by God.)

Nonetheless, Forum members frequently deny not only the 'fundamentalist' tag, but any description of the organisation as Christian. Tasmanian Liberal Senator Eric Abetz welcomed the question as a chance to set the record straight:

SENATOR ABETZ: I'm glad you asked, because the Lyons Forum in fact is non-religious. The Lyons Forum has four core beliefs, none of which is religious in nature ... It is, if you like, straight out secular. Having said that, I personally have religious beliefs ...

MM: Would most or all members of the Lyons Forum, as it happens, share those religious beliefs?

SENATOR ABETZ: Most, I think it would be fair to say, hold part of the spectrum of Christian beliefs, be they Catholic or Anglican or the non-conformist Protestants et cetera. You've got a broad range there. But there are some who are in the Lyons Forum who wouldn't go to the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, for example.15

Although a number of Lyons Forum members mentioned non-Christian colleagues, they were unwilling to name any. That understandable reticence contributes to the difficulty of evaluating the media characterisation of the Forum as—in practice even if not in intention—a Christian group. Some had trouble not just in naming atheist members, but in thinking of them. For example, when I asked Forum co-founder and former Liberal Member
for Braddon Mr Chris Miles whether he could think of any who were avowed atheists, he ruminated:

Any who was an avowed atheist? Ah, well, there are not many of those in the Liberal Party. There are very few in the Liberal Party; most in the Liberal and National Parties have religious convictions.16

To a number of Lyons Forum members and supporters, the 'Christian' tag is all part of the media's effort to discredit the organisation. According to Senator Abetz, 'Membership or acceptance of the beliefs of the Lyons Forum does not require you to have a religious belief. So we have been demonised by the media.' For him, commitment to the 'the family' is universally uncontroversial; those who criticise it do so out of dubious motives and, lacking arguments, resort to name-calling:

SENATOR ABETZ: 'The foundation of a nation's greatness is in the homes of its people.' If you put that to anybody, nobody disagrees with that statement. Nobody disagrees … They can't argue it, so what certain elements did was seek to demonise the Lyons Forum as a wacky, way out of line kind of organisation …

MM: If no one disagrees, why do people want to demonise you?

SENATOR ABETZ: There has been an element within, in general terms, the left-wing oriented media, who have been promoting basically interest groups rather than the broad general good.17

Senator Abetz was at pains to dispel what he saw as media portrayals of the Forum as wedded to a punitive personal morality:

We aren't callous or unsympathetic, we understand that family life doesn't always go as people would wish. There are people in the Lyons Forum who are divorced. In my time as a family lawyer, I saw a lot of divorcing couples—but I never saw anyone who was glad things hadn't worked out. People would always say, 'I wish things could have worked out between us', it was always a matter of sorrow that the marriage had broken down. The Forum sees part of government's role as being to make it easier for families to stay together. But the media can't understand that, they paint us as unsympathetic.18

To Mr Miles, the detractors' motives were more personal:
MR MILES: I think that the public writers, the journalists don't share the [Lyons Forum's] view because it is a threat to them as individual people quite often, and they wrote vitriically against the Forum ...

MM: What do you mean?

MR MILES: Well, I don't want to go into that in any more detail, but if you want to do more research on the journalists, that's another big research topic. But I think it would be very interesting, and I only say it from just general knowledge and association.\

Forum co-founder and Liberal Senator for Queensland John Herron agreed: 'The media are dysfunctional in their personal lives, they are different from the general public'.

The Forum's origins suggest another explanation for the 'Christian' characterisation. Senator Herron recalled its genesis:

Religion wasn't a reason for my entering Parliament, but [preparing for] the maiden speech makes you think, 'What will be the basis of my actions while I'm here?'

In his first speech, Senator Herron set out concerns about a range of bioethical matters, and concerns about declining birthrate, rising divorce and increasing numbers of families where both parents do paid work. However, 'the processes of Parliament overwhelmed me for eighteen months', so that he felt he made little headway in implementing his proposals.

Then Kevin Andrews came in [as Member for Menzies in May 1991] and said virtually the same thing. I'd never met him, but I walked over to him and said, 'Great speech, what are you going to do about it? We had a meeting, got together with five or six including Chris Miles. We sent a note around to the Coalition side—and got 60 people along'

According to Senator Herron, after that initial meeting, 'Kevin [Andrews] and Chris Miles made the running. Chris was the inaugural chair'. While accounts of the Forum's origins differed about who actually called the first meeting (others nominated Mr Miles as the source of the idea), they consistently named as co-founders Senators Herron and Tierney,
Mr Alan Cadman, Mr John Bradford, Mr Chris Miles, Mr Kevin Andrews and Mr John Forrest. Whoever the Forum’s merely nominal Christians are, they are not on that list. Senator Herron has never been reticent about his Catholicism. Senator Tierney describes himself as an active lay Anglican. Mr Cadman has been a member of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship since 1980. Before his 1998 defeat, Mr Bradford served on the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship executive, making headlines when he left the Liberal Party to become the only Christian Democrat in the federal Parliament. Mr Miles spent over a decade on the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship executive, and is a Baptist lay preacher. Mr Andrews is an active lay Catholic. Mr Forrest chaired the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship until the duties of National Party Chief Whip made the workload impossible. Such publicly Christian progenitors go some way to explaining the Forum’s religious reputation.

Not all self-professed members distanced themselves from the Christian characterisation. Senator Herron answered the question about the Forum’s Christian identity with a simple 'Yes'. This was reflected in some agreed positions: 'We believe in God, we believe in marriage', he said.

Non-members are more likely than members to see the group as Christian. Notably, that interpretation was shared by a number of former Forum members who had subsequently distanced themselves from it. Dr (formerly Senator) Baden Teague combines a commitment to 'family values' with 'small-l' liberalism: 'there would be few in the Liberal Party further to the left than me'. He was an early member of the Lyons Forum—'I'm probably still on the books'. As he saw it, the Forum began as a lobby for the family, but:

    after not many meetings, it became what the public see it as: a hard right think tank. It’s a puzzle how a well-intentioned group can become so conservative, but I can only go back to saying that the Liberal Party has two traditions.

The sometimes conflicting liberal and conservative traditions are evident, he said, in religious alignments as well as in the more general party structure.
Another self-described small-l liberal, NSW Senator John Tierney, was a Lyons Forum founder but, unusually, combined that commitment with founding involvement in the socially libertarian John Stuart Mill Society. He left the Lyons Forum because 'it was too public: I didn’t mind the issues, but objected to the publicity technique'. On his account, 'The Lyons Forum was established to examine legislation in the light of Christian values'.

MM: Are all its members Christian?

SENATOR TIERNEY: Yes—I don’t think you’d bother if you weren’t.31

Mr Tim Fischer, former National Party Leader and Deputy Prime Minister, was never a member, but declared himself in sympathy with the Forum's conservative 'family' stance. Himself a practising Catholic ('I haven’t come suddenly to Christ, it’s something that’s been there all the time'), he gave an unequivocal 'Yes' to the question about the Forum’s Christian identity. Like Senator Tierney, his disagreement is about tactics, although on contrasting grounds: 'I didn’t like their behind-the-scenes way of operating, I thought it should be more out in the open.'32

One of the Forum's most prolific Labor critics, Member for Grayndler Anthony Albanese, went further, comparing it to the American religious right: 'The Lyons Forum is a rightwing, Buchanan type of politics entering Australia. It is an organised rightwing religious cell in the Liberal Party—it’s old-fashioned vanguard politics'.

MM: The Lyons Forum themselves say, 'we're not a religious group, we're just pro-family'. Do you buy that?

MR ALBANESE: No. Not at all.

MM: Why not?

MR ALBANESE: Because every one of their members is a religious zealot.

MM: Have you seen a membership list?

MR ALBANESE: No, but we had pretty close to it. They don't make their membership list available. But the people who identify with it ... all claim and purport to speak on behalf of God. That’s one of the things that they’ve got in common.33
The occasional articles which have discussed the Lyons Forum in any detail have generally avoided explicit investigation of the relationship between religion and conservatism in the Forum’s philosophical position. Two exceptions are by political opponents with backgrounds in the social responsibility and justice organisations of the Uniting Church. Bronwyn Pike wrote ‘A Lyons Share of Power: The influence of the religious right in contemporary Australian politics’ while working for the Evatt Foundation. Before that, she had been Director of Justice and Social Responsibility for the Uniting Church in Victoria, and after her time at the Evatt Foundation, became Labor Member for the State seat of Melbourne and a Minister in the Victorian Government. ‘A Lyons Share of Power’ does not explore any explicitly theological references in the Lyons Forum’s materials, but notes similarities between the Lyons Forum’s policy positions and those of the Australian Christian Coalition, a conservative Christian lobby group.

Former Australian Democrats Senator John Woodley was Director for Social Responsibility for the Uniting Church’s Queensland Synod from 1977 until 1984. Around the time he was retiring as President of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, he wrote ‘Christians in the Lyons Den’, which appeared in a number of church-related publications in mid-1997. It calls the Lyons Forum ‘the most powerful Christian group in Australia’. During his Presidency, Rev. John Woodley recalled, ‘almost all Lyons Forum members were also members of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship’. The article’s focus is Senator Woodley’s argument that Christian parliamentarians should be concerned with ‘economic and social injustice and human rights’ rather than preoccupied by matters of personal morality. He devotes less attention to analysing the Lyons Forum’s actual position than to criticising ‘examples of [Coalition Government] policy’, particularly social and economic, which ‘flew in the face of the Judaeo-Christian ethic but raised not a whisper from the Lyons Forum’.

A related criticism comes from Mr (formerly Senator) Chris Puplick. In his analysis, Christian identification drives Lyons Forum members’ concerns; but ‘Christian’ in this instance stands less for a theological position than as shorthand for a socially conservative agenda which might in fact be softened by more careful attention to Christian teaching:
I mean, the theological pig-ignorance of these people! They call themselves Christian, but they know nothing about their tradition—these are people who wouldn’t know a Gnostic gospel from a bowl of pasta!39

Besides the Christian characterisation, another point of intrigue in early coverage of the Lyons Forum was membership. Even after it began to attract significant public attention, the actual membership remained largely a matter of speculation. Today, attitudes to publicity vary within the Forum, from those who remain chary about confirming or denying an involvement to those, like Education Minister Dr David Kemp, who announce their membership on departmental web pages.40 In general, an air of confidentiality remains—for example, the Forum does not release membership lists. When the group began to draw media attention, the realisation that an apparently influential political grouping had existed almost unnoticed for three years, together with the uncertainty about membership, brought a frisson of intrigue. This may in part account for the way in which analysis of the Forum to date has tended to delve little further than the headline tags, 'Secret!' 'Fundamentalist!' 'Christian!' 'Faction!'.

Whether or not one agrees with Senator Abetz that media labelling of the Forum as Christian amounts to 'demonisation', one of its effects has been to send discussion of the group down a single path. The unfamiliar concept of a politically-significant Australian religious right became the story in itself. A more helpful way to understand the Forum’s significance in the Australian political landscape is in terms of its place in the structure of the Liberal Party. To gain a clearer picture, we need to shift our attention temporarily off the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Parliaments, to consider events in the Liberal Party in the period of the Lyons Forum’s formation and first public activities.

Discussion Group, Pressure Group or Faction?

The Lyons Forum’s 1995 rise to public attention with its submission on family tax sparked the predictable discussion, both inside Parliament and outside, about whether it had taken on a role comparable to that played by factions in the ALP:
SENATOR CROWLEY: We know there are a few whispers of division over there. If it is not from the Lyons Forum it could be from the John Stuart Mill group—not a faction, you understand, but just a different way of thinking about the world. It must be fun when you have your little party room brawls.41

Indeed, when the John Stuart Mill Society was first announced as a forum for the more libertarian strand of Liberal Party opinion, some explanations used quite explicit language of factionalism. Member for Hindmarsh (SA) and John Stuart Mill Society co-founder Ms Chris Gallus told ABC television viewers:

People are saying, ‘Well, if they [the Lyons Forum] are having this sort of influence, perhaps we should get together and have our, you know, talk a bit about the things that we want to get forward and try to have [an] equal amount of influence.’42

However, the traditional Liberal Party reluctance to recognise factions quickly reasserted itself in public discussion. The day after Ms Gallus’s 7:30 Report appearance, ABC radio’s Suzanne Smith asked Lyons Forum member Mr Kevin Andrews whether he was ‘confirming the Liberal Party has a faction and there are factions within the Liberal Party’.

MR ANDREWS: Oh, no. The Liberal Party doesn’t have factions and, on any issue, there would be a different grouping of people. You could name three different issues and you would find me in three different camps, and I suspect most of my colleagues would be.

SUZANNE SMITH: But could we see the development of the Liberal Party having factions in a more formalised sense, like the ALP where you actually vote on factional lines?

MR ANDREWS: No, that won’t happen to the Liberal Party because the essence of the Liberal Party is that the individual can make up his or her mind on a particular issue.

SUZANNE SMITH: But if the Lyons group is based on a philosophical premise, why wouldn’t it become a faction? You’d vote very similarly; you’d vote on conscience issues; you’d
vote on the family; you’d put the family first. Why isn't that a faction?

MR ANDREWS: Putting the family first and discussing it doesn’t actually determine how you vote on particular issues. It doesn’t determine the mechanism of a piece of legislation. It doesn’t determine whether there are other competing considerations, which might override the way in which you would decide an issue … it's not going to occur in this Government and I don’t think it’ll ever occur.43

Evident in the two responses are contrasting views of what a faction is. In Ms Gallus's account, the defining feature of a faction is its acting as a block. That definition both supports interpretation of the Lyons Forum as a faction and suggests—in Ms Gallus’s analysis—the need for a countervailing force. Mr Andrews used a narrower definition of 'faction', emphasising compulsory factional solidarity, at odds with liberal individualism. That narrower definition makes it easier to maintain the official Party view that 'the Liberal Party doesn't have factions'. A few weeks later, Ms Gallus had adopted a similar interpretation, based on exclusiveness and compulsion. Thus, the John Stuart Mill Society was 'definitely not a faction, far from it. Actually, exactly the opposite … this is a discussion group for everybody in the party'.44

However, Mr Andrews’s view, that being a faction implies formal discipline, does not necessarily preclude factional effectiveness in Ms Gallus's earlier sense. Indeed, the Liberal Party itself bears out the observation that formal procedures to punish dissent are not needed to produce a high level of conformity: Liberal Senators and Members, although each officially free to 'make up his or her own mind on a particular issue', in fact behave, in Parliament, as consistent block voters. If an entire party can maintain at least a public display of unity without the compulsion its members often deplore in the ALP, it does not require a great stretch to imagine that a grouping within it could command similar loyalty and consistency, even while publicly maintaining that each member can 'make up his or her own mind'.
Parties and Factions

The exchanges over whether the Lyons Forum is a faction point to a distinction typically drawn between the Liberal and Labor parties, namely, their handling of internal differences. In the ALP, difference is managed through the faction system. Giving formal, public acknowledgment to internal differences has, paradoxically, proved stabilising. During the Hawke and Keating years, for example, according to outgoing ALP President Barry Jones: 'factionalism ... was quite a useful way of dispute resolution that didn't involve personalities'.

By contrast, the Liberal Party has historically been wary of public expressions of dissent, or even the appearance of it, especially when associated with a particular grouping within the party. Sometimes, the groupings are officially dispersed, as happened in the late 1960s to the Mushroom Club, a dining group of Gortonite 'blokes who liked a drink, a little fun, a little ribaldry, ... to talk about sport and dismiss politics from their minds once a fortnight'. More dramatically, groupings have at times been expelled *tout court*, as befell the Liberal Movement in South Australia's Liberal and Country League. Less visibly, but to similar effect, representatives of a grouping may be picked off or eased out one by one. Thus, the moderate Liberal Forum of the 1980s found itself much diminished after the 1989 preselections.

At various times, some people in the Liberal Party have proposed a more structured system for managing internal debate. For example, in 1994 Senator Nick Minchin suggested that the Liberal Party should adopt organised factions on the Labor model. The objection to this proposal most often pointed out by Liberals themselves is the principle of allowing individual Senators and Members to vote in Parliament according to their conscience on any issue, theoretically free even from the restraints of party discipline. On the other hand, as I have already suggested, it may be argued that formal constraints are not needed to produce high levels of conformity. On that interpretation, Senator Minchin's suggestion could rather be construed as proposing formal acknowledgment of already existing patterns.
In place of the problematic 'freedom of conscience' argument against formally-recognised factions, a more convincing explanation for Liberal reluctance to publicly acknowledge differences may be found in the party’s structure. As numerous commentators point out, the parliamentary Liberal Party gives distinctive prominence to the Leader. (The close alignment of Leader and policy I discuss below.) That prominence is evident in organisational matters internal to the parliamentary Party. For example, the Leader not only allocates portfolios among Ministerial candidates (as in the Labor Party), but also selects the pool of those among whom portfolios are to be distributed. By contrast, in the ALP, factions manage not only ideological differences in policy debate, but also organisational matters such as, within the parliamentary party, election of candidates for Ministerial appointments, and, in the wider party organisation, preselection and appointment of party officials. While it may be argued that those are not necessary functions of factions, it may well be that, over time, a formal factional system would erode the Leader’s power. For example, formally acknowledging factions could be perceived as creating a framework which the dissatisfied could use as grounds for demanding proportional representation of different ideological positions in Cabinet. That, in turn, could threaten the present discretion of the Leader in Ministerial appointments.

