

# **Religion and Politics**

Contemporary Tensions



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**By Paul Kelly**

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## About the Author

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A Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia, he holds a doctor of letters from the University of Melbourne and also has honorary doctorates from Griffith University and the University of NSW. In 2002 he was a visiting fellow at the Kennedy School of Government and a visiting lecturer at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University.



# Introduction

Right Reverend Robert Forsyth,  
Anglican Bishop of South Sydney

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It's a great pleasure to be here. I would like to say publicly that we owe a great debt to The Centre for Independent Studies for continuing with this lectureship and for letting religions and religious institutions be seen as real players in Australian society. So often we are simply marginalised, not by being denied coverage, but simply by not being noticed. And long before religion became an issue in society, CIS was aware that it was an issue. I hold this secular organisation, in the good sense of the word—not anti-religion but allowing for freedom of religion in its various forms—in very high regard.

It's also a tremendous honour to introduce Paul Kelly. I am one of his fans. I always set my video recorder to make sure that I tape *Insiders*—at least the first ten minutes. He is editor-at-large of *The Australian*, previously editor-in-chief, and writes regularly. An example of the eminence of the man can be seen in the books and the years. He began *The Unmaking of Gough*—remember him?—in 1976. The book of his that I found most helpful was *The End of Certainty* in 1992 which really helped chart what was happening in the big picture in Australian society. He has written more recently as well.

I think the reason that he is an eminently suitable person for this lecture is that whereas many journalists can tell you the latest scuttlebutt in the corridors of Canberra or which particular aspirant for Prime Minister or opposition leader they are favouring, Paul

Kelly is able to give you the meaning of what is going on in a very significant way. I think this is because he brings a perspective of history, an understanding of the larger forces, to his analysis. I find him always illuminating and very helpful and am therefore always very interested in what he has to say.

I cannot think of anyone more suited to give this talk. I do not know whether he is a religious practitioner but he is certainly an observer.

I met, unfortunately, one person who does not share my enthusiasm. As I left the office this afternoon, I mentioned to my PA that I was going to hear Paul Kelly. 'Oh', she said. I realised that perhaps there may have been a miscommunication. I said, 'I'm going to listen to the one who talks, not to the one who sings.' Her face fell. But can I say that I am delighted that he is the one who talks and not the one who sings.

May I introduce to you, Paul Kelly. ■



# Religion and Politics

## Contemporary Tensions

**I**t is an honour to deliver the 2006 Acton Lecture for The Centre for Independent Studies.

Lord Acton was a master of this subject. Acton saw history not just as the key to understanding politics but as a sacred task that testified to the pre-eminence of religion in the world. Acton was lucid and charismatic. His famous 1895 Cambridge lecture on *The Study of History* embraces the view that ‘opinions alter, manners change, creeds rise and fall, but the moral law is written on the tablets of eternity.’ Acton finished that lecture with the classic nineteenth century injunction ‘that if we lower our standard in History, we cannot uphold it in Church or State.’ Might this still be true?

My theme in this lecture is that religion is becoming more important in Australian politics and this will pose fresh opportunities and challenges. Religion, of course, has always been important but the decline in Christian practice in recent decades led to a widespread assumption of religion’s decline in civic and political life.

This view I argue requires revision because of three epic global trends that also impinge upon Australia. These are the resurgence of Islam simultaneous with doctrinal and social fractures that provoke questions about Islam’s ability to reconcile with the secular state and that are ingredients in organised violence; a Christian revival in much of the developing world along with the growth in the

multicultural societies of the New World of both new Christian sects and old faiths being transplanted by immigrants; and the twenty-first century obligation upon political leaders to maintain the unity and cohesion of nations amid the growing trend to define identity by culture, religion or lack of religion.

While Australia is on the periphery of these global trends, they are reflected in our politics.