Against the background of the traditional Liberal nervousness about factions, the Lyons Forum can be understood as providing the formal organisation for a grouping around one strong ideological tendency. In a party where any grouping can be seen as a threat, the Lyons Forum’s association with Christianity may have facilitated its acceptance. After all, ever since their founders’ promise that 'where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there’, Christians have been conspicuous for their readiness to congregate. Their meetings carry an aura of fellowship rather than conspiracy. Given the liberal tradition, a religious group might be deemed 'non-political'. An even vaguely Christian alliance could well prove easier for the party to tolerate than, say, a Mushroom Club.

Viewed in this light, the Lyons Forum’s significance is best understood in terms of the way it operates within the Liberal Party’s ongoing ideological debates, as they are mediated through the party’s structure. We cannot, of
course, understand the Lyons Forum without appreciating the particular kind of conservatism it represents and how that is placed within the wider field of Liberal philosophical debate. But, equally, its ideological position can only be adequately understood once we have grasped the organisational aspects of how it functions as a grouping within the Liberal Party structure.

Conservative Allsorts

Discussion of tendencies in the Liberal Party typically focuses on 'wet' and 'dry', or, in the terms of one classic account, 'ameliorative' and 'individualist'. Each plausibly appeals to the party's Menzian heritage, the former emphasising the need for some state intervention to protect the weak where the latter advocates smaller government and freer markets. In these terms, the period of the Lyons Forum's rise was marked by increasing philosophical homogenisation. A series of dry Liberal Leaders had tended toward an increasingly uniform frontbench. As Dean Jaensch notes, by 1993, the tendencies' historical coexistence had suffered:

The Liberal Party's leadership, since 1990, has sought not to provide representation for tendencies, especially at policy-making levels. Rather, the parliamentary party leadership has sought, by the various means available to it, to exclude from authority, power and input the wets and the pragmatists.

The telling moment for Jaensch was the 1993 leadership ballot. By that time, 'dry' homogenisation had advanced so far that, according to Jaensch, all the contenders were 'of one ideological persuasion'. Jaensch lists John Hewson, John Howard, Peter Costello, Bronwyn Bishop, Ian McLachlan, Wilson Tuckey and Alexander Downer, adding:

the reason why there were no wets or moderates available is that the leading members of these tendencies had either resigned from the parliamentary party, or had been purged.

Jaensch’s account leaves the impression of a contest reduced to personality, electoral appeal or leadership skills, rather than policy. But the economic polarisation of 'wet' and 'dry' obscures other significant policy variations. While the potential contenders were all economic dries, they differed on social questions. Jaensch himself elsewhere provides a matrix which allows
a more informed reading of the 1993 leadership contest and its aftermath. The role of government in various spheres of public and private life provides the divining rod with which he categorises Liberal opinion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should the State be Involved?</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Moral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Conservative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Cold Conservative</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Social Liberal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV (no label fits)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V Libertarian Dry</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI Dry Warm Libertarian</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII Dry Cold Conservative</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII Dry Warm Conservative</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In Jaensch's account, the Liberal Party grew out of Menzies's 'type I conservative' orientation, but by the mid-1980s had developed 'tendencies and proto-factions ... across almost all of the possibilities' in the table.55 However, he saw some as stronger than others: to Jaensch, writing in 1994, the social conservative position (broadly, the table's positions VII and VIII) 'was, and remains, a tendency' within the Liberal Party, but without developing 'proto-faction characteristics'.56

Jaensch's study was published two years after the Lyons Forum's formation. The social conservatives were in the process of developing arguably the strongest 'proto-faction characteristics' of any Coalition grouping since the Liberal Movement. In the 1993 contest, Dr Hewson, in Jaensch's terms a 'Libertarian Dry' (or possibly Dry, Warm Libertarian),57 retained the leadership. By the time he lost it on 23 May 1994, the distinction between Libertarian and Conservative Dry stances had been thrown into relief by a series of controversies which brought the social conservative agenda to prominence.

**Party, Policy and Leader**

It is one thing for party members to have a strong policy position. It may be quite another thing to implement it. In the Liberal Party, the potential obstacles take a distinctive form. Despite moves in the 1990s towards a
stronger 'policy partnership' involving the extra-parliamentary party, policy responsibility has remained substantially in the party room. Inside its doors, policy influence is heavily concentrated in a single chair. The Liberal Leader enjoys greater freedom within the party structure than either Labor or National Party Leaders do, being free, for example, of restraint from organisational resolutions. Consequently, as Graeme Starr points out, 'Real power in the parliamentary Liberal Party rests with the leader', so that:

The parliamentary party elects its leader and its deputy leader and, after that, the parliamentary organisation is whatever the leader wants it to be ... The effect of this practice, of course, is that members of the parliamentary party are almost entirely dependent for their rise or fall to or from positions of power upon the patronage of the leader.

On policy, too, as Jaensch points out, 'the Liberal Party gives its leader authority beyond the platform and even the canvas'. Consequently, in David Kemp's view, 'The ultimate support of a leader's authority is his role as expounder of a philosophy or ideology which commands common consent and adherence in the party'. The situation has changed little since Menzies's day, when: 'The philosophy and platform of Liberalism and the authority of the Liberal leader of the opposition were closely linked'.

Ian Cook gives Kemp's description a more specifically philosophical interpretation. He reads the history of Liberal policy formation as an ongoing contest between 'ameliorative' and 'individualistic' philosophies. He concludes that the choice of Leader is the mechanism through which, at any point, the parliamentary party determines which strand will dominate. The ramifications of the choice are both ideological and structural:

In short, the adoption of one of the varieties of liberalism within the Liberal Party [through the choice of Leader] will tend to marginalise certain potential office holders and power brokers, and to enhance the position of others.

Moreover, as Randal Stewart and Ian Ward infer, the parliamentary Leader's 'primary role in defining Liberal ideology' in consequence 'leaves him or her as the chief custodian of the party's electoral fortunes'. When those fail, or when ideological disagreement wells for other reasons, 'there is an incentive for those who want to change policy direction to change
leaders'. Changing the course of policy means, in effect, finding a replacement Leader to be the new agenda's figurehead and executor.

From Future Directions to Fightback

Former Senator Chris Puplick's *Is the Party Over? The future of the Liberals* describes the late 1980s and early 1990s as a period when this concentration of policy responsibility in the hands of the Leader was particularly intense. John Howard's 1988 *Future Directions* statement was born, according to Puplick, 'with little or no input from the party rank and file, or even from the party room', making it 'very much a personal creation of Howard, members of his staff and a select few members of the party federal secretariat'. But centralisation reached its zenith with Dr John Hewson's *Fightback!*. Involving none of 'the organisation, the joint policy committee or the party room', policy formation was effectively outsourced to the consulting firm Access Economics.

One seeming exception to this pattern of increasing exclusiveness of policy formation was the Liberal Party's pre-1993 *Australia 2000* series of surveys. Hearings and written submissions received from Australians within and beyond the Party found widespread discontent with the political process, suspicion of politicians and 'a psychological trough in which people believe their very birthright is somehow being forfeited and the old values are crumbling everywhere'. Jaensch sees *Fightback!* as 'clearly designed to offer a "straw" to such voters'. However, he does not explain what the 'straw' consisted of. On the contrary, according to Puplick, the economically dry *Fightback!* embodied the very elements such voters deplored. On Puplick's analysis, 'there is no evidence that any of the material gathered [by *Australia 2000*] had the slightest impact on the policies which the Liberal Party took into the subsequent election'. Indeed, one aspect of the *Australia 2000* findings left the Liberal Party, at least publicly, reluctant to own too much of the content. As an interview on ABC television's *7:30 Report* makes clear, public malaise, at least as found by the survey, focused on immigration:
PHILIP RUDDOCK: It is an expression of view by numbers of Australians who contributed ... It is certainly a document which we will look at, but it is not determinative in relation to the policies that we'll put in place.

KERRY O'BRIEN: But it's a document that talks: 'There was [a] feeling that the influx of migration, and particularly Asian migration, was resulting in permanent changes to the Australian way of life'; talks about anger and fear about a diminution of Australian national identity.

PHILIP RUDDOCK: Well, Kerry, there are some people who expressed those sorts of views, and they wrote to us and expressed them, and all that's happened in relation to that is ...

KERRY O'BRIEN: Is that you've given publicity to those views ...

PHILIP RUDDOCK: Well, no, those views were included in a document ... but they are not ...

KERRY O'BRIEN: But given the credibility of your leader and your party.

PHILIP RUDDOCK: No, they are not our views and it is not our policy.76

Dr Hewson's reaction to this malaise was to combine dry economic policy with explicitly inclusive social policies. In the wake of the 'unlosable' 1993 election, he strengthened his public commitment to social liberalism, often interpreted as an attempt to soften the hard-right economic image conveyed by *Fightback!* Whoever may have felt more included by this stance, it set him at odds with the conservative 'family' agenda. Announcing his resignation as Member for Wentworth, Hewson summed up his philosophical stance as follows:

The individual ... is supreme. The government is subservient except, of course, when individuals collectively choose otherwise. In social policy, again, [that conviction] leads me, and has led me, to see the individual as supreme. So I do not have any problem myself with issues that relate to women's rights or gay rights as they are called, to seeing abortion as a matter of choice for a woman in conjunction with her family and her doctor, to supporting legislation in relation to privacy or anti-racial vilification.
Of course, there are always constraints; there must be. In the case of the latter, such legislation protects free speech, and gives proper recognition to the status and rights of Aboriginal people. It explains why I took the strong positions I did on issues such as female genital mutilation, mental illness and breast cancer research. In terms of the political spectrum, I was to the right of centre in economic matters and to the left of centre in social policy matters.\textsuperscript{77}

It must have seemed to the socially right of centre Lyons Forum that the conservative 'family' agenda was unlikely to progress while the holder of such views remained Leader.

It is not surprising that this period of policy monopoly, with Coalition spokespeople defending policy to which they had made minimal contributions and with which they did not necessarily agree,\textsuperscript{78} should have seen attempts by members of the parliamentary party to win themselves a more substantial say. A number of factors contributed to the kind of manoeuvres likely to prove effective in such circumstances. With the fizzling of Australia 2000, and the embarrassments of Future Directions and Fightback! fresh in their minds, Coalition MPs might reasonably conclude that little was likely to be changed by mere discussion: there was no guarantee that the ultimate arbiters of policy would be listening. Effective policy change, then as at other times in the Party's history, entailed a leadership change.

**Mardi Gras**

One issue which proved a lightning rod for the cleavage between conservative and libertarian strands in the Dry tendency was Dr Hewson's decision to send a message of support to the 1994 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.\textsuperscript{79} According to news reports at the time, a number of Liberal backbenchers objected to the message on the grounds that 'the event was not one Dr Hewson should have supported' expressing 'anger' at the inference 'that Liberals generally supported it'.\textsuperscript{80}

The Mardi Gras provided a second focus for discontent when Senators and Members from both sides signed a 'petition' to the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, objecting to the station's scheduled broadcast of the event at
8:30 the following Sunday evening. To some who signed, the issue was simply a matter of the broadcast’s timing. To others, including Mr Chris Miles, one of the Coalition members who circulated the petition, it reflected a broader social concern:

**MR MILES:** The ABC rejected the view of 94 Members of Parliament. And I think that was a reflection of really how arrogant the ABC were in regard to their promotion of homosexuality in society. Because if 94 Members of Parliament … couldn’t convince a publicly funded organisation to change their time slot for what we thought was the benefit of the nation, then I think that does show a particular agenda which the ABC have had, and I think they have had it and I think they continue to have it.

**MM:** Of promoting homosexuality?

**CM:** Of course. Homosexual practices—let’s get that straight. Homosexuality and homosexual practices are different issues.81

The petition won some seventy Coalition and twenty ALP signatures, as well as some notable refusals to sign. One was Ms Kathy Sullivan, Liberal Member for Moncrieff. No one could call Ms Sullivan an advocate of homosexual practices. True, she believes in the rights of consenting adults to conduct their sex lives without state interference; but she worries that some material aimed at teenagers amounts to gay proselytising. She refused to sign the petition to the ABC not out of any special affection for the Mardi Gras, but because ‘it is inappropriate for us to dictate to the ABC’. Moreover, when the petition was circulated in the chamber that Wednesday, her impression was that it was explained as an initiative of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship. But ‘I was at the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship that morning, and nothing was said’.82 To her eyes, the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship’s bipartisan standing was being co-opted for party political purposes—indeed, to promote one sectional concern within one party. Such a move would be entirely contrary to the spirit of the Fellowship, which ‘was never designed for networking’.83
Others I spoke to did not share the impression that the petition was a Parliamentary Christian Fellowship initiative:

MM: That petition arose out of the Christian Fellowship?

MR MILES: No, no, it didn’t arise out of the Christian Fellowship, it had nothing to do with the Fellowship, nothing to do with it. It was a concern being expressed by both Labor Party members, a range of them, and Liberal Party members in just general discussion.84

The ALP signatures were collected by Mrs Mary Easson, then Member for Lowe. She recalled being invited to be involved with the petition by Mr Alan Cadman.

MM: Did the idea come out of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship?

MRS EASSON: No, not as far as I know. It wasn’t raised at a meeting there or anything like that. No, it was more just that we’d gradually got to know one another there. I didn’t go to the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship all that often, but I went now and again, and I was known as someone who would actually talk to people and get to know people whatever side they were on. I was never on the executive or anything, but I went from time to time. So that would have been why they approached me.85

The text sent to the ABC (worded as an open letter to then Managing Director David Hill), describes the signatories simply as ‘Senators and Members of the Australian Parliament’, and later as ‘representatives of millions of Australians’.86 According to Ms Sullivan, ‘The next day (4 March) Miles issued a vicious press release, vilifying Hewson in the name of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship.’ I could not find the press release in the Parliament House media files, and Mr Miles could not recall issuing it. However, Dr Hewson’s comments at the time suggest that he perceived a religious element to the criticism of him from within his party, prompting him to offer (in the Sydney Morning Herald) a theological defence:
Chapter Five: Lyons in the Bear-Pit

There is also a Christian streak to this debate ... God didn't say, 'God so loved the world excluding homosexuals', or, 'God so loved the world excluding two-income families', or whatever.87

Whatever the source of the letter to the ABC, its effect was to throw into further relief the differences between Dr Hewson and the conservative drys. According to Ms Sullivan, 'The petition never reached the central table, so Hewson didn't get a chance to sign it. The next day, [Parliamentary Christian Fellowship President and Lyons Forum Vice-President Mr John] Bradford phoned every Liberal who hadn't signed, to ask them to reconsider—with two exceptions. He didn't phone me, because he knew I wouldn't sign—we had neighbouring electorates and we've clashed too often. And he didn't phone Hewson. So Hewson was being criticised for not supporting it, even though he never had an opportunity to sign.'88 As it happened, he agreed with the petitioners' view, and, on his own account after the event, would have signed the letter if invited.89 In article headed, 'Hewson Lashes Conservatives', the Canberra Times reported the Liberal Leader's interpretation:

You could argue that a handful of people might be trying to set me up because they didn't ask me to sign the petition. They feared, I think, that I might sign the petition and that would weaken their argument'.90

The issue lived in media reporting less as an attempt to influence the ABC than as an indication of widening Liberal rifts:

MRS EASSON: What they [the letter's initiators] raised when they talked to me, and what it was all about as far as I was concerned, was the issue of [the broadcast's] timing. That was how they sold it to me, and that was how I sold it on my side ... But it blew out of all proportion, because there was another agenda running, to do with Hewson and the Liberal leadership ... Then David Hill released [the letter] on TV, and it all blew up and it became clear that the Liberals were using it against Hewson.91
Minorities and Mainstream

When John Howard led the Coalition to victory in 1996, he did so under the slogan ‘For all of Us’, with the idea that the outgoing Labor Government had been ruled by ‘them’, namely, minority and special interest groups. Pamela Williams’s study of the 1996 election campaign attributes to Liberal federal campaign director Andrew Robb the strategy to:

devise a campaign around the concept of "We" and "Them" ... with "them" representing the many special interest groups associated with [Labor Prime Minister Paul] Keating ... Keating was about "them", the noisy interest groups who made the majority feel left out.92

The campaign centred on the impression of a tide of public ‘resentment’93 and ushered in a government riding on the image of an alienated ‘mainstream’, who felt excluded from other groups’ ‘special privileges’. However, examining the Lyons Forum’s role in the Liberal Party structure through the early 1990s suggests that the ‘minorities versus mainstream’ divide, rather than arising from the immediate political necessities of the 1996 campaign, is a longstanding flashpoint in Liberal Party policy debate. Indeed, Senator Abetz cites that feeling as a major reason for the Lyons Forum’s formation:

See, the Lyons Forum started because Australian politics was going along a path of you had to be a special interest group to access the government’s attention. There were people in the Coalition before I arrived who were of the view that there were certain mainstream issues and, if you like, a silent majority that were being forgotten. As a result, they were of the view, and I agreed when I got here, that government does need to look at broad issues.94

At stake was the interpretation of what it means to ‘govern for all Australians’. To Dr Hewson, it meant that ‘if you want to be a Party for all Australians, you have to ... start out by recognising all Australians’, including those with minority sexual preferences or non-nuclear families.95 Moreover, recognising minority groups was the best way to uphold the Liberal principle of giving ‘the individual ... control over their lives and choice’.96 The alternative he saw as to ‘go back to some sort of traditional basic something, whatever words they use, I mean narrow the party back
and have nothing to do with this group or that group’. Such a mentality he described, in a newspaper article at the time, as inherently exclusivist: 'It leads people to say, "Oh well, I prefer White Australians to others"'.

Significantly, in the context of the leadership debate, he judged the retreat from recognition of minority groups to be electorally damaging. It would, he argued, leave the Liberal Party 'irrelevant in about six months flat'. The Labor Party, on the other hand, 'will laugh themselves stupid that [we] have such an incredible misunderstanding of the nature and basic values of the people of Australia'.

One year on from the unlosable election, few observers would have thought that Dr Hewson, then already walking in a perpetual mist of leadership speculation, would need any hastening towards his valedictory address. The Mardi Gras controversy did not create his downfall. Yet it supplemented news bulletins' concentration on the then continuing differences between Dr Hewson and Mr Howard over immigration, family policy and income-splitting.

Before the Mardi Gras story surfaced, journalists were prolifically reporting Liberal reactions to the leadership struggle with words like 'despairing', 'appalled' and 'had a gutful'. Rather than seeing the Mardi Gras petition as an attempt to destabilise an already shaky Leader, it is more helpful to see the incident as an attempt to entrench a conservative social agenda as a benchmark issue in any leadership decision. In particular, the petition was circulated just as Dr Hewson was claiming the socially-progressive ground and support for 'minority groups' in an attempt to reclaim small-l liberals whom the party felt it had lost to the ALP. Interpreting the controversy this way helps explain an otherwise perplexing aspect of the story:

MM: So, when the story blew up afterwards, and people were talking about this Hewson leadership agenda, did you feel—did you think maybe you’d been set up?

MRS EASSON: No, no, I don’t think I was set up. I don’t know whether the Hewson leadership agenda was there all the time, whether the petition was always part of a strategy, or whether it just grew out of it afterwards ... I thought about it at the time, once the story was running, and people were putting all
these machiavellian theories about Chris Miles. But, if the theories were right, I couldn't see how our signatures helped. If it was an agenda to do with Hewson, they only needed the signatures from their side, they didn't need ours.99

If, on the other hand, the agenda was less getting rid of Dr Hewson (he was on the way out anyway) than establishing the social conservative agenda as a benchmark in the inevitable ballot for his successor, then the ALP signatures performed a useful function. The Lyons Forum early established the practice of emphasising the popular appeal of social conservatism, identifying it with the 'mainstream' which flows beyond 'special interests'.100 The Forum's bid for involvement in policy, such emphasis implied, should not be dismissed as just backbench grumbling, but bore the imprimatur of the Australian 'mainstream'. Similarly, the bipartisan collection of signatures on the letter to the ABC, featuring prominent figures from both Labor Left and Right factions, might have indicated to potential leadership voters that a 'family values' stance did not automatically damn the party to a conservative electoral ghetto as Dr Hewson implied.101

With hindsight, Dr Hewson shares Ms Sullivan's interpretation of the events surrounding the Mardi Gras petition. Himself a practising Anglican ('I go to St Michael's, Vaucluse. It's not my local church, but we chose it because of the Sunday school'), he recalls:

I knew the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship was being used for political ends. I don't think they knew it at the time! But they've stopped running the gay issue. In due course, they must have realised they were being used ... That's been Howard's history. He uses groups like the Modest Members and the Pitt Club. People set these things up for the right reasons, but then they get manipulated.102

Dr Hewson himself does not attribute his electoral career's collapse solely to conservative dissatisfaction with his social liberalism. He acknowledges the impact of left-wing critique, including from the Christian churches, of his Fightback! package's potential to increase social inequality. However, he finds it disappointing (not to say, ironic) that, under Howard:

Now we've got a GST and the social conservatism. And Howard's GST is a much less fair, less socially responsible package than Fightback. I didn't
just give compensation, I wanted to overcome discrimination, against the aged, for example. We had an eight per cent pension increase (not four per cent, like the Howard package!), and free private health cover for the elderly. We had a focus on children, whether they were in one- or two-parent families—we weren’t saying mum has to be at home with the kids. The present Liberal Party’s socially conservative policy leads to a less fair society.103

Transition

In May 1994, Dr Hewson lost a party ballot, becoming, at that point, the third-longest serving Liberal leader (after Menzies and Fraser). He was replaced by Mr Alexander Downer, Member for Mayo (SA). Mr Downer was never a Lyons Forum member; however, he was a well-established critic of ‘minority special interest groups’. As early as 1985, Mr Downer’s first speech was an extended attack on a Labor Government held ‘hostage’ to the ‘squeals and cries’ of ‘selfish and sectional interests’.104

At the time of his election, Mr Downer was widely seen as a compromise candidate, filling in the gap for a party not yet ready to embrace Mr Costello, with his overt New Right alignment, nor yet to re-instate Mr Howard. Such analyses usually relate to Mr Downer’s position in the Liberal Party’s general shift to the economic right. However, a similar claim could be made about his stance on the questions of social policy dear to the Lyons Forum. His amply-stated 1985 antipathy to ‘deals with … privileged interest groups’ had as its main target the more traditional Liberal enemy of trade unions; but the context of the Party turmoil in the early 1990s found it readily translating into social policy.

Mr Downer’s actions in relation to the Mardi Gras form a case in point: ‘What do I think about the Gay Mardi Gras? If it’s your scene, have a nice day. It doesn’t affect me.’ Nevertheless, true to his vision on entering Parliament, he did not feel that a broad-based party needed to find favour with minority interests. As Leader, he judged party unity was more important: ‘I can remember exactly why I didn’t send [a message of support in preparation for the 1995 parade]. It was because I didn’t want another break-out in the party on an issue like that.’105
Howard to Power

Mr Downer’s leadership lasted less than a year. By the end of January 1995, the Liberal Party had a Leader whose views reflected the—by then—longstanding aspirations of Lyons Forum members. In one of the smattering of media notices of the Lyons Forum before its 1995 rise to public prominence, Mr Miles had anticipated the change:

MATTHEW ABRAHAM: Is it fair to say, though, that members of the group would tend to support the very strong traditional family focus taken by John Howard, when he was leader? …

CHRIS MILES: Well, fine, if they were the things—and I think to a certain extent they were, the things which John Howard was talking about—then certainly the Lyons Forum is interested in having better nurturing for children around Australia.106

Mr Howard brought to the Leadership a social sensibility forged in suburban bourgeois Methodism. Its legacy was less theological than social:

Religion did play quite a role in my upbringing. I was brought up in a Methodist home, we went to a Methodist Sunday school and church … we talked about behaviour, but we didn’t talk so much about theology and the more spiritual content … I still regard myself as having a strong Methodist deposit, I guess it’s reflected in my attitude to some things like gambling. Though not drinking, I enjoy a drink …107

In contrast to those strands of Methodism associated with the genesis of the trade union movement,108 Wesleyan egalitarianism in the Howard household translated into a ‘distrust’ of ‘class division’ whose implications could perhaps better be described as aesthetic than political:

We were brought up to—not to be hostile to what might be regarded as the upper classes, but there was a strong view in my family that people shouldn’t be too pretentious. We were perhaps an understated people, … with the idea that pretension was something to be avoided.109

Such explicitly political dimensions as his childhood Methodism had, he identified with the idea of ‘standing on your own two feet’:
They talk of the Protestant work ethic, and I was certainly brought up in the Protestant work ethic, very much. And I don’t regard that as anything but an entirely positive thing, because it’s the idea of working and expecting some reward, but doing it in an ethical fashion, in an honourable fashion, and not breaking the law or being greedy. And I regard that as part of the Protestant work ethic: that work has its own reward in return.\textsuperscript{110}

Suspicion of those who expect something for nothing was matched by suspicion of ‘minority interests’, a state of mind which former Howard advisor Gerard Henderson attributes directly to the family’s religious history.

Henderson’s 1995 book, \textit{A Howard Government? Inside the Coalition},\textsuperscript{111} recounts how Mr Howard’s mother, Mona, was the daughter of a Catholic mother, who died young, and an Anglican father, whose family raised Mona in the ways of Protestantism so effectively that she rejected her own early education to become bitterly anti-Catholic. Marrying Lyall Howard, she found herself in the heart of suburban Methodism, and became enthusiastically Methodist herself. Henderson reports Mr Howard’s brothers regaling him with a series of family anecdotes about the strong sectarian feeling in their home, leading Henderson to ask Mr Howard about his own surprising lack of sectarian sentiment. This seemed to be one aspect of maternal influence against which the young John Howard had rebelled: ‘I just thought it was stupid that people who were professedly Christian should be fighting each other as to who was the superior Christian’, he told Henderson. But Henderson attributes this sentiment less to ecumenical conviction than to ‘the psychological process of denial’. According to \textit{A Howard Government?}, Mr Howard could not bring himself to acknowledge that ‘difference (as in Protestant-Catholic) was a fact of post-1788 Australian life’, and so concluded that ‘no discussion was better than arguing with his friends and family about the meaning of (Christian) life’. Consequently, ‘unity, however artificial, was preferable to plurality if the latter led to emphasis on difference’. Henderson finds in ‘this subliminal attitude’ the origins of the adult Mr Howard’s distrust of those whom the Howard-led Liberal Party has consistently placed under the headings of minority and special interest groups.\textsuperscript{112}
In that suspicion of difference, what I have called the aesthetic and political dimensions of his suburban bourgeois Methodism come together to produce an enduring theme in Mr Howard’s thought. At the time of the 1996 election, another childhood memory was widely quoted. Mr Howard recalled, wistfully, that at Earlwood Primary School:

Everybody was about the same. You had a few kids who obviously came from fairly poor families. You had one or two whose fathers had been very successful in small business. And the rest were sort of in the middle ... You had that feeling that everybody was about the same ... Some homes didn’t have telephones, although most did. Some didn’t have cars, although most did. But they all seemed to have a house and a backyard that you went and played in. It’s different now.113

Sameness was not a tyrany, but a virtue that should extend from the backyards of Earlwood to the politics of the nation. The Earlwood ethos—everyone much the same—has been evident in successive Howard policies. During Mr Howard’s first spell as leader, in 1988, the Howard-led Coalition, then in opposition, produced a joint Liberal/National statement called *Future Directions*, famously adorned with a two-parents-and-children family and an iconic white picket fence. In a decisive rebuttal of Fraser’s multiculturalism, the new slogan was One Australia. Difference came to be synonymous with disadvantage, sameness with equality; a more equal society meant assimilating those who did not fit the mainstream.114

The *Future Directions* for the late 1990s was called *The Australia I Believe In*. In its pages, difference was more dangerous than ever. Where in 1988 difference was synonymous with disadvantage, by 1995 difference meant privilege. The ‘broad Australian mainstream’ was now held hostage to ‘“insider” interest groups’ who, two paragraphs later, had become ‘powerful vested interests’.115 The Earlwood ethos would now mean stripping such groups of their ‘special privileges’.

**Whatever Happened to the Lyons Forum?**

In its early days, according to members, the Lyons Forum met at least once a month when Parliament was sitting, giving eight meetings a year. Sometimes meetings would be more frequent, even weekly during sitting
periods. It boasted a membership of around half of the Coalition’s parliamentary parties, including some fifteen frontbenchers.

Compared to those heady days, the Lyons Forum of today is quiet. 'I think we might have met once or twice this year', members told me doubtfully. Senator Chapman reflected:

> It’s been fairly dormant for the last couple of years. Actually, they had a dinner meeting a couple of weeks ago, but I couldn’t go because I had something else on. It was quite active for the latter days that we were in opposition and in the early days of government … I can’t remember, I think we might have had one or two meetings last year … the last one I can remember attending would have been a couple of years ago at least.\(^{116}\)

In 1997, in response to Senator Woodley’s imputation that cuts to the common youth allowance had 'the stamp of the Lyons Forum all over them', Senator Herron expostulated, 'On a point of order, Madam President: I am a member of the Lyons Forum, and it has not even had a meeting this year'.\(^{117}\) To me, he summed up: 'We got our policy in—we’ve gone quiet since we won'.\(^{118}\) Senator Ferguson was similarly candid:

> The Forum has served its purpose. It was formed in opposition to make sure that all policy was assessed for its impact on families. But once we’re in government, the party doesn’t have as much input into policy, the executive does. But we keep the structure alive, in case we ever need to revive it.\(^{119}\)

With an Executive in place likely to pursue its agenda, the Lyons Forum could relax back into an occasional dining club.

**A Flash in the Liberal Pan?**

If we apply Jaensch’s classification of Liberal Party ideologies to the Lyons Forum, we find that opinion within it ranges over all of the ‘conservative’ positions, labelled respectively I, II, VII and VIII. The first, however, is dominant. Jaensch places the John Howard of the early 1990s in Category VIII—economically dry, but willing to countenance state intervention on both the social and moral fronts.\(^{120}\) The social, for Jaensch, encompasses 'the role of government in such areas as social welfare and unemployment
benefits', while the moral covers 'the role of the state in enforcing a code of moral behaviour, including questions such as drugs, gambling, abortion and homosexuality'. Two terms of Howard Government have seen progressive uncoupling of government from social welfare and employment programs (discussed in chapter four). Other 'social' questions which have been prominent during Mr Howard's prime ministership have included Native Title, Pauline Hanson's electoral high tide, and an apology to members of the stolen generations. On each, he has consistently opted for minimal government response.121

This removal of government from Jaensch's 'social' category has gone hand in hand with an unusually interventionist stance on such conventionally 'moral' questions as euthanasia, censorship, gambling and IVF access for single, de facto partnered and lesbian women. Mr Howard, in Government, has dropped several degrees centigrade from the 'dry, warm conservative' of Jaensch's characterisation, embracing the 'morally' interventionist but 'socially' minimalist theory of government which characterises Jaensch's position VII.

There are at least two possible ways of interpreting the fact that Mr Howard's strand of conservatism coincides with the dominant position in the Lyons Forum. The conventional reading, keeping in mind the importance of the Leader in Liberal policy formation, would be that his stance dominates because of his office. This interpretation is often produced to explain the stands of other Senators and Members. For example, when Kevin Andrews introduced his Euthanasia Laws Bill into the House of Representatives, it was widely said that the Bill enjoyed prominence in the House agenda and overwhelming Liberal support because it had 'the personal imprimatur of John Howard'.122 Indeed, in view of the size of the Liberals' 1996 win, and coming after the protracted leadership troubles, and related electoral misfortunes, his authority as Leader was arguably even greater than conventionally attends that office. However, there is an alternative reading. Before a Leader can carry a policy position, the prior step is to be elected. To attain the position of Leader, one must represent a position close to many parliamentary party hearts. By repeatedly drawing the social conservative agenda to public attention and demonstrating the weight of numbers and senior office-holders behind it, the Lyons Forum can
be interpreted as ensuring that agenda became a factor in future leadership play-offs between otherwise ideologically homogeneous contenders. By demonstrating its capacity to harness the social conservative agenda to further destabilise an already struggling Leader, the Lyons Forum can be interpreted as demonstrating its power as a block within the Coalition. By successfully associating the social conservative agenda with both parties and with a broader Christian identification, the Lyons Forum can be interpreted as answering the fear, raised by Dr Hewson and others,¹²³ that a retreat to picket fence conservatism would prove an electoral loser. Each was a step in ensuring that the new policy figurehead would be one in sympathy with that agenda. In other words, where many commentators assumed that Senators and Members in the two Howard Governments have supported socially conservative positions because they are favoured by the Leader, some evidence suggests an alternative view: that Mr Howard regained the Leadership at least partly because his brand of conservatism fits with the dominant position within this well-organised and distinctive proto-faction.

Political analysts often identify the Liberal Party’s shift to the socially conservative right with Mr Howard, and anticipate its unravelling when he is no longer Leader. Treasurer Peter Costello, widely seen as his most likely successor, has impeccably dry economic credentials. However, on the social front, the Treasurer tends to be seen as less conservative than Mr Howard. This impression gains weight from Mr Costello’s republicanism and his recognition of the need for an apology to Indigenous Australians.¹²⁴ Neither of these issues, however, touches directly on the Lyons Forum’s ‘family’ agenda. Mr Costello’s flashes of ‘small-l liberalism’ on issues such as the republic and reconciliation do not necessarily indicate a less socially conservative stance on ‘family’ matters than Mr Howard’s. Indeed, there is surprisingly little public record of his stances on such matters as legal equality for gay and lesbian couples, publicly-funded abortion or the desirability of a full-time stay-at-home parent. For example, ABC Radio National’s Background Briefing, endeavouring to go behind ‘the smirk on the hard face of economic rationalism’, explored the Treasurer’s views on Aboriginal reconciliation, immigration and football. On ‘family’ issues, however, it recorded only the ambiguous statement that:
We just ought to get the governments out as far as possible, out of family lives, you ought to let the non-government institutions of society, like the family and the school and the community and the church take a lot of the slack.\textsuperscript{125}

The program discussed his founding involvement in the economic libertarian H. R. Nicholls Society, but did not mention his involvement in the Lyons Forum's early 1990s heyday, documented at the time by journalists such as the \textit{Age}'s Nikki Savva (subsequently his media officer). His membership of the Lyons Forum from its early days suggests sympathy with its agenda. Perhaps more importantly, it suggests that, like Mr Howard, he could be understood as owing some of his party standing to its support.