God is making a comeback, at least in much of the world. This trend is not sufficiently grasped in Australia. Contrary to much Western orthodoxy from the Enlightenment onwards, modernisation and science have not killed religion. The collapse of the hierarchical Christian churches in Western Europe and their decline in Australia is more the exception than the rule. The irony is that as Europe abandoned religion it lost its fertility and is now heading into population decline. The historical dimensions of this transition can hardly be overlooked—the purging of religion seems the prelude to a national twilight that will be dominated by new divisions and inequities generated by population ageing.

In a review of the trends, Pew Forum's Timothy Samuel Shah and Harvard University's Monica Duffy Toft from the Kennedy School conclude: 'The belief that outbreaks of politicised religion are temporary detours on the road to secularisation was plausible in 1976, 1986 and even 1996. Today the argument is untenable. As a framework for explaining and predicting the course of global politics, secularism is increasingly unsound.'<sup>1</sup>

This conclusion, if correct, constitutes one of the most radical messages for the current age. That people do not live by reason alone is one of the great affirmations of mankind's current situation. In 1940 T S Eliott, fearing the secularist triumph, warned: 'If you will not have God (and He is a jealous God), you should pay your respects to Hitler or Stalin.' Eliot would be happier today.<sup>2</sup> Those secularists who saw a new unfolding world of rationalism, tolerance, scientific progress devoid of the boggy of religion and religious superstition should be worried.

The global trend is unmistakable. Shah and Toft say that over the last 40 years the world's largest global religions—Catholicism

and Protestantism, Islam and Hinduism—have expanded faster than world population growth. A total of 64% of people on earth belong to these religions compared with 50% at the start of the twentieth century. The figure may be close to 70% within the next 20 years. They report that the upsurge applies to both numbers and devotion: ‘The most populous and fastest growing countries in the world, including the United States, are witnessing marked increases in religiosity. In Brazil, China, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa and the United States religiosity became more vigorous between 1990 and 2001.’<sup>3</sup>

### Religion’s revival

What is driving this? Demography is one obvious explanation. But we need to look deeper. Samuel Huntington in his book *The Clash of Civilisations* says: ‘A global phenomenon demands a global explanation ... The most obvious cause of the global religious resurgence is precisely what was supposed to cause the death of religion: the process of social, economic and cultural modernisation that swept across the world in the second half of the twentieth century.’ Huntington quoted Singapore’s Lee Kuan Yew who said: ‘If you look at the fastest growing countries—Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong and Singapore—there’s been one remarkable phenomenon: the rise of religion.’ The Islamic scholar, Gilles Kepel said: ‘Re-Islamisation “from below” is first and foremost a way of rebuilding an identity in a world that has lost its meaning and become amorphous and alienating.’ In India a new Hindu identity is under construction as a response to the tensions from modernisation. In Russia, the religious revival is the result ‘of a passionate desire for identity which only the Orthodox church, the sole unbroken link with the Russians’ 1000 year past can provide.’<sup>4</sup>

Political freedom and the struggle for freedom has become a catalyst for the religious revival. There is a pattern at work—as greater political freedom came to nations as different as India, Mexico, Turkey and Indonesia the influence of religion on politics increased significantly.

The Islamic resurgence in its good and evil dimensions has

touched much of the world. It began with the 1979 Iranian revolution, extended to the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan, the Shia revival in the Middle East, the 2006 election victory by Hamas in Palestine and, in its most violent and sinister form, the sectarian war in Iraq between Sunni and Shia where the US has come undone because it made the secularist judgement that Iraq post-Saddam Hussein would be governed by nationalism not religious identity. That was the wrong call.

Religion is becoming more important in the politics of South East Asia, notably in Malaysia and Indonesia. One of the major tasks of political leaders in these nations is to accommodate this rise but to quarantine the fundamentalists. At the extreme fundamentalism can turn into violence with the Bali bombers, who killed 88 Australians, being explicit during their trial about their perverted religious motivations and their desire to kill Jews and Christians. Two years ago Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi at a glittering Sydney dinner with several hundred guests devoted his entire 40 minute speech to a discussion of religion and Islam. There is still insufficient grasp in Australia that we live in an Islamic geography. This reality, however, will impinge increasingly upon our foreign policy options and style.