Mr Howard has been said to favour Liberal Member for Warringah (NSW) Mr Tony Abbott as his successor. Mr Abbott is another Lyons Forum stalwart, combining social conservatism on 'family' issues with a position nearer to the Prime Minister's on such matters as the republic and the question of an apology. These, rather than the Lyons Forum's core 'family' concerns, are likely to prove the main dividing line between candidates.

Senator Ferguson's assessment of the importance of the Executive is vindicated in the continued legislative life of the \textit{Forum}'s concerns. In terms of actual policy success, the \textit{Forum}'s achievements have been mixed. Under Mr Howard, the Lyons Forum's 'family' agenda has not remained consistently on the Coalition's 'front burner'. Instead, it has surfaced at times of party tension or electoral pressure. As one example, in 1997 the Lyons Forum pushed a proposal to modify the Sex Discrimination Act to exclude single women and lesbians from access to fertility services.\textsuperscript{126} The controversial suggestion did not make it into legislation at that time, but resurfaced in August 2000 as the Sex Discrimination Amendment Bill (No. 1). When raised, Lyons Forum concerns have dominated the headlines, bringing socially conservative 'family'-related issues to the forefront of public attention and arguably consolidating the Prime Minister's leadership position. In a Costello-led Coalition (or, indeed, an Abbott-led one), the Forum, even in semi-hibernation, might well have a similar effect.
Looking back over the mixed successes of the conservative 'family values' agenda under two terms of Howard Government, its significant gain surely is in respectability. During the leadership battles of early 1994, an *Age* article, entitled 'The Shadow Boxers of Morality and Policy', characterised the protagonists as 'Howard (suburban man) and Hewson (product of social change'). Mr Howard, 'a dag', and Dr Hewson, summed up by his 'flashy cars, ... faded jeans and beautifully tailored reefer jacket', were confined to 'shadow boxing' because, during the 1980s and early 1990s Labor ascendancy, social conservatives had lost so much ground that:

> Apart from rednecks like Tim Fischer who is reflecting the views of his small and shrinking constituency, they are not prepared to articulate any sort of clear vision of just what it is they want for fear of being ridiculed ... For all his intellectual robustness, John Howard has been afflicted with timidity when it has come to articulating just what it is about John Hewson's attitudes to social issues that he finds objectionable.

Such timidity is no longer a feature of the social policy debate. With the Institute of Family Studies restaffed in the 'family values' image, the Office of Film and Literature classification supplied with a more conservative panel of censors, drug users encountering 'zero tolerance' and legislation on the books to enable the States to deny lesbian and single women access to IVF, to name but a few examples, social conservatives can more confidently 'articulate ... [a] clear vision of just what it is they want'.

The Lyons Forum and Religion

One key element in the Lyons Forum's success in 'mainstreaming' its social conservative agenda has arguably been its ambiguous association with confessional Christianity. That association operated on a number of levels. On one level, the identification arguably eased the acceptance of a new (proto-)faction within a Party traditionally wary of internal division. On another level, the identification with Christianity, together with many of its key members' involvement in the bipartisan Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, provided one means by which the Lyons Forum was able to garner expressions of support for aspects of its agenda not only across the
Liberal and National parties, but even among some ALP Senators and Members. At the same time, the 'family' emphasis, eschewing too much explicitly religious language, allows the Lyons Forum’s defenders to allay fears of an insurgent religious right and extend their agenda’s appeal beyond a narrowly-confessional constituency. The ambiguity also makes challenge to the conservative social agenda on theological grounds (such as developed, for example, by former Senator Woodley and Ms Pike) more difficult than it would be if it were directed to an articulated confessional position.

Through the course of this study, we have seen a number of ways in which religion, marginal to secular structure, breaks through its interstices at critical points. One effect of marginalisation is invisibility: what breaks through may not always be readily recognisable to eyes acclimatised to the settled patterns of structure. The reverse observation also applies: faced with apparently religious incursions into secular structure, those used to operating within entirely secular categories may be distracted by the novelty, failing to look any deeper than an apparent manifestation of religion. That helps explain the dearth of serious analysis of the Lyons Forum’s theological, ideological and political significance up to now. It has been too easy to interpret an ambiguous association with Christianity simply as such a religious incursion, without exploring the ambiguities.

We can gain a still clearer picture by turning to a founding account of 'civil religion'. The term's originator, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, described the use of religious language and ritual to clothe the concerns of civil and political life as a set of 'articles of faith' which exist 'not exactly as religious dogmas, but as social sentiments ... without explanation or commentary'. The language of 'family values' offers just such an example. Every interviewee in the present project, regardless of party, assured me that they believed in 'the family'. Some hastened to distance themselves from the conservative connotations often associated with that phrase; but the universal approbation for some version indicates that 'the family' is a 'social sentiment' whose centrality requires no justification or explanation. Family life, in Durkheim’s terms, is one of the 'ways of action to which [modern Australian] society is strongly enough attached to impose them upon its members', investing it by that very fact with a quasi-religious aura.
the same time, its explicit association with some strands of Christian discourse gives it an additional sense of unassailability.

In each of the cases examined so far, the effects of liminal religion's incursions into secular structure have been ambiguous. In the rhetorical strategies of the Lyons Forum, the primary ambiguity is the group's, and its agenda's, relationship to Christianity. Appealing less to explicit theological argument than to a conventional association between religiously-charged terms and a conservative social agenda, its interventions on behalf of hierarchically-ordered stability retain a stabilising quasi-religious aura.

Endnotes

1. N. Savva, 'The God Squad', Age, 2 April 1997; see also B. Pike, 'A Lyons Share of Power: The influence of the religious right in contemporary Australian politics', Evait Victoria Centre [Canberra, Vic.], [1997].
4. N. Savva, 'The God Squad', op. cit., Hon. Chris Miles was defeated as Member for Braddon in 1998. At the time of writing, Mr Abbott is Employment Services Minister and Senator Minchin is Minister for Industry, Science and Resources.
Endnotes continued

8. ibid.
14. The statement about the family is the only difference between the two versions in the section headed 'beliefs'. The differences in the remainder of the text are that the version containing the 'God ordained' reference describes the Forum as 'a group of over 30 Senators and Members of the Federal Liberal and National Parties', where the other version describes it as 'a group of Members and Senators', without specifying numbers or parties; one describes Joe and Enid Lyons as 'a role model for families in the 1990s' where the other sees them as a model 'for families in the future'; and the two give different office bearers and contact details.
15. Interview, Parliament House, 24 June 1999. This view was put by a number of Lyons Forum members. For example:

   **SENATOR CHAPMAN:** Its basis is what we might broadly call family values. But those that are involved in it would, I mean, they’re not all necessarily active Christians, but most of the ones involved in it would have a Christian faith, a Christian perspective on life and on issues. But it’s not limited to those. There would be people who perhaps haven’t got a strong Christian faith but still have that sort of family value type approach to issues.

   **MM:** So would it be too strong to call it a Christian organisation?
Endnotes continued

SENATOR CHAPMAN I think so ... You can say that a lot of its membership would be active Christians, but you couldn't say that was exclusively the case. (Interview, Parliament House, 25 June 1999.)

Similarly, Mr Kerry Bartlett, the Liberal Member for Macquarie, NSW responded:

I don't see the Lyons Forum as a religious group; a lot of its values suit people with Christian values, but membership is not restricted to Christians. There would be some non-Christian members. (Interview, Parliament House, 23 June 1999.)

South Australian Senator Alan Ferguson agreed:

'Well, it's no coincidence that members of the Lyons Forum tended also to be members of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship. But some who joined were nominally religious'. (Interview, Parliament House, 29 November 1999.)

18. ibid.
Endnotes continued


36. Supplied by Senator Woodley's office.


38. 'Christians in the Lyons Den', op. cit.


42. 7:30 Report, ABC TV, 16 September 1996.

43. AM, ABC Radio, 17 September 1996.

44. AM, ABC Radio, 10 October 1996. The John Stuart Mill society is in many respects a foil to the Lyons Forum. It was set up in 1996, shortly after the Lyons Forum's rise to public prominence with its 1995 submission to Cabinet on family tax. Like the Lyons Forum, its membership is restricted to members of the Federal parliamentary coalition parties (although, unlike the Lyons Forum, it has held occasional meetings of non-parliamentary sympathisers). The groups follow a similar format: dinner, a speaker on a topic relevant to current or impending policy, and discussion.

45. 7:30 Report, ABC TV, 18 July 2000.


47. D. Chipp and J. Larkin, Don Chipp: The Third Man, Rigby/Beckett Green, Melbourne, 1978, p. 90. According to Chipp and Larkin, Gorton at first accepted the honorary title of 'Chief Spore', but later 'reluctantly and sadly' asked the group to dissolve, because 'ridiculous and incredible stories of conspiracies' associated with the group were 'leading to divisions in the Party' (ibid., pp. 90–91). For a less benign view of the club's activities, see G. Souter, Acts of Parliament, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1988, p. 487.
Endnotes continued


51. Once it had established itself, other groupings, like the John Stuart Mill Society, may have found the path to acceptance smoothed, even though their ideological stance was at variance with the Lyons Forum's.


54. ibid., p. 220.

55. ibid.

56. ibid., p. 162.


59. G. Starr, 'The Liberal Party of Australia', in G. Starr, K. Richmond and G. Maddox, *Political Parties in Australia*, op. cit., 1978, p. 43. The Nationals' policy is officially formed by the Federal Conference, but in practice, given the exigencies of coalition and the leeway afforded by party rules, is as likely to be determined by the parliamentary party executive, often under pressure from the senior coalition partner.

60. ibid.

61. ibid., pp. 43–44. This Liberal Party characteristic has been heightened, in recent years, by the general trend toward executive dominance in Australian
Endnotes continued

politics—see for example R. Macklin, 'For His Is the Power', *Canberra Times*, 18 March 2000.


64. ibid.


68. ibid., p. 115.


70. ibid., p. 40.


Endnotes continued

79. Dr Hewson had sent messages of support to successive Mardi Gras parades during his time as Leader; but it was March 1994, just as the differences within the Liberal Party were solidifying, which sparked controversy.


83. ibid.


85. Telephone interview, November 2000.

86. Although the wording of the text takes the form of a letter, its presentation is more like a petition: the ABC received fourteen pages, each with a copy of the letter on Parliamentary letterhead filling the top two-thirds and as many signatures as would fit filling the bottom third. The signatures on most pages appear roughly in the order of the chambers’ seating plans. The signatures include those of all six Lyons Forum founders. The signatures on page four read, in order, John Howard, Tim Fischer, John Anderson, John Sharp, David Kemp, David Jull, Peter Costello, David Connolly. The text of each page reads:

> Dear Mr Hill,
>
> Having regard to the new arrangements negotiated with commercial television broadcasters regarding adult viewing hours we, Senators and Members of the Australian Parliament, strongly believe that the present decision by the ABC to televise the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras for an hour at 8.30 Sunday night March 6th is inappropriate.
>
> We recognise the great diversity of human activity that exists within the Australian community and that the ABC has a charter which provides for executive judgements to be made. However we strongly believe that this programming decision does not reflect what the overwhelming majority of Australian families would wish to watch on Sunday night at 8.30.
>
> As representatives of millions of Australians it is our request that the ABC not broadcast the Mardi Gras as scheduled and a more suitable family programme be substituted.
>
> Yours faithfully,
Endnotes continued

The text of the letter and list of signatories in alphabetical order were published in newspapers on 4 March 1994. Facsimile of original fourteen pages supplied by Roger Grant, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 5 September 2000.


90. ibid.

91. Telephone interview, November 2000.


96. Quoted in A. Meade et al., 'Libs Parade Ire at Hewson', op. cit.


98. See for example Lyndall Curtis's recap of the previous week's stories on *PM*, ABC Radio National, 8 March 1994.


100. See K. Davidson, 'Which Families? Exposing the Lyons Forum', op. cit., Davidson draws attention to the pattern in the Forum's 1995 manifesto *Empowering Australian Families* to present socially conservative views as being those of respondents' to the Forum's hearings, rather than as its own policy recommendations.

101. See for example his comments on *PM*, op. cit.

102. Interview, Sydney, 24 November 1999. The Society of Modest Members is discussed in chapter three, above. The Pitt Club was a grouping of younger
Endnotes continued


105. Interview, op. cit.

106. ABC, 2CN, Morning Show, 10 November 1993.

107. 'What Our Leaders Believe', Compass, op. cit.


109. 'What Our Leaders Believe', Compass, op. cit.

110. ibid.

111. Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW.

112. ibid., p. 26.

113. ibid., p. 28.


121. Of course, the caveat that government non-intervention is itself a kind of intervention holds here. For a statement of this argument, see F. Olsen, 'The Myth of State Intervention in the Family', University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform, vol. 18, no. 4, 1985, pp. 835–864.
Endnotes continued


128. ibid.


Chapter Six: Sacred Sites and the Public Square

A number of issues of public controversy, when reinterpreted, throw light on the relationship between religion and politics in Australia. The Preamble, the role of churches in political debate and service delivery and the place of religious conviction in our elected representatives' deliberations have received varying public attention. In each case, I hope to have both added to the available discussion of those issues, and contributed to a general understanding of religion-state relations in Australia.

Whether measured by column-inches, broadcast-hours or intensity of passion, the present chapter's topic surpasses them all. The recognition of Indigenous peoples' rights has a claim to being the issue par excellence in Australian political consciousness at the turn of the twenty-first century. In recent decades, as one step towards greater rights for Indigenous peoples, Australian law has evolved various mechanisms for preserving cultural heritage, establishing land claims and recognising Native Title. This chapter deals with attempts to accommodate within the procedures of the state those aspects of Indigenous tradition which are variously referred to as 'spiritual' or 'sacred'.

But here we find a curious thing. The issues examined so far in this study are rarely viewed from an explicit religion-state perspective, yet their status as (at least partly) religious issues is never in doubt. People may be dubious about putting God in the Preamble; they may oppose it (although Christians), or support it (although atheists); or they may be indifferent;
but they seldom doubt that, at least on some level, the issue itself concerns religion. Similarly, people may think that churches delivering previously government services is good (because churches are more likely than government to 'go the extra mile') or bad (because of the potential for discrimination); but they do not doubt that the issue has religious dimensions. Although irritated by their frequent characterisation as a 'Christian faction', Lyons Forum members concede that most (or perhaps all) share a religious commitment. But in the case of Indigenous sacred site protection, one may read volumes of commentary without striking the word 'religion'. The Australian public, it seems, is ready—some of the time—to consider the protection of Indigenous sacred heritage as a matter of culture, or custom, or tradition. It will even employ words like 'sacred' or 'spiritual' to describe the nature of cultural, customary or traditional places or practices. But secular Australia is reluctant to see the issue as one of religion.

This chapter explores the reasons for this aspect of the Great Australian Silence,¹ and argues that it has serious consequences for the success of Indigenous heritage protection. Here, as in the cases examined so far, we should not expect to find a simple association between legislators' religious commitments and their attitudes to Indigenous heritage protection. Instead, taking our cue from Turner, we can discern intersecting patterns of reaction to the emergence of this particularly liminal manifestation of the sacred—reactions sometimes reinforcing secular structure, sometimes holding out even yet the hope of long-deferred communitas.

Thus, some religiously-committed Senators and Members took their own tradition as the defining instance of 'religion', a model into which Indigenous traditions do not obviously fit. Others found in their own religious commitments empathy with the religious traditions so long marginalised in Christian and post-Christian Australia.

Some with no religious commitments expressed discomfort with the idea of state intervention to protect living religious traditions, although they were prepared to countenance protection on 'historical' or 'heritage' grounds. Others who professed no religious beliefs themselves nevertheless felt strongly that some category such as 'spirituality' or 'the sacred' is needed to
express the aspirations of a cosmopolitan, inclusive society, echoing the 'generic' theology discussed in chapter two.

In Turner's terms, we encounter in this chapter a 'sacred' triply repressed—first, as Indigenous in a colonial polity; second, as religious in a profoundly secular culture; and, thirdly, as a form of religion long actively suppressed by that Christianity which is now, in many respects, itself liminal to secular structure. Religious factors in the Mabo decision, the Junction Waterhole heritage protection case and the long-running Hindmarsh Island controversy provide telling instances of the various perspectives which we revisit in Senators' and Members' views of Indigenous religious heritage in the secular state.