It has now become apparent that economic globalisation of the past generation is not leading to one global culture but the reverse. Globalisation has provoked a stronger tide of nationalism and cultural assertion in which religion is a dynamic element. In much of the developing world nationalism and religion are marching together. Huntington says the revival of non-Western religions is the most powerful anti-Western manifestation in non-Western societies. It is not a rejection of modernity; it is a rejection of the West. It is, he argues, a proud statement that: 'We will be modern but we won't be you.'<sup>5</sup>

One of the most publicised aspects of religion's revival is the rise of the Christian right in America and its mobilisation by President Bush. The story has been presented by the quality media in Australia as an example of American exceptionalism and dysfunction. There is, however, no gainsaying the growth of grassroots Christianity and the

evangelical churches in America nor their influence on its domestic and foreign policy. Within the US, values have replaced income as the dividing line of politics; the best indicator of support for Bush is not income but church attendance. The close interaction between religion and politics is a defining feature of the Bush era.<sup>6</sup>

This is a unique American phenomenon and there are two trends at work. In America the hierarchical religions, notably the Catholic and mainstream Protestant churches have been in decline, undermined by a crisis of faith and institutional scandals. The religious revival in the US is the latest manifestation of that decentralised, populist, market-based, evangelical impulse deeply embedded in the American psyche and soil from the foundations that provokes periodic surges of religious awakening. American utopianism and religious faith penetrate into the political arena as a belief in man's ability to transform the world for the better.

## **Trends in Australia**

This brings me to the Australian experience. The global religious revival I have described affects Australia in distinct but modest ways. It is apparent that the political, social and economic upheavals that drive this revival are not reproduced to the same extent in Australia. In addition, Australia has experienced the decline in hierarchical churches that marks the US yet it lacks the intensity of the American grassroots religious revival. The Christian resurgence in Australia, symbolised by the Hillsong church, is real and it can be expected to grow. Its impact, however, will not remotely scale the peaks of the phenomenon in the US.

The decline of the traditional churches within Australia, Catholic and mainstream Protestant, has been powerfully evoked by the Anglican bishop to the Australian Defence Forces, Tom Frame, who recently wrote of the Australian experience:

Within the space of several decades, the church has moved from nearer the centre of public life to the periphery. It has lost ground. Christians no longer enjoy political, social or moral ascendancy. Many clergy feel besieged or ignored. Whereas

previously the church's position meant a great deal in national affairs and Christian thinkers were accorded a prime place in the public square, Christians can no longer presume they will even be heard, let alone heeded, in an increasingly indifferent and hostile society.<sup>7</sup>

Few would dispute the validity of these remarks. Yet there are new trends underway within Australia that point in the opposite direction and that affect the interaction between religion and politics.

Let me identify two such trends

### **Bringing God back in**

First, I believe there is a growing revolt against the secularisation of public life. This is a contested claim. However I think it is a powerful current in the Howard era and that Australian politics over the past decade cannot be comprehended short of this mood. In this sense the Australian trend is a symptom of the international disillusionment outside Europe with secularism. Australia is a classic study in frustration over the limitations of the liberal democratic state. For me, the best analyst of the phenomenon is Francis Fukuyama who argues the modern liberal state 'was premised on the notion that in the interests of political peace, governments would not take sides among differing moral claims made by religion and traditional culture. Tolerance would become the cardinal virtue.' The state would become morally neutral as the moral consensus broke down.<sup>8</sup>

The consequences, however, of a morally neutral state that legitimises individual freedoms are manifest and increasingly unacceptable. Fukuyama says: 'The breakdown of the social order is not a matter of nostalgia. The decline is readily measurable in statistics on crime, fatherless children, reduced education outcomes and opportunities ... The culture of intense individualism which in the marketplace and laboratory leads to innovation and growth, spilled into the realm of social norms where it corroded virtually all forms of authority and weakened the bonds holding families, neighbourhoods and nations together.'<sup>9</sup>