**The Myth That Would Not Die**

In earlier chapters, I compared aspects of modern debates with parallel controversies at the time of Federation. The theme of this chapter is notable for its absence from the Federation debates. The founders gave some attention to minority religious traditions. Their major concern was to protect the Christian status quo against disrupting 'heathen' practices or opportunists who might spuriously claim religious grounds to legitimate undesirable secular behaviour. They were less concerned with protecting minorities' religious freedoms, although moments of such concern can be traced in the debates discussed in chapter two, above.

They did not discuss either threats from or threats to the religious traditions of Indigenous peoples. Delegating responsibility for 'the Aboriginal race' to the States left no room for such discussion. However, even had the founders not felt that the matter was adequately left in the hands of the States, it is highly unlikely that they would have considered Indigenous traditions as having anything whatever to do with questions of religion. Through the nineteenth century, the anthropological consensus was that the Indigenous peoples of Australia disproved the theory that religion is a universal human attribute. Some observers claimed to have evidence of Aboriginal 'superstition', 'magic' and even 'ceremony'; but they showed extreme reluctance to dignify such practices with the name of 'religion'.
Some chroniclers of this reluctance put the early observers' reticence down to faulty taxonomy. According to Tony Swain, the explorers, missionaries and philanthropists who provided the bulk of nineteenth century data, and the armchair ethnologists who interpreted it, were unduly influenced by Lord Herbert of Cherbury's definition of 'religion' as requiring belief in a Supreme Deity. To others, the silence is more ideological. W. E. H. Stanner attributes it to the colonial view that Australia's Indigenous peoples were either 'too archaic in the social sense or too debased in the moral sense to have veritable religion'. That evaluation reinforced both of the then dominant non-Indigenous opinions about Aboriginal peoples. One was 'that they were a survival into modern times of a protoid form of humanity incapable of civilisation'; the other 'that they were decadents from a once-higher life and culture'. Each view:

fed the psychological disposition to hate and despise those whom the powerful have injured, or wish to injure. It allowed European moral standards to atrophy by tacitly exempting from canons of right, law and justice acts of dispossession, neglect, and violence at Aboriginal expense.

The silence of the founders at Federation, as they were considering the appropriate parameters of religious freedom and the relationship of religious and other freedoms, reflects both the general Constitutional erasure of Indigenous peoples and the specific nineteenth century blindness to Indigenous religion.

Either Swain's or Stanner's explanation might imply that the blindness would quickly lift, either through the development of more flexible definitions of religion or through softening of the colonial need to denigrate the colonised. However, early twentieth century waves of intellectual fashion sent new currents to leach awareness of religion per se from Aboriginal ethnography. Stanner blames Durkheim's sociological reductionism and Freud's interpretation of religion as pathological for having 'darkened the study they sought to light'. The result was that, just when that particular colonial blind spot might have diminished, 'many a writer about the Aborigines dropped the word "religion" altogether'. Although philosophically removed from earlier refusals to recognise Indigenous Australian religion, Durkheimian and Freudian departures perpetuated the silence which, in Stanner's view, was intimately related to
'the pervasive doctrine of Aboriginal worthlessness'. Djiniyini Gondarra draws the same conclusion when he condemns 'words like "animalistic", "preliterate", "traditional", "ethnic", "heathen" or "savage" as equally implicated in a denigration of Indigenous religion, and therefore of its practitioners, which amounts to 'spiritual genocide'.

The twentieth century eventually saw anthropological consensus shift to the view that 'the Aborigines are a profoundly religious people'. More pointedly, Indigenous thinkers have drawn attention to the irony: 'The fact is that we ... are much more religious than many modern Westerners'. However, the nineteenth century idea lived on in popular imagination to such an extent that, long after the myth of Australian Indigenous peoples as religionless had been formally laid to rest, authors of discussions in the public domain still found it necessary to begin with a correction. Thus, Stanner's 1962 essay 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism' opens by chronicling 'how delusive opinion, once established, could be accepted as truth' for so long. He seems to have felt that little headway was being made: as late as 1976, delivering the Charles Strong lecture on Aboriginal religion, he began by acknowledging that 'there may still be some who question the rightness of including Aboriginal beliefs, acts and objects within the scholarly scope of comparative religion'. He reassured such people that 'all the intellectual requirements can be, and long have been, amply satisfied'.

**Religion, Tradition, Custom**

Stanner's and his successors' confidence notwithstanding, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that collective non-Indigenous reluctance to recognise Indigenous religion persists. In particular, some key inquiries and legal cases which have set the terms for much of the discussion avoid 'religion' in favour of words like 'the sacred' or 'the spiritual' or, more generally, 'tradition' or 'custom'. When they do refer to 'religion', it is with a degree of equivocation which, whatever its intention, arguably has the effect of perpetuating an earlier era's uncertainty about whether Indigenous traditions qualify as religious. The first report of the Woodward Aboriginal Land Rights Commission speaks of 'religious rites' as a clan's "title deeds'"
to its land, but this is unusually direct. More typical is the coupling of 'religion' with some alternative term, as when we read, a page later, that Indigenous peoples’ knowledge of their title to land comes from their 'religion or mythology'. By the second report, the language of sacredness has become more diffuse. The section setting out the criteria for protecting 'sacred sites' describes the relevant areas variously as 'places which are said to be "sacred" to Aborigines', places of 'mythological significance', 'special significance' and, once, as sites whose significance is 'spiritual or religious'. By the time the Commission’s recommendations materialised as the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*, religion had retreated still further, so that the Act designates as a 'sacred site':

A site that is sacred to Aboriginals or is otherwise of significance according to Aboriginal tradition, and includes any land that, under a law of the Northern Territory, is declared to be sacred to Aboriginals or of significance according to Aboriginal tradition.

From there, legislative language relating to religious tradition becomes increasingly circumlocutory. The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984* defines a 'significant Aboriginal object' as 'an object (including Aboriginal remains) of particular significance to Aboriginals in accordance with Aboriginal tradition', and glosses 'Aboriginal tradition' as:

The body of traditions, observances, customs and beliefs of Aboriginals generally or of a particular community or group of Aboriginals, [including] any such traditions, observances, customs or beliefs relating to particular persons, areas, objects or relationships.

The Act's list of definitions in Part II subsumes 'songs, rituals, ceremonies, dances, art, customs and spiritual beliefs' under the heading of 'Aboriginal folklore'. The 1984 Act sparked a series of inquiries, which speak of 'spiritual significance' and 'sacred sites'. The Mabo decision speaks of 'custom' and 'customary law', a usage which I shall discuss below.

Religious and Civil Interests: A Classic Liberal Distinction

According to the mainstream of liberal political theory, religion is a matter for private deliberation. It is a realm (at least in theory) entirely separate
from the state. That separation is achieved by assigning religion firmly to the realm of private belief. The argument is classically expounded by John Locke, building his case on fear of religious persecution. When there is a risk that some will 'persecute, torment, destroy and kill other men upon pretence of religion',\(^{21}\) the most pressing need is to persuade them not to; and the most urgent step is to remove the means of force from the hands of those in ecclesial authority. Locke therefore opens his *Letter Concerning Toleration* with the case that 'I esteem it above all things necessary to distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other'.\(^{22}\)

The state, by contrast, is concerned with material arrangements. In Locke's formulation:

> The commonwealth seems to me to be a society of men constituted ... for the procuring, preserving, and advancing their own civil interests. Civil interests I call life, liberty, health, and indolency of body; and the possession of outward things, such as money, lands, houses, furniture, and the like.\(^{23}\)

When civil and religious interests conflict, the former prevail. Free practice of religion must entail 'no injury to any man, either in life or estate'.\(^{24}\) The same qualification of religious freedom is found in later liberal thought.\(^{25}\) In liberal tradition, then, the separation of 'civil' and 'religious' interests is not neutral but gives priority, in practice, to the 'civil'.

'Religious' and 'Civil' Interests in Indigenous Traditions

Both law and commentary relating to Indigenous traditions tend to use terms like 'spiritual' and 'sacred' without definition. This can lead to serious confusion. In conventional English usage, these terms imply sharp distinctions: body is opposed to soul, the material is opposed to the sacred, matter wars against spirit. By contrast, Indigenous traditions see matter as infused with spirit. Neither the land nor its inhabitants can be slotted into a dichotomy between matter and spirit.

Moreover, although, in practice, liberal tradition privileges material interests, it accords the 'spirit' or 'soul' a compensating notional superiority
over 'matter' and 'body'. In Indigenous thought, by contrast, 'matter' and 'spirit' do not divide clearly into 'inferior' and 'superior'. The 'spiritual', like the 'material', may include both good and bad. Given this interpenetration of what, in non-Indigenous Australian thought, are separate domains, non-Indigenous writers struggle to express the concept of 'spirit' in ways which do not fall into the problems of cross-cultural interpretation. Deborah Bird Rose cautions, 'Were I able to find a better term, I would avoid 'spirit' altogether, but as it is, I must state emphatically that spirit is immanent in body and even death does not wholly disrupt this immediacy'.

What is true of the relationship between spirit and body in individual people is also true of the relationship between person and land. Thus Galarrwuy Yunupingu, addressing a conference on the theme 'Aboriginal Spirituality', explains the 'spiritual' in terms inseparable from material, and thus political, struggles, so that his analysis strains against the associations which non-Indigenous hearers might conventionally place on his topic:

I believe the best way for me to talk about Aboriginal Spirituality is for me to talk about the relationship that Aboriginal People have with the land ... We all come from the land and that is where we will go back to when we die. My bones will join those of my Ancestors, so I feel I am a part of a link that started over 60 000 years ago and will continue forever ... That is why the continued push for land rights is so strong across Australia. I know the Aboriginal Spirituality conference is not strictly a political forum, but I do feel it is vital that Aboriginal People win their land back, with the help of the Federal Government. Then they can realise their Spirituality in a deeper and more relevant way than perhaps they are doing now. When you sit in your own country, your Spirits lift and you are again truly back to the land where things make sense and your life has meaning.

The interpenetration of 'material' and 'spiritual' in Indigenous traditions confounds liberal philosophy's differentiation between religious and civil interests. Indigenous traditions are likely to draw much less distinction between religious and other dimensions of existence. Ritual practice and spiritual traditions help to define and produce economic and social relations, for example. As Ronald Berndt notes:
Traditional Aboriginal societies were examples of what have been called sacred societies. That is to say, religion was all-pervasive ... Aboriginal religion in its mytho-ritual expression was intimately associated with everyday social living, with relations between the sexes, with the natural environment, and with food collecting.29

Indigenous writers and anthropological accounts alike convey the strong impression that, for Indigenous communities, the aspects of life which Locke termed 'civil interests'—namely, 'life, liberty, health, ... and the possession of outward things such as ... lands'—are intimately related to what is variously called 'the spiritual' or 'the sacred'. The health and even survival of individuals and communities may depend, in part, on preservation of significant 'spiritual' sites or objects. Locke's category of 'liberty', too, has a 'spiritual' dimension for Indigenous peoples: as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody has found, disruption to a person's pattern of spiritual obligations and separation from their land may be among the most debilitating effects of imprisonment. Land rights law accepts, with varying consistency, that Indigenous peoples' 'possession of outward things such as lands' is explained in terms of the claimants' relationship to the relevant Dreamings.

A secular legal and political system like Australia's, assuming the liberal distinction between 'civil interests' and religious belief, may encounter difficulties in dealing with traditions where that distinction does not readily apply.

Discussing Religion in the Secular Public Square

The encounter between non-Indigenous Australian secularism and Indigenous religion posits a further dimension of the dynamic which has been evident throughout this study of the liminal sacred interposing itself through the interstices and from the margins of secular structure. Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs's *Uncanny Australia*30 proposes a Durkheimian reading of the Indigenous sacred irrupting into secular Australian consciousness. However, in contrast to the present approach, their analysis draws a sharp divide, painting non-Indigenous Australia as seamlessly secular, while 'the sacred' is identified exclusively with Aboriginality. As
such, it is designated 'uncanny' and 'amplified', depicted as wielding unpredictable 'effects' which it 'unleashes across the nation'. That delineation produces a depoliticised interpretation of the dynamics involved in disputed Indigenous heritage claims. By identifying 'the sacred' exclusively with Aboriginality, and designating it 'uncanny', they rather easily attribute any apparent contradictions to its titillating potency. So, to give one example, Gelder and Jacobs discuss the mining industry's appropriation of the language of 'minority status' and 'dispossession' to describe miners' interests as against Aboriginal interests. They analyse that inverted use of language as an 'uncanny' effect of the intrusive 'Aboriginal sacred' (or as a postmodern outworking of the 'arbitrary nature of the sign'). Another interpretation, seeing both structure-endorsing and destabilising elements of the liminal sacred, might be more inclined to see the inversion by which multinational corporations feature as 'dispossessed' as, rather, the careful product of a decade's systematic opinion-polling, think-tank activity and publicity campaigning.

We can gain a more helpful picture by recalling the liminal nature of the non-Indigenous sacred. It is not only the Indigenous sacred which unsettles secular structure; the non-Indigenous sacred is a frequent intruder, although the patterns of misrecognition which it sets off in secular structure are often different. And, as we have seen in the foregoing chapters, the effects of its incursions can only be understood when we take into account the political dynamics which intersect with it, either challenging or reinforcing the hierarchically-ordered status quo. Similarly, secular structure's encounters with Indigenous religion need to be understood against the double effects, first, of Australian secularism's fraught relationship with its own religious origins, and second, of the historical and continuing tendency to, in Stanner's phrase, 'hate and despise those whom the powerful have injured, or wish to injure'. Indigenous religion is doubly marginalised vis-à-vis secular structure, both qua Indigenous and qua religion; and, even within the field of religion, stands as the chthonic 'other' of missionary endeavour.

The marginalisation of religion which forms the frame for Australian debates about Indigenous people's sacred heritage can have various consequences. This section explores historical cases which illustrate four
such consequences. Although all but one of the cases predate the Thirty-eighth Parliament, they illuminate difficulties in secular Australia’s understanding of Indigenous religion which marked fault-lines in the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Parliaments’ approach to Indigenous affairs. They point, in particular, to the need for a better understanding on the part of the Australian legal and political system of the materiality of Indigenous religion. In addition, they suggest that the Australian legal and political system might reappraise the assumptions which underpin its own secularism.

One consequence of the encounter between secular Australian law and Indigenous religion is that secular structure reasserts itself to the effect that the religious elements in a tradition are simply ignored, or subsumed under some other heading such as ‘culture’ or ‘custom’. The Mabo case provides an example of this tendency. It suggests that ignoring the specifically religious elements of a tradition may seriously misrepresent it.

An alternative consequence is that citizens of a highly secular society may come to see religion generally as exotic or irrational. Encountering an unfamiliar tradition, observers may tend to seek out elements which—from the point of view of the dominant culture—can be taken as reinforcing that characterisation. Having identified such elements, the secularised observers may cherish them (as exotic) or decry them (as irrational). The cherishing response is sometimes said to be a condition for successful land rights and heritage protection negotiations. It can be read, on one level, along the lines of Gelder and Jacobs’s account of ‘the effects the Aboriginal sacred unleashes across the nation’ as a positive, if unsettling, force. I shall explore the Junction Waterhole decision as one such instance. However, the sacred’s intrusions into secular structure need to be understood against the background of political marginalisation and economic dispossession. Although, in the Junction Waterhole case, the ‘cherishing’ response produced success for the claimants, that case also raises the warning that emphasising the apparent strangeness of an unfamiliar tradition may foster a voyeuristic attitude on the part of the dominant culture.

The alternative to cherishing an unfamiliar tradition’s strangeness—decrying its perceived irrationality—is suggested by some of the
deliberations of South Australia’s Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission, which forms my third case study. Secular structure reasserts itself not by ignoring the sacred, as in the Mabo example, but by imposing secular criteria in such a way that religious content is judged on criteria alien to religion.

A further possible consequence of the encounter is that, grasping for ways to understand the unfamiliar, secular institutions may impose frames of reference which are really specific to only some kinds of religion. Even in a secularised society such as Australia, a significant proportion of the population has residual connections to the religion of their forebears. Although its symbols may be losing potency, Christianity remains the dominant religious tradition, its continuing influence felt, for example, in public holidays marking its major festivals. Although increasing numbers of Australians do not identify with any of its denominations, yet Christian traditions are most likely to form the first religious reference points for the vast majority. So, when thinking about Indigenous religion, there may be a tendency to impose Christian frames of reference. Thus, Christine Morris warns that ‘Western attempts to understand the “other” have been nothing more than the projection of “self” onto the “other”’. Similarly, Ronald Berndt points out that ‘Most of us have ideas about what constitutes religion, or a religion’. Faced with a confusing mass of information about unfamiliar traditions, ‘we might take the line of least resistance and read into what we hear about Aboriginal religion what we already know about our own or others’. Here, it is the unacknowledged, submerged sacred from within non-Indigenous Australia’s own dominant tradition which interposes itself in secular structure’s attempt to comprehend the Indigenous sacred. But the liminal nature of the non-Indigenous sacred raises its own complications. Taking Berndt’s argument further, in a highly secular society even ‘what we already know about our own’ religion is likely to be residual rather than the result of active involvement. In these circumstances, some generalised Christian framework may be imposed, largely unconsciously. This, the final case study suggests, is what happened in Justice Jane Mathews’s inquiry into the traditions surrounding Hindmarsh Island.
'Not a Religious or Spiritual Relationship': Mabo v Queensland

The High Court's 1992 Mabo decision gave a new level of formal recognition to the relationship between Australia's Indigenous peoples and their land. It established that the Australian legal system can recognise Indigenous law relating to land ownership. Further, it established that native title persists where that law is maintained through a continuing tradition and where there has been no explicit extinguishment of native title. Consequently, demonstrating continuity of tradition is a crucial issue for claimants. One significant element of land ownership is the religious traditions which explain relationships between people and particular sites or regions. Claims to land are likely to be expressed in terms of stories about the ancestral creative beings. Given the interpenetration of religious, economic and social life, native title procedures might be seen as giving increased recognition to Indigenous religion. Native title claims may be strengthened by evidence of continuing religious practice. Their failure may be attributed in part—as in the Yorta Yorta claim—to its disruption. Moreover, non-Indigenous people with interest in native title negotiations, whether directly as involved parties or as observers, have found themselves needing to learn about the traditions which confer land ownership. Given the stakes, Mabo might arguably have counteracted some of the non-Indigenous dismissal of Indigenous religion which characterised relations into the late twentieth century.

However, a reading of the Mabo case finds little reference to religion. Mabo refers instead to 'custom'. While the Mabo decision's legacy has included an intensified public focus on Indigenous religion, the Meriam people's own system of land tenure has often been read more as a set of secular principles than an example of the interpenetration of the religious, social and economic worlds.

By contrast, Nonie Sharp contends, on the basis of her own fieldwork in the Murray Islands, that the Meriam people's self-understanding, including their relationship with their land, is profoundly structured by the religion of the ancestral being Malo. She concludes that this religious element was marginalised in the court's interpretation of Meriam culture.
Sharpe identifies the ground for the Mabo judgment as laid out by Justice Moynihan’s determination of matters of fact for the High Court,\(^5\) in which he concluded that the Meriam people’s relationship to their land ‘was not and is not a religious or spiritual relationship’.\(^4\) Instead, he portrayed a ‘rough and ready “primitive secularism”’.\(^5\) The Meriam people’s system of land tenure, as interpreted by Justice Moynihan, appeared ‘recognisably private “property-ish”’ to an Australian court, Sharp reports.\(^6\) She implies that a key element of the claim’s success was the way in which aspects of Meriam culture could be made to seem familiar to the secular legal system. However, on Sharp’s analysis of the 67 days of evidence, witnesses repeatedly referred to their religious traditions, explaining the connections which they drew between traditional belief and Christianity, now well-established in their community. Justice Moynihan’s portrayal reflected not the absence of religion but, rather, a system in which the laws handed down by Malo are easy for outside observers to miss, according to Sharp, because they ‘are embedded in religious legitimations which are manifest outwardly in ways which may appear prosaic and profane’.\(^6\)

It is ironic that the case which helped put Indigenous religion on non-Indigenous Australians’ conceptual map itself relied on the marginalisation of religion. Sharp’s account of the religious background to the Mabo decision suggests that one way in which a secular state can deal with Indigenous religion is by reshaping it to a secular framework. However, Sharp declares, to reframe the tradition in this way:

> Is to rob the Meriam of the fundamental truth about their culture and the way they see themselves. To deny their spiritual or religious relationship and attitudes to land is to divest them of their ‘natural inheritance’, of that ‘body of patent truth about the universe’, to use Professor Stanner’s words.\(^6\)

Although in this case the result was success for the plaintiffs, such substantial reinterpretation might not always have such rewards. Indeed, it may not always be possible. On Sharp’s analysis, the presence of ‘recognisably private “property-ish”’ elements was an unusual feature of Meriam tradition. A relevant comparison here would be with *Milirrpum vs Nabalco and the Commonwealth*.\(^5\) Justice Blackburn extrapolated a ‘fundamental truth’ about the Yolngu claimants' relationship to the land:
'whatever else it is, it is a religious relationship'. In Nancy Williams’s analysis, the court’s inadequate understanding of the nature of religious title to land, and its subordination of 'religious' to 'economic' indices of ownership, contributed to the case's failure. Marcia Langton draws attention to the variation between Indigenous land tenure systems, noting the wide range of ritual and other criteria by which title is demonstrated. She also points out that the legal environment of Native Title is more fluid than under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act, with Native Title relying more heavily on Indigenous claimants' own conception of their ties to land. Given that that conception is likely to involve religion, the lesson from Mabo that religious meaning remains problematic for Australian courts must be a matter of concern.

Moreover, if a secular reframing of religious legitimations was essential to the Mabo plaintiffs' success, the question arises of whether a choice between doing violence to one's traditions and losing one's claim is the best that Australian law can offer. Even if the court's secular reframing of religious evidence is not seen as a necessary condition of the claimants' success in Mabo, Sharp's account suggests that the secular legal system still has some distance to go in appreciating the ways in which Indigenous religion may bear on its processes.

'Knowing They Are Genuinely Held': Junction Waterhole

In 1992, Hal Wootten QC was appointed to report to Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner on a claim for protection of a sacred site under Section 10 of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984*. The area in question was the site of a proposed flood mitigation dam in the Todd River, north of Alice Springs. The claimants held that the dam’s construction would desecrate a sacred site, Junction Waterhole. Following Wootten’s inquiry, the Minister used his powers under Section 10 to stop the dam being built. The ban remains in force.

Wootten’s account of the factors that contributed to his report invokes at least three separate dynamics in the encounter between a highly secularised culture and a deeply religious one. All three aspects of Wootten’s comments have to do with the tendency for secular Australia to
regard religion as exotic. This tendency may have positive or negative effects as regards the preservation of religious freedom.

At one level, Wootten suggests, a certain kind of Australian secularism may be a threat to religious tolerance. Lacking understanding of religion, people may pry where scrutiny is inappropriate, or ridicule things which should be taken seriously:

I have deliberately not tried to describe the relevant beliefs in any detail, much less to explain them ... I feel a personal obligation to respect the confidentiality of the information given to me. Moreover, I would not wish my report to be the vehicle for the public trivialisation and ridicule of Aboriginal beliefs in the media by uncomprehending people, a situation which was such a shocking feature of the debate over Coronation Hill.\(^{49}\)

In further deflecting insensitive inquiry, Wootten points to a second dynamic in the encounter between secular and religious world views. If a secularism which views religion as exotic can lead to 'trivialisation and ridicule', it can also lead to an equally destructive voyeurism. Outsiders may look in an unfamiliar tradition for something which challenges, reinforces or in some other way relates to their own society's worldview. But, Wootten cautions, they are unlikely to find it:

I can assure the curious that the confidentiality of Aboriginal knowledge of the site is not because the information would be found titillating, shocking or even particularly interesting by Western standards. It simply lacks significance in Western culture, and I could not claim to appreciate its significance to Aborigines.\(^{50}\)

The idea that something can be too unfamiliar, from the point of view of the dominant culture, to be interesting stresses the distance between secular and religious world views. The beliefs related to Junction Waterhole are not presented, for example, as putative components of a hypothetical interfaith dialogue. The reason is not simply that non-members of the Indigenous group are not allowed to know the contents of the beliefs. Even if you were allowed to know them, Wootten tells 'the curious', you would not want to; they are just too different.

Wootten's argument, that items of significance in one culture lose their significance when they are taken out of their cultural context, is by no
means universally accepted. The need to take his view more seriously is illustrated, for example, by Christine Morris, who shows that taking elements of Indigenous mythic tradition out of their cultural context is so commonplace as to amount to a non-Indigenous literary convention. On her analysis, removing stories from their setting in a continuing oral tradition and in the grounded experience of a particular, local, community does fundamental violence to the stories involved:

A human being is a necessary vehicle for the telling of an Aboriginal story and the story cannot be told without the land, the very thing that gives it life ... [to do otherwise] is to deny the essential orality and the importance of the land in the continual recreation of Aboriginal additional stories.\(^5\)

Not only has the wider non-Indigenous culture failed to come to grips with Wootten's argument; it remains controversial even within the field of Indigenous heritage protection law. In November 2000, the former Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Robert Tickner, went to court to defend his arrival, in another Section 10 case, at the same conclusion. As Minister, he was convinced 'in my heart of hearts' that because he was 'not an Aboriginal woman', he 'had an incapacity to understand' the detail of a confidential and gender-restricted report.\(^5\) For that and other reasons, he relied instead on the advice of a female constitutional lawyer, who in turn relied on the interpretation of a female anthropologist. Following Wootten's reasoning, relying on the interpretation of an appropriately-skilled anthropologist with the necessary credentials for receiving confidential cultural information would be a surer way of achieving a reliable cross-cultural appreciation of the tradition's significance than an out-of-context reading by the Minister. The court nevertheless ordered Mr Tickner to read the contents of a secret and gender-restricted tradition,\(^5\) so that he could decide whether, 'had the contents ... been read by you, your decision might have been different'. Justice Von Doussa, in making the order, appeared to bypass Wootten's view that, to someone without the necessary cultural grounding, reading alone could not produce the kind of understanding required. However, his eventual judgment endorsed the argument that 'the clash of cultures interrupts further understanding of [Indigenous religious tradition] in a manner that can be shared by non-Aboriginal minds'.\(^5\)
In Wootten's argument, the gulf between one culture's cosmology and another's appears all but unbridgeable (other than, presumably, by people who have grown up in both or acquired specialist training to bridge the gap). However, he implies, that difference is, in itself, a ground for protecting unfamiliar traditions. The argument which explains this stance draws attention to the third dynamic in encounters between religious and secular world views. The point in heritage protection claims, Wootten argues:

should not be whether, judged by the norms and values of our secular culture or our religions, the sites are important, but whether they are important to Aborigines in terms of the norms and values of their traditional culture and beliefs. In other words, the issue is not whether we can understand and share the Aboriginal beliefs, but whether, knowing they are genuinely held, we can therefore respect them.55

Wootten's plea for respect, lodged against those whose secularism might lead them to either ridicule or voyeurism, can be understood as itself a product of a certain kind of secular world view. This third kind of secularism rejects any sense that the religion of the majority (or the religion which was once typical of the majority) has any universal validity or exclusive claim.56

'Not Supported By Any Form of Logic': The Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission

The Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission was announced on 8 June 1995 by South Australian Premier Dean Brown,57 at the urging of then Opposition Leader John Howard.58 Its terms of reference were built around challenges to so-called 'secret women's business' claimed by a group of Ngarrindjeri elders. The Commission was to inquire into:

Whether the 'women's business' or any aspect of the 'women's business' was a fabrication and if so:

(a) the circumstances relating to such a fabrication
(b) the extent of such fabrication, and
(c) the purpose of such fabrication.59
'Secret women’s business’ refers to a tradition whose content the Royal Commission did not know and could not be told. Some of its processes and eventual findings reflect the secular tendency to view religious conviction as requiring empirical verification.

As the South Australian public was repeatedly assured, the Royal Commission was to be an inquiry into ‘whether the beliefs exist’. However, many critics of the Royal Commission took the view that it was going to inquire into the content and validity of Ngarrindjeri women’s beliefs, seeing any such undertaking as a threat to religious freedom. For example, the South Australian Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia warned:

In our tradition there have been times when political leaders have sought to wield control over spiritual belief … We will stand against any government of any persuasion which seeks to do so. We believe that this State Government has stepped beyond its powers in calling a Royal Commission into Ngarrindjeri beliefs.

The South Australian Council of Churches accused the Royal Commission of being an inquiry ‘into Aboriginal Women’s beliefs, past and present’. Adelaide’s Roman Catholic Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission maintained that such an investigation ‘cannot hope to fulfil its terms of reference … without setting itself up as the judge of the spiritual beliefs of the Ngarrindjeri people’.

The South Australian government dismissed the criticisms as ‘unfair and misguided’:

The criticism might be valid if the Royal Commission was required to examine the validity of the spiritual beliefs of the Ngarrindjeri or any other people … it is not a function of government to be an arbiter of religious beliefs. However, the terms of reference of the Royal Commission do not require it to examine the underlying truth or validity of the spiritual beliefs. The Commission is required to examine whether those beliefs were a fabrication, ie whether they were devised or concocted for a particular purpose.

Can one inquire into the existence of a belief without inquiring into its content and validity? On the face of it, the distinction seems obvious. Yet the Royal Commission appeared to find that distinction extraordinarily
difficult to maintain in practice. The following extracts suggest that, if such a separation can be made at all, it would at least require a considerably more sophisticated understanding of religious belief than the Royal Commission had at its disposal.

The problem was thrown into relief by an exchange between counsel assisting the Royal Commission, David Smith, and Dr Deane Fergie, the anthropologist who had first reported on the existence of secret women’s sacred traditions surrounding Hindmarsh Island. Smith asked, ‘Do you accept the proposition that you must reach a stage, as an anthropologist, of asking yourself whether the position taken in connection with a belief is so unacceptable, inconsistent and illogical, that it is not credible?’ Fergie replied that anthropologists’ understanding of belief does not lead them to evaluate a tradition’s ‘credibility’.65

The problem was further illustrated in the Report’s interest in the system of barrages which regulates the flow of water behind the Murray Mouth. Discussion of the barrages takes up an entire section of the Report. They are described in detail, from the dates of their construction to the number of timber piles (4470 in the Goolwa barrage), to the dimensions (in metres) of each of the building components. Readers are told the construction materials (timber piles, steel sheet piling, concrete piers and reinforced concrete floor), what powers the gantry crane (diesel) and the mechanics of water level control. There is even given a scale drawing of a cross-section through the Goolwa barrage’s sluices.

Readers might wonder as to the purpose of this elaboration. One explanation might be that the Commission is seeking evidence of Ngarrindjeri opposition to the barrages’ construction, a point which the Report does visit in passing. However, the major relevance which the Commissioner attributes to the empirical data is explained: ‘Work commenced on construction of the barrage system in 1935 and was complete in 1940. Aboriginal people worked on construction without apparent harm’. The Commissioner reports that there was no ‘consequent injury to the reproductive capabilities of Ngarrindjeri people, and to the fertility of the cosmos generally, following the permanent link to the mainland effected by the barrage system’.66 Bearing in mind that the Royal Commission was
investigating a restricted tradition whose content was known only to one anthropologist and one witness, neither of whom revealed it to the Commissioner or investigating counsel, these remarks presumably bear on the Commissioner's beliefs about the content of the tradition.

The Commissioner’s intention here is apparently to try empirically to disprove the (alleged) content of beliefs which in any case, the inquiry found, do not exist. There are two possible interpretations of the significance which the 'no consequent injury' argument might have had for the Royal Commission. The Commission might have been suggesting that a belief whose content is not empirically verifiable could not exist; that is, nobody would believe something which was not confirmed by empirical verification. Alternatively, the Commission might have been suggesting that such a tradition should not exist; that is, if anybody does believe such things, they ought not.

Either possibility is problematic. The Royal Commission's examination of Fergie and its treatment of the barrages illustrate the difficulty, in practice, of inquiring into 'whether ... beliefs [are] a fabrication, that is whether they were devised or concocted for a particular purpose', without slipping into an examination of 'the validity of ... spiritual beliefs'.67 The Royal Commission appears to have taken 'validity' of a belief as a necessary condition for 'genuineness', with 'validity' amounting to empirical or logical demonstrability.

In the chapter headed 'Defining the Women's Business and its Place in the Literature', the Report concludes that: 'The beliefs said to constitute the "women's business" and Dr Fergie's elaboration of it ... are not supported by any form of logic'.68 From the point of view of a comparative study of religion, it is hard to know how to interpret such a statement. Religious beliefs have their own, internal logic which connects them together into a system of thought; but, viewed from outside their own internal system, they do not necessarily gain 'support' from 'any form of logic'. Nor is empirical proof or disproof necessarily relevant to religious belief. People do not flock to the springs of Lourdes or seek inspiration at Medjugore because they can demonstrate, by statistics or by logic, that they are more likely to receive healing or truth there than anywhere else. Christians do not take bread and
wine, nor Jews avoid pork, because they can prove or disprove that such practices translate into material outcomes.

Yet these material objects and physical practices are crucially important parts of religious systems of meaning. Such systems do not start out as being true or false. They become true in the lives of the people who adhere to them and who live them into meaning. They become false when those who live them do so in bad faith, or when the surrounding systems of meaning in which they derived their significance collapse.69

The Federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act 1984 and related State legislation enable areas of cultural or spiritual significance to Aboriginal people to be protected. In other words, one must be prepared to deal with spiritual significance, with theological meaning, or else stay out of the game. One must be prepared, therefore, to accept religious systems as analysable in their own terms, or the Act does not make any sense at all.