Howard defines himself as a values politician and his values are best described as cultural traditionalism. He discerns a strong community mood for a re-assertion of values and standards with government taking a lead. There is no necessary public agreement about these values since such demands come from both the political right and left. But the demands are unmistakable. Howard projects values in his support for educational standards, upholding individual responsibility in his 'mutual obligation' philosophy, his rejection of ethno-centric views of multiculturalism in favour of unity, his upholding the virtues of the family model, and in his respect for state sovereignty and traditional institutions including the churches.

His secular opponents clearly believe that Howard's cultural traditionalism violates the accepted divide between politics and faith. For example, Marion Maddox in her book *God Under Howard* propounds the thesis that Howard has launched a 'spiritual assault on Australian values' with God as his ally.<sup>10</sup>

It is time, however, to be more precise about Howard's approach. Howard does not project as a leader implementing God's will. I know of no evidence he thinks like this. Howard has religious beliefs as a Methodist who became an Anglican but, in my view, religion is exaggerated as an explanation of his policies. Howard respects religion. He believes it has contributed mightily to making Australia a better society. Howard is a secularist who believes governments should reflect values but not embrace any religion. He is keenly aware of the differences between Australia and America. He neither seeks to replicate the American Christian revival in this country nor does he believe it is likely to happen. He understands that religion is a more relaxed and low-key affair in Australia and this element of our national character is unlikely to change.

When I talk about a revolt against the secularisation of public life I am not suggesting the public wants to re-invest religion in laws, customs and executive decision-making. This is not about turning back the clock. It is more complex and subtle. There is recognition that the idea of the state as value-neutral was a phoney proposition. Governments are forever taking decisions with moral and ethical judgements. Such decisions only seem to be growing as the public

debate expands into the areas of biotechnology, the quality of human life, human relationships, the obligations of governments in an age of terrorism, the issues of global poverty, people movements and limits to national sovereignty.

The moral imperative is returning to the public policy debate with force. This has both positives and negatives for good public policy. But politicians are expected by the public to define themselves in terms of values and often this means in terms of religious values. This trend is only likely to intensify. It is false to think the values debate will grow de-coupled from religion and the churches. The secularists who want religion removed from politics are fighting a losing cause. Religion will return in Australia within the over-arching framework of the values debate. This new political environment demands a greater voice from the churches. But they should beware. It offers them both opportunity and risk.

## **Religious identification**

The second trend I want to identify is the growing willingness of political leaders to define their identity by reference to religion. Again, this is a contested assessment. Such a view, however, is irresistible given the election of Kevin Rudd to the Labor leadership. In recent times both Tony Abbott and Peter Costello have depicted themselves within a Christian framework and offered faith as a motive for some policies. But Rudd's writings are the most powerful evidence of this approach within senior ranks of the ALP.

Rudd is a declared Christian. In a recent article in *The Monthly* magazine he declared his personal hero to be the German theologian, pastor and peace activist, Dietrich Bonhoeffer who defied Hitler and was executed. Rudd admires Bonhoeffer, he says, because he not only declared his Christian principles but acted upon them. Rudd quotes Bonhoeffer in 1937 prophetically saying that 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.'<sup>11</sup>

Rudd is upset that Howard has been able to use religion (or what he tags right-wing religious extremism) to bolster the Coalition vote. He seems even more upset that Labor has allowed this to happen. Rudd's philosophical argument is that Howard's neo-liberalism on the economy destroys his claims to conservative, family and Christian



values on society. 'The Christian churches should be concerned about where this ultimately ends,' Rudd declares of Howard's policies.