None of this is to say that the authenticity of particular claimed elements of those traditions can never be open to question. Rather, aspects of the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission illustrate the particular tendency latent within some strands of secularism to equate authenticity with empirical verifiability. This kind of category mistake is a feature of a society which has moved a long way from its own religious roots. Considering Anglo-Australian difficulties in understanding Indigenous religious symbolism, Nancy Williams reflects:

> There is surely no logical barrier for one group of people whose religious symbolism encompasses burning bushes, pillars of salt, laws miraculously engraved on stone, virgin birth, and transubstantiation, to comprehend the symbolism of another in which spirits assume the form of snakes and speak, and other spirits enter rocks and trees.70

Matters are more difficult, however, when the first group has become so far estranged from its symbols that they exist only as empirical truth claims to be rejected (by the majority) or clung to with fundamentalist defiance (by a minority). Losing faith in the symbolic richness of religious meaning produces a kind of secularism which can present as a denial of rationality in religion per se.
'The Connection Has Not Been Made': The Mathews Inquiry

Justice Jane Mathews was appointed in January 1996, to report on matters which might be relevant to a declaration under Section 10 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Heritage Protection Act protecting an area around Hindmarsh Island from threatened desecration. Unlike the Royal Commission, the Mathews Inquiry concluded that there was a genuine and archaic tradition which prescribed that 'nothing must come between the waters around Hindmarsh Island and the sky'.

However, Justice Mathews found that this tradition’s existence was insufficient grounds for a ban. Her reasons for reaching this conclusion suggest that her interpretation of Indigenous religion was profoundly shaped by Christian assumptions, and reflects the tendency of a deeply secular society to resort uncritically to a (hazily) remembered frame of reference when entering unfamiliar religious territory.

Justice Mathews found:

The proposition that nothing must come between the waters and the sky is not a part of the tradition but a rule deriving from it. The question still remains as to why it is that nothing must come between the waters and the sky. The answer is that we do not know. The connection has not been made. Nor has a connection been made between the rule (nothing can come between the waters and the sky) and the claimed consequence, namely that Ngarrindjeri women will get sick.

Mathews’s requirement for a connection between ‘tradition’ and ‘rule’ reflects a peculiarly Western and Protestant view of the nature and structure of religious systems. It makes assumptions about the nature of authentic tradition which are unlikely to hold true for religious traditions other than Western Christianity.

Ninian Smart, exploring *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, names six ‘dimensions’ of religious experience, of which the mythical (in the sense of foundational stories, whether historical or not) and doctrinal (that is, theoretical explication of the myth) are two. The others dimensions are the ritual, ethical, social and experiential. Not all traditions have each of these 'dimensions' in the same intensity, he finds. Doctrine, the level of
systematic and theoretical elaboration, he identifies as the strand most highly-prized by the so-called 'historical' religions—those with written rather than exclusively oral traditions.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith goes further than Smart in distinguishing doctrine, or what he calls 'believing', from other kinds of religious activity. While many religious traditions through history have had doctrinal dimensions of more or less centrality to their overall orientation, Christian tradition has stressed 'belief' as no other. People have been burned at the stake for what they did or did not believe, quizzed before church tribunals and charged with heresy because of the intellectual positions which they do or do not hold. Through the ages, Christians have expressed their faith in a series of formulae beginning 'I believe ...'.

Believing, understood as 'an activity of the mind', has come to be regarded by those influenced by Christian cultures 'as what religious people primarily do'. Propelled from the distant past by their Greek heritage, and, nearer, by the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason, those whose backgrounds lie in the Protestant tradition are particularly prone to this assumption, Smith contends. Their heritage inclines them:

To go around asking about ... religious communities, 'What do they believe?'—as though this were a basic, or at least a legitimate, question ... Since they themselves believed something religiously, they presumed that others would too.

By contrast, some religious traditions have no doctrinal dimension at all. Smith uses the example of practitioners of Shinto, who do not 'construct formal theories ... to order their exuberant myths into rational coherence'. While myths are certainly an element of 'belief' in a broad sense, myth and doctrine are distinct elements in a religious system. While doctrine relies on myth to provide the matter which it interprets, myth can be present independently of doctrine. As Smart cautions:

It is often not easy to draw a clear line between the mythological and the doctrinal dimensions of religion, but the former is typically more colourful, symbolic, picturesque and story-like. Myths are stories, and they bring out something concerning the invisible world.
Doctrine is the more systematic and theoretical elaboration of that 'something', in which questions of 'believing' something (in the sense of 'believing that' such-and-such a thing is true) are more likely to become significant. The highly systematic light in which Westerners, especially of Protestant extraction, tend to regard the place of 'doctrine' underlies a general understanding of religion as essentially to do with (to borrow a phrase from Locke)80 each believer's 'persuasion of the mind'. This view, however, is best understood as a peculiarity rather than a constant in the history of religions. Mathews's finding on Hindmarsh Island assumes a structural view of religion which parallels Smart's distinction between the 'mythological' and 'doctrinal' elements of religion. Mathews asserts that a particular relation between myth and doctrine must obtain in order for a Section 10 declaration to proceed; and that relation must be one of a 'connection' between the rule and its 'rationale'.

Two anthropologists are quoted at length in the Mathews report, both arguing that such connections are unlikely to be found in the religious traditions of Aboriginal communities.81 Mathews observed, 'I am told that many Aboriginal traditions, even when revealed in full, do not provide these connections'. She went on to quote for a page and a half from comments made to her by consulting anthropologist Peter Sutton. He noted that 'there appears to be no problem' with the story's 'standing as a tradition'. Responding to the objection that its 'link to the prohibition on covering the waters has not been explained', Sutton raised the pertinent question: 'If such a link could be made out, would this be a case of "content" providing "rationale" sufficient for a declaration?' He drew a distinction between rationale which would make sense to 'someone who is a member of the cultural group concerned' and 'that of an outsider interpreting that culture'. The law, in its current interpretation, depends upon the latter. The kind of knowledge available to insiders may not be the kind that the law recognises.

Sutton went on to argue that:

There is no inherent reason why Ngarrindjeri women would have to be able to specify a logical link between the Seven Sisters and the prohibition on covering the waters, in order to make the link between the two. That is, the link may have been handed down minus its rationale.82
One does not have to be an expert in Aboriginal tradition to appreciate this point. For example, the Hebrew biblical book of Leviticus gives twenty-seven chapters of obligations and prohibitions. Many of them have been 'handed down minus their rationale', a lacuna which has provided grist for generations of biblical scholars and, more recently, structural anthropologists. The point which Sutton made next has therefore an even more general application than the significance he attached to it:

In fact the holders of such traditions rarely, if ever, propose specific causal connections between the sacred details of a place and the specific taboos that surround it. When anthropologists ask for such whys and wherefores they are typically met with statements such as 'The Old People always said that would happen', or 'I don't know—it just is that way and always has been'. This is typical of the cake [sic] of custom.83

Mathews's distinction between myth and doctrine ('tradition' and the 'rule' deriving from it) enabled her to declare that both must be present before a case for a section 10 application can be held to have been satisfactorily made. Beyond privileging doctrine, she invoked a specifically Christian reification of 'belief' as a mental phenomenon which can be isolated and extracted from the other elements of a religious tradition.

Religious and Civil Interests in the Thirty-Ninth Parliament

The extent to which Senators and Members saw Indigenous religious heritage as a religious freedom issue varied. Some, in speeches and in conversation, made regular comparisons between the religious concerns of Indigenous communities and those of other Australians. Others spoke in terms which suggested a substantial gulf between Indigenous traditions and the world religions, with the term 'religion' (and, to a greater or lesser degree, the accompanying rights and freedoms) more appropriately relating to the latter.

Mr Michael Danby, the Member for Melbourne Ports (Vic.), put the case for equivalence in quite personal terms:

Being from a minority myself, I'd hate to see Australia trample on another minority. The fact of being a minority confers a special need for consideration. You'll find that a lot of people with Jewish backgrounds are
active on Indigenous rights—look at Mark Dreyfus and Ron Caston on the stolen children inquiry.\textsuperscript{84}

Opposing the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Bill, Mr Anthony Albanese, ALP Member for Grayndler (NSW), built his argument on the idea that the Bill was a violation of religious freedom:

Over there you have got a mob called the Lyons Forum who have a particular spiritual belief. You can imagine the reaction of people like the member for Menzies [Mr Andrews] or the member for Mitchell [Mr Cadman] if we said, 'We're going to have a royal commission into your beliefs; into whether you can prove the Holy Trinity exists'. What if we said, 'We're going to have a royal commission into Islam,' or into any other religious or spiritual belief? It simply has not happened. There would be outrage if anyone suggested it. But, for the Indigenous people of this country, it is fair game, open slather.\textsuperscript{85}

In conversation, he repeated the concern that some religious traditions are accorded more respect than others:

\textbf{MM:} One issue where you were quite outspoken about respecting other people's religious views is the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Bill.

\textbf{MR ALBANESE:} Well, that was a classic case. In Parliament, I remember what I said, and that was not from notes. I remember thinking, 'Oh, what have I done?' But there were people standing up in Parliament ridiculing the fact that the shape of the island could represent something, in terms of the landscape and that sort of issue that was there. And I remember going up to Kakadu, and seeing at a site in Kakadu there's a serpent, and it's just there, it's there, it's like, wow, it really is quite a spiritual experience for someone who doesn't consider themselves very religious. I mean, all those people who were leading the charge on that issue, these were people who say that you should accept the Holy Trinity, you should accept a whole range of things that are not rational or logical, but people believe them and they have a right to, as a matter of faith. But the hypocrisy of letting people make fun of other people's faith, when they don't question or examine themselves! ... And so, yes,
the Hindmarsh Bridge was one example that I think really showed that. And if people went into Parliament and made fun of the Holy Trinity, or the Immaculate Conception, or any of those sort of articles of faith, there would be an outcry, it would just be huge, Howard would be in there five minutes later.

MM: Eventually, the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Bill did go through with Labor Party support. Was that difficult?

MR ALBANESE: Ah, well, you know, you’re bound by the Caucus—but there were a couple of subsequent legal decisions in between time that put the Labor Party in a difficult position, I think. But, you know, lots of things I find difficult in this place ...

In fact, Mr Albanese’s characterisation of the Lyons Forum may be questioned at this point, in that some of its members drew on their own religious convictions to find a point of empathy with Indigenous concerns. At least one of the targets of his criticism in the House agreed with the principle of equality between religious traditions:

MM: Does the protection of Indigenous sacred heritage protection pose a tension for a secular state?

MR ANDREWS: Is there a tension? Yes, definitely.

MM: Do you think it’s legitimate for it to act in that way?

MR ANDREWS: I think it’s legitimate. It’s a matter of balancing it up, again. The state does—protect is not the right word, necessarily, but the state does have a concern for—that’s not the right word either—but it takes cognisance in practical ways of other religious organisations. To take as an example, the fact that religious organisations can claim tax-exempt status for a whole range of religious activities is an acknowledgment by the state of a special place, I suppose. So it would be inconsistent to say you can do that for Jews and Muslims and Christians but you can’t do it for some other belief system.
To some, equity in itself was less important than the legacy of destructive evangelisation, creating the right to protection as a form of religious reparation:

**MM:** A question for you as a Jeffersonian advocate of the separation of religion and the state. Indigenous heritage protection is an example of the state intervening to protect a minority religious tradition. Do you think that’s an illegitimate crossing of that boundary?

**MR RUDD:** No, because it's about the protection of minorities from a dominant culture, which has been dominant for a couple of hundred years and probably will be dominant for at least another hundred, partly because of the church's efforts at evangelisation. So, I think that's an expression of continuing tolerance, of diversity.

Others were happy to contemplate state protection of Indigenous sacred heritage, but argued that the reasons for state intervention are not themselves religious:

**MM:** Indigenous heritage protection is an instance of the state intervening to protect the religious traditions of a minority religious community. Do you think that's legitimate?

**MR ABBOTT:** … That’s a perfectly reasonable thing for a government or a state organisation to do. It’s not being done for religious grounds, it’s being done for sort of cultural artefact type grounds, in the same way that we like to protect old houses.88

To some, religious questions were part of a more general issue of worldviews, which included economic and political measures of value:

**MR CAMERON:** There probably is some interventionist role for government. Two hundred years of suffering—and when Humpty Dumpty falls off the wall you can’t unscramble the egg. It’s the hardest policy area and greatest government failure since settlement … Indigenous leaders want their values respected—but they are values based in a nomadic economy with no room for the accumulation of capital. So, under
those values, there can be no public hospitals, no public health, no literacy, no numeracy—

MM: But you told me earlier you don’t want us to have public hospitals?

MR CAMERON: Well, no, it’s true that I see public ownership as the less desirable option. But what I mean is, the Indigenous leadership has selected land as the ground on which to fight—largely successfully—but is reliance on land empowering in the 21st Century?

To others, not only should the state’s reasons be non-religious, but the traditions themselves have only a dubious claim to the title ‘religion’, one pulling a dictionary from the shelf mid-interview to make his point:

MM: Indigenous heritage protection, sacred site protection. That is a case of the secular state intervening to protect a minority religious tradition …

MR DOWNER: I don’t know whether it’s religious within the meaning of the Constitution. It’s a cultural site. Is it religious? What’s the definition of ‘religion’ in the Constitution?

MM: It says the Commonwealth shall not make any laws with respect to the free exercise of any religion--

MR DOWNER: With respect to what?

MM: Preventing the free exercise of any religion, or to establish any religious practice, or to make any religious test—but it doesn’t tell us what religion is.

MR DOWNER: How do you find out what religion is? What is religion?

STAFFER: Belief in a higher being.

MR DOWNER: Do you think? It says here, in the dictionary, which you can take or leave, ‘The quest for the values of life involving three phases: the ideal, the practices for attaining the values of the ideal, and the theology or moral view relating to the quest.’ So there you go … It might be drawing a long bow, actually, to define sacred sites as religious. Well, if you were put into a position of having to define them as religious, you’d scurry away from that. You’d say they were cultural.
Chapter Six: Sacred Sites and the Public Square

MM: Why would you scurry away?

MR DOWNER: Well, you might get into trouble with the Constitution. You'd say they're cultural. I mean, I'm not sure that sacred sites are religious sites. You could have an argument about that, I suppose. Not sure of the answer to that. I don't really know. I think I'd have to hear a bit more of the evidence. What do you think?

STAFFER: I think they're cultural sites.

MR DOWNER: Why aren't they religious sites?

STAFFER: Why aren't they religious sites? Because, what is the religion?

MR DOWNER: Yes, what is the religion?

MM: Well, in traditional societies there's not usually something parcelled off and called 'religion', but--

MR DOWNER: OK, so they don't have a religion.

MM: No, no, you could just as well say everything's religion.

STAFFER: Dreamtime, spirits—

MR DOWNER: Is that religion? I mean, is it religion?

MM: It certainly gets studied in religious studies departments!

MR DOWNER: Oh yes? Lots of things get studied! I don't know what that means, it doesn't sound to me like evidence of any kind at all! Just because something gets studied--

STAFFER: It's more racial.

MR DOWNER: Racial? No, I don't think it's racial. I suppose I've never really contemplated that this was a matter so much of religion, but since you ask the question I would say that I must have always assumed that it was a matter of culture.

Religion, the Sacred and the State

Australian secularism is not a single cultural theme or body of thought. Instead, Australia's formally secular political and legal institutions and
informally secular culture contain numerous strands which interact in various ways. When the secular state has to resolve matters related to religious significance, some strands prove more productive than others. A more careful appreciation of the consequences of different ways of understanding religion may help to avoid or minimise conflicts such as some of those which arose around Hindmarsh Island and other disputed heritage claims.

The processes for resolving Indigenous claims for land or for protection of sacred heritage allow for expert evidence from specialists in the relevant fields. To date, specialists in the comparative study of religion have been unlikely to feature among those called. However, the comparative study of religion offers resources which could cast fresh light on conflicts between the secular state and Indigenous religious tradition.

Successful land rights, Native Title and heritage protection claims attest that Australian law manages, from time to time, to accommodate forms of knowledge in which a particular view of the 'spiritual' or 'sacred' organises material interests. Yet such processes remain precarious. The controversies examined here illustrate the need for closer attention to the specifically religious aspects of Indigenous tradition. They also illustrate the need for a more self-conscious appreciation of the religious presuppositions underlying the various strands of Australian secular structure.

Throughout this study, we have seen the twin effects of the liminal sacred's incursions into secular structure—now reinforcing hierarchical order, now destabilising it through a counterposing communitas. Secular Australia's efforts to accommodate Indigenous religion show those effects amplified through the interplay of multiple marginalised threads. As Caroline Walker Bynum points out, one caveat to Turner's theory of liminality is that the 'marginalised' are not marginal to themselves; however, Indigenous peoples, systematically excluded from the avenues of power which produce and reinforce secular structure, appear to it as a liminal force, which, in its more extreme moments (such as the height of the Wik debate), it hails in tones verging upon the apocalyptic. Thus far, Indigenous religion is a force doubly repressed, as Indigenous (in relation to Anglo-Australia) and as religious (in relation to secular Australia). But the picture is still further
Chapter Six: Sacred Sites and the Public Square

complicated. Secular Australia is no seamless political fabric, but a patchwork of different, sometimes competing, philosophical and pragmatic fragments: elements of naive liberal separations, sporadic accommodations of religious special pleading, a social justice tradition owing much to religious activism. Its unresolved relationship to the Western, Christian sacred causes the joins to strain and tear. Often unacknowledged residual Christian assumptions force their way through the rips, mingling with patches of equally unexamined scientism, prurient voyeurism or the simple complacency which prevents recognition of anything which does not fit existing frames of reference. The resultant fraying tangle drapes additional snags in the way of Indigenous communities seeking the same protection for their own religious freedoms which secular structure manages to accord, with disarming regularity, to the religious sensibilities of the majority.