Rudd presents himself as a leader to restore ethical balance in Australia. He appeals to the churches for support in this cause. His template is Bonhoeffer's repudiation of the Two Kingdoms doctrine—the view that the concern of the gospel is the inner person as opposed to the realm of state affairs which is beyond the gospel's message. Bonhoeffer rejected this doctrine when speaking out against Hitler's state. His philosophy was that obedience to God's will 'is not an ethical experience until it issues in actions that can be socially valued.' He railed at a church for whom Christianity was 'a metaphysical abstraction to be spoken of only at the edges of life.' For Bonhoeffer, the church must stand 'in the middle of the village'.

By this endorsement Rudd embraces a dynamic and assertive view of the Christian role in politics. This goes beyond anything Howard has propounded. As far as I am aware it goes beyond any Christian vision advanced by any other federal political leader of a major party for many decades. Bob Menzies during the more Christian age of the 1950s did not talk like this. Yet we now have an ALP leader who advocates Bonhoeffer's muscular Christianity and finds him in the tradition of Thomas More who defied the King and paid with his life.

Rudd speculates that Christianity may continue to decline in the West and even return to a minority position similar to the early centuries of its existence. It may become a counter-culture operating in a post-Christian world. But, Rudd says, this is not the main point—the main point is how individual Christians should relate to the state.

Rudd's answer is unequivocal—they should relate according to Bonhoeffer's principles of action. That means to 'always take the side of the marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed.' For Rudd, the role of the church 'in all these areas of social, economic and security policy is to speak directly to the state.' Indeed, he wants the church 'to point to the great silences in our national discourse.' That is, the church must fill the moral and political vacuums. This reflects Rudd's view of the Gospel as 'an exhortation to social action'. There is no compromise in his position. Rudd says: 'We should

repudiate the proposition that such policy debates are somehow simply “the practical matters of the state” which should be left to “practical” politicians rather than to “impractical” pastors, preachers and theologians.’

It would be hard to imagine a more comprehensive rejection of aggressive secularists seeking to keep religion and the church out of politics. For Rudd, religion has an important and constructive role to play. Christians have an obligation to advance ideas on public policy within their ethical framework. The state, in turn, has an obligation to listen if not to endorse.

Yet Rudd goes further. He lectures politicians on how they should deal with the church. He puts secularist politicians on notice: Christian views must be heard and respected and they should not be ‘rejected contemptuously by secular politicians as if these views are an unwelcome intrusion into the political sphere.’ This would diminish civil life and weaken our great debates.

For Rudd, Howard operates on the principle that religion is involved in politics and Labor must accept this reality rather than engage in the folly of denying it. In political terms Rudd’s target is Howard. In religious terms his targets are those Christians and Christian leaders who allowed their faith to be turned into the political handmaiden of the conservative political establishment.

By arguing for a Christianity based in social action Rudd hopes to re-build links between the Labor Party and the churches. For Rudd, this is a political strategy and an expression of his Christianity.

The symbolism of Howard and Rudd as competing political leaders is unmistakable. The message is that while the church as an institution is in decline the role of religion in politics is being revived and re-defined.

## **The Australian experience**

If this is true, if religion and religious values are becoming more prominent in Australian politics, what are the guiding stars that should direct this debate?

The starting point for an answer lies in an understanding of the relationship in Australia between church and state. This represents

an established polity, enshrined by the constitution and embedded in Australian life.

Australia is a secular state. In many respects it is unique and its secular model is different from that in Britain or America.

Australia's secular state is reflected and reinforced by section 116 of the Constitution. It is the only provision of the constitution that deals with religion. It outlaws an established religion or national church, unlike the British Constitution where there is an established church. Australia, therefore, is not a theocratic state where religion and the civil order are fused. The theocratic states that characterise much of the Islamic world are incompatible with the Australian Constitution, our democracy and our values. There is no basis for compromise on this point. The secular state is non-negotiable for Australia and this principle is fundamental to our pluralistic society.