Endnotes


2. Convention Debates, Melbourne, 1898, 8 February 1898, pp. 660, 662, 2 March 1898, pp. 1772, 1779.


5. ibid., p. 108.

6. ibid.

7. Stanner follows the interpretation of Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* as reducing all religion to a reification of social structure. This is a common, but by no means necessary, reading of Durkheim.

8. ibid., p. 111.

9. ibid., p. 113.
Endnotes continued

15. Avoidance of the word ‘religion’ reflects some Indigenous peoples’ preferred terminology. For example, Diane Bell notes with reference to the Ngarrindjeri that people who are both active Christians and active practitioners of Indigenous tradition may need a way of distinguishing the two world views. ‘Religion’, then, comes to stand for Christianity, marking it out from ‘culture’, ‘tradition’ or ‘custom’ (see D. Bell, *Ngarrindjeri Wurruwarrin: A World That Is, Was and Will Be*, Spinifex, North Melbourne, 1998, pp. 109–110). However, it is one thing to avoid the word and another to misinterpret an entire concept. The instances I address in this chapter suggest that the avoidance of specific reference to ‘religion’ in legislation, and therefore in the public discussion for which it sets the terms, is born less out of respect for Indigenous usage than from what Nancy Williams has called ‘perceptual barriers implicated in non-Aborigines’ failure to comprehend’ Indigenous peoples’ evidence (N. Williams, *The Yolngu and Their Land: A System of Land Tenure and the Fight for its Recognition*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1986, p. 3).
17. ibid., p. 143.
18. Part I (3).
19. Part IIA.
Endnotes continued

*Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund*, April 1998, and *Twelfth Report of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Native Title and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Fund*, May 1998.


22. ibid., p. 147.

23. ibid., p. 146.

24. ibid., p. 170.


31. ibid., p. xiv.

32. ibid., p. 53.

33. ibid., p. xiv.


Endnotes continued


39. 'Determination pursuant to reference of 27 February 1986 by the High Court to the Supreme Court of Queensland to hear and determine all issues of fact raised by the pleadings, particulars and further particulars' in High Court action B 12 of 1982, 16 November 1990.


41. ibid.

42. ibid., p. 189.


44. N. Sharp, 'Malo's Law in Court', op. cit., p. 178.

45. Supreme Court of the Northern Territory, 1971.


48. ibid., p. 91.


50. ibid.

Endnotes continued


56. Secularism in this sense of a world view which rejects religious exclusivism is not necessarily incompatible with religious commitment. Universalist claims are not a necessary feature of religion. Some religions are adept at accommodating other belief systems. Moreover, even those traditions, like Christianity, which can be exceptionally universalistic and exclusivist, also contain more accommodating strands. These strands are likely to come to the fore in periods of cross-cultural communication and cultural secularisation.

57. For background to the Hindmarsh Island enquiries, see 'Hindmarsh Island Bridge Bill 1996', *Bills Digest*, no. 50, 1996–97, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 1996.


65. Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission Transcript, p. 5921.

Endnotes continued


71. See J. Mathews, *Commonwealth Hindmarsh Island Report*, 27 June 1996, p. 49 and Appendix 12, reporting the forensic dating of paper used to record an account of secret Ngarrindjeri women's traditions in the 1960s or early 1970s; and her detailed rebuttal (ibid., pp. 122–3, 174–183) of the Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission's conclusion that 'the Seven Sisters Dreaming Story, the source of the prohibition of a bridge, was never part of the Dreaming of the Ngarrindjeri people. It was part of Western Desert mythology and is likely to have been introduced by Doreen Kartinyeri' (Stevens, op. cit., p. 278).

72. ibid., p. 203.


74. His 1996 *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Harper Collins, London) adds a seventh dimension, the 'material'. A discussion of the addition's significance is beyond my present scope; for convenience, I retain the longer-established classification. The addition of a seventh dimension makes no difference to the argument presented here.


76. ibid., pp. 12, 122.

77. ibid., pp. 13–14.

78. ibid., p. 14.
Endnotes continued

82. ibid., p. 204.
83. ibid.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Wall of Separation or Webs of Intersection?

Australia's well-known secularism holds a number of hazards. One is that religious incursions into public policy and discussion may go unrecognised. Journalists and commentators, whom we normally rely on to alert us to what is going on, may not have the skills or experience to recognise what is happening, or to articulate it when they do. A second is that when the formal structures and language of religion absent themselves from public life, we are left with no agreed public discourse for dealing with matters of the sacred, leaving us casting around for variously half-remembered or unfamiliar categories to contain phenomena which may not fit. A third is that when formal discussion of religious matters moves from the public stage, then various kinds of 'gut-level' religiosity may be allowed in, unscrutinised, by the back door.

In the cases examined in the present study, each of these tendencies is apparent in various ways. Apparently secular structure has proved permeable to the sacred's destabilising residues or incursions, which, in every case, have turned out to have significant political effects. However, the effects are not uniform: religion does not (contrary to common interpretation) produce consistent leanings either to the right or to the left. Instead, each instance examined here reflects the dual tendencies of religion, at times investing the hierarchically-ordered status quo with an
aura of religious legitimation, at other times challenging existing structure by a social critique from the margins.

One way in which religion enters the Australian public sphere is when Senators and Members bring it with them. The scars of the Labor Party's internal battles between Catholic 'groupers' and their opponents have healed; but Senators and Members on both sides bring a remarkable wealth of religious experience to Parliament. Many learned political skills in religious organisations. Many still find their politics informed by religious reflection. Their convictions do not lead to a common political result, but, in different ways, inform economic positions from dry neo-liberal through interventionist wet to socialist; and social policies ranging from conservative 'family-values' social engineering to libertarian cosmopolitanism. At times, religion has produced solidarity across party divisions; at others, it has provided a base for intra-party factionalism.

The 1998 Constitutional Convention considered God's inclusion in any new Preamble (chapter two), and found the topic less controversial than had delegates to the Australasian Conventions in the much more religious Australia of a century earlier. Back then, many avowedly Christian representatives expressed strong reservations about attaching God to any political masthead. By 1998, the meaning of 'God' had changed substantially, so that delegates theologised a 'generic God', incorporating concepts of openness to and embrace of the other. At the same time, the 'generic God' also reinforced the status quo, by establishing a higher reality as guarantor of stability in the unstable phase of transition to a republic.

Christian forms in parliamentary ritual, such as daily prayers and swearing-in, and the existence of para-parliamentary religious groupings such as the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, are further examples of religion's ambiguous political presence (chapter three). On one hand, such incursions of the sacred mitigate inter-party antagonisms by infiltrating a sense of religious community across party lines. On the other hand, however, that bipartisanship is achieved by privatising religion to a degree which marginalises less individualist theologies. In the eyes of some Senators and Members, that privatising of religion in fact reinforces the very left-right divisions it aims to overcome. Others perceive the bipartisan
Christian solidarity as entrenching Christian exclusivism against members of non-Christian religions.

Historically, and still today, churches have offered one avenue for civic involvement, leading some church members into more direct political engagement (chapter four). As well as their effects on individuals, churches have long been corporate players on the political stage, often from the left, for example criticising government from the standpoint of the marginalised. But they have also played a conservative role, lending their language, symbols and traditions to reproducing hierarchically-ordered social structure. Churches continue to demonstrate those ambiguities, from their role as ‘irritants on the body politic’ in relation to such issues as tax and Native Title to their—perhaps inadvertent—contribution to the de-unionisation of social service workers.

One feature of the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments has been the increasing public acceptability of a particular strand of social conservatism, coalescing around the rhetorical themes of ‘family values’ (chapter five). That trend accompanied the success of a proto-faction in the right wing parties in installing a Leader sympathetic to their brand of conservatism. While this strand for the most part avoids overtly religious language, it draws on and appeals to a conventional association between religiously-charged terms and policy positions centred on a single-breadwinner, nuclear family model of domestic life.

If the sacred is marginalised in modern, secular Australia, the Indigenous sacred is especially repressed (chapter six). Indeed, dominant discourses sometimes deny that Indigenous religion exists. Disputed claims for the protection of religious tradition and religiously-based claims for land demonstrate deep ambiguities in secular Australia’s grasp of its own religious roots and in its often-stated aspirations for an inclusive future.

Australia’s religious character is most often labelled ‘secularism’. A better term might be ‘religious innocence’. Each of the cases examined here demonstrates different ways in which Australia’s collective loss of religious sophistication has led to misunderstandings and sometimes substantial social damage in important areas of our political and cultural life. We urgently need to develop more refined conceptual tools for understanding,
and accommodating, the sacred’s unruly incursions in the secular public sphere. This study has begun that task.
### Appendix: Interviews

#### 1. Senators and Members of the 38th and 39th Parliament

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Thursday 24 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Tasmania, Special Minister of State (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence, 21.10.98 to 30.01.01) Religious affiliation: Dutch Reformed. Member of the Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Tony Abbott MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tuesday 15 February 2000</td>
<td>Member for Warringah, Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Religious affiliation: Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Dick Adams MP</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Thursday 24 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Lyons. Religious affiliation: Raised Anglican, no longer practising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Anthony Albanese MP</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Monday 28 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Grayndler, Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services. Religious affiliation: Raised Catholic, no longer practising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Kevin Andrews MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Monday 28 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Menzies. Religious affiliation: Catholic. Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Kerry Bartlett MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 23 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Macquarie. Religious affiliation: Anglican. Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator the Hon. Nick Bolkus</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Wednesday 30 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia, Shadow Minister for Environment and Heritage. Religious affiliation: Raised Greek Orthodox</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Ross Cameron MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 11 August 1999</td>
<td>Member for Parramatta. Religious affiliation: Raised Presbyterian, now Baptist. Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Monday Night Group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Date of Interview</td>
<td>Role and Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senator Kim Carr</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Wednesday 30 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Victoria, Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate and Parliamentary Secretary representing the Shadow Minister for Education in the Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Grant Chapman</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Friday 25 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia. Religious affiliation: Anglican, Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator the Hon. Rosemary Crowley</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Tuesday 29 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia. Religious affiliation: raised Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Michael Danby MP</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Wednesday 23 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Melbourne Ports. Religious affiliation: Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Kay Denman</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Thursday 12 August 1999</td>
<td>Opposition Deputy Whip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Alexander Downer MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 1 March 2000</td>
<td>Member for Mayo, Minister for Foreign Affairs. Religious affiliation: Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Alan Ferguson</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Monday 29 November 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia. Religious affiliation: Uniting, member of the Parliamentary Christian Fellowship and Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Tim Fischer MP</td>
<td>Nat</td>
<td>Tuesday 24 August 1999</td>
<td>Member for Farrer (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Trade 11.3.92–20.7.99). Religious affiliation: Catholic. Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Michael Forshaw</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Monday 28 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for NSW. Religious affiliation: Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Chris Gallus MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Thursday 16 September 1999</td>
<td>Member for Hindmarsh, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator the Hon. John Herron</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 11 August 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Queensland, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Religious affiliation: Catholic. Member of Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Date of Interview</td>
<td>Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Dr Carmen Lawrence MP</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Wednesday 25 August 1999</td>
<td>Member for Fremantle, Shadow Minister for Industry, Innovation and Technology and Shadow Minister for the Status of Women from 5.9.00. Religious affiliation: Raised Catholic, no longer practising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Meg Lees</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Tuesday 7 September 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia, Leader, Australian Democrats until 6.4.01. Religious affiliation: Uniting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Dr Brendan Nelson MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tuesday 29 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Bradfield, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence. Religious affiliation: Raised Catholic. Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Harry Quick</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Tuesday 15 February 2000</td>
<td>Member for Franklin. Religious affiliation: Uniting. President of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator John Quirke</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Friday 10 September, 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia (resigned 15 August 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Kevin Rudd MP</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Thursday 17 February 2000</td>
<td>Member for Griffith. Religious affiliation: Anglican. Executive Member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Hon. Chris Schacht</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Friday 10 June 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia, Shadow Minister for Veterans’ Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Sid Sidebottom MP</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Thursday 12 August 1999</td>
<td>Member for Braddon. Religious affiliation: Raised Catholic, no longer practising</td>
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<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Hon. Kathy Sullivan MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Monday 28 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Moncreiff, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Religious affiliation: Raised Methodist, now attends Catholic church, member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Dr John Tierney</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tuesday 22 June 1999</td>
<td>Religious affiliation: Anglican, member of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship, former member of Lyons Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Hon. Amanda Vanstone</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tuesday 10 August</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia, Minister for Family and Community Services and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women (Minister for Justice and Customs 21.10.98–30.1.01). Religious affiliation: Raised Anglican, no longer practising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Rev. John Woodley</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Wednesday 11 August 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Queensland (resigned 27.7.01). Religious affiliation: Uniting (Minister of the Word), past President of Parliamentary Christian Fellowship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Hon. Dr Michael Wooldridge MP</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Monday 28 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Casey, Minister for Health and Aged Care</td>
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## 2. Former Senators and Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Party when in Parliament</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr Robert Baldwin</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tuesday 15 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Patterson, defeated 3.3.1998. Religious affiliation: Raised Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Professor Baume</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 8 July 1999</td>
<td>Senator for NSW, resigned 28.1.91. Religious affiliation: Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Christabel Chamarette</td>
<td>GWA</td>
<td>Friday 27 August 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Western Australia, term expired 30.6.96. Religious affiliation: Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Fred Chaney</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Friday 6 August 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Western Australia resigned 27.2.90; Member for Pearce retired 8.2.93. Religious affiliation: Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor Harry Edwards</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Thursday 24 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Berowra, retired 8.2.93. Religious affiliation: Uniting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Dr John Hewson</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 24 November 1999</td>
<td>Member for Wentworth, Leader of the Opposition until May 1994, resigned 28.2.95. Religious affiliation: Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Clyde Holding</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Friday 30 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Melbourne Ports, retired 31.8.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Rev. Professor Brian Howe</td>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Thursday 29 July 1999</td>
<td>Member for Batman, Deputy Prime Minister, retired 21.1.96. Religious affiliation: Uniting (Minister of the Word)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Chris Miles</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Wednesday 30 June 1999</td>
<td>Member for Braddon, defeated 3.10.98. Religious affiliation: Baptist (lay preacher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Chris Puplick</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Tuesday 28 December 1999</td>
<td>Senator for NSW, term expired 30.6.90. Religious affiliation: Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Karin Sowada</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Wednesday 21 July 1999</td>
<td>Senator for NSW, term expired 30.6.93. Religious affiliation: Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Sid Spindler</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Tuesday 27 July 1999</td>
<td>Senator for Victoria, term expired 30.6.96. Religious affiliation: Raised Lutheran, no longer practising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix: Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Party when in Parliament</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Baden Teague</td>
<td>Lib</td>
<td>Friday 2 July 1999</td>
<td>Senator for South Australia, term expired 30.6.96. Religious affiliation: Anglican (lay preacher)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 3. Church and Community Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Role and Affiliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Ross Carter</td>
<td>Wednesday 29 July 1999</td>
<td>Uniting Church Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Jock Cameron</td>
<td>Monday 6 December 1999</td>
<td>Lay worker attached to the office of Mr Ross Cameron MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Dr Max Champion</td>
<td>Wednesday 29 July 1999</td>
<td>Uniting Church Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Warren Clarnette</td>
<td>Wednesday 29 July 1999</td>
<td>Uniting Church Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Tim Costello</td>
<td>Monday 26 July 1999</td>
<td>Baptist Minister; President, Baptist Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Bill Crews</td>
<td>Friday 21 July 1999</td>
<td>Uniting Church Minister; Chair, Exodus Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Sam Gregg</td>
<td>Thursday 22 July 1999</td>
<td>Program Director, Religion and the Free Society Program, Centre for Independent Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Harry Herbert</td>
<td>Wednesday 21 July 1999</td>
<td>Uniting Church Minister, Executive Director, UnitingCare NSW ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Les Murray</td>
<td>At Galatians Group Conference</td>
<td>Poet, co-author of proposed Preamble text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br Mark O'Connor</td>
<td>Thursday 29 July 1999</td>
<td>Marist Brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rev. Ray Richmond</td>
<td>Thursday 25 November 1999</td>
<td>Uniting Church Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Heather Southcott</td>
<td>29 October 1999</td>
<td>Former National President, Australian Democrats. Religious affiliation: Uniting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hon. Shane Stone</td>
<td>1 July 1999</td>
<td>Former Northern Territory Chief Minister, Liberal Party President. Religious affiliation: Catholic</td>
</tr>
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About the 1999 Parliamentary Fellow

Marion Maddox holds PhDs in theology and political philosophy and has taught religious studies at the University of South Australia and Australian Politics at the University of Adelaide. Dr Maddox was the 1999 Australian Parliamentary Fellow and *For God and Country: Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics*, published by the Department of the Parliamentary Library on 27 September 2001, is the result of her research. She currently lectures in religious studies at Victoria University, Wellington, NZ, and is a Visiting Fellow at the Politics Department, University of Adelaide.

*For God and Country: Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics* explores religious influences and debate in and around the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments. Interviews with some 60 present and past Senators and Members form the centrepiece of this groundbreaking study of Canberra's handling of religion.