Section 116 is the foundation for religious tolerance. It renders unconstitutional any effort by the Commonwealth to impose religious obligations thereby protecting believers and non-believers. It guarantees there cannot be any religious obligation for public office.

Australia's secular state provides a limited guarantee of religious freedom. This does not equate with the first amendment of the US constitution as interpreted by the US Supreme Court. This interpretation leans towards an absolute guarantee of religious freedom. Thomas Jefferson claimed the first amendment had built 'a wall of separation between Church and State.'

As Tom Frame argues there is no such wall in Australia. Australia's secular state is different to America's secular state. We have no such constitutional provision. On the contrary, in Australia there is extensive interaction between church and state rather than an attempt at constitutional separation.<sup>12</sup>

The nature of Australia's secular state has been entrenched by constitutional interpretation and I want to mention two cases in this context.

In the Jehovah's Witnesses Case of 1943 the sect challenged Commonwealth actions that were taken because it was inhibiting Australia's war effort. The Jehovah's Witnesses invoked section 116

on grounds of freedom of religion to restrain the Commonwealth. The High Court found the sect's non-participation in the war effort was a religious act and it found against any immunity for the sect on grounds of religious freedom. (The sect won the case on other grounds not pertinent to this discussion.) Chief Justice Latham found that conduct inimical to the war effort even when motivated by religion could be proscribed by the Commonwealth.

That is, religious freedom in Australia is not absolute. It has distinct limits. Such freedom must be balanced against other societal values and laws. This means that in Australia religion and religious practice falls under the law of the land. It is not the law of the land. It is not above the law of the land. It is not exempted from the law of the land. It comes under the law of the land. The Australian public does not believe a cleric is above the law. This is a non-negotiable pillar of our constitution and polity. Yet in sections of the Islamic community and amid sympathetic fellow-travellers there exists a reluctance to accept this point or a re-occurring desire to qualify this principle. There can be no such qualification and leaving the door half open on this principle is the hallway to strife.

The second case was in 1981 when the Defence of Government Schools lobby challenged the validity of government grants to church schools. DOGS argued that the benefits to the Catholic Church infringed the constitutional prohibition against establishment of a religion.

In a majority decision the court argued such action would only be invalid if the intent was establishment of a religion. Justice Ninian Stephen concluded the section 'cannot readily be viewed as the repository of some broad statement principle concerning the separation of Church and State ...' In a practical sense Justice Stephen said the Founding Fathers in section 116 were only prohibiting two things—setting up a national church and favouring one church over another.<sup>13</sup>

Justice Murphy was in a minority of one arguing that section 116 should be interpreted broadly such that its rejection of an established religion rendered invalid government funding of church schools. The Murphy view was not accepted by other judges. This judgement further consolidated the nature of Australia's secular

state. It means there is no wall separating church and state and no comprehensive and strict separation of church and state in Australia. This leaves room for an extension of interaction between church and state and this is what occurs through many institutional and financial arrangements such as government aid to church schools.

The frequent claim, therefore, that Australia's secular model involves a clear separation between church and state, similar to the US model, is incorrect. This may be a good or bad result. But there is no denying in Australia there is an extensive field of church-state interaction allowed by the constitution.

I think many Americans would see this as a negative for the church. They would argue it is precisely the tight constitutional separation of church from state that gives the American church its vitality, energy and drive. The separation model in America is linked with a centrality for God and religion in US life that far exceeds the situation in Australia. In America the dollar is inscribed with the words 'In God We Trust'—a vote of confidence that would be inconceivable in Australia.

In conclusion I would draw three lessons or guidelines as to how Australia should proceed in this expected deeper interaction between religion and politics.

First, the churches and Islam in particular need to be mindful not to push too far, not to infringe the limits that exist on religious freedom, all of which are designed to entrench Australia's secular state and the principles of religious pluralism and equal treatment of religions.

Second, the political secularists need to beware of propounding a false or exaggerated doctrine about the separation of church and state in Australia, a view inconsistent with Australian law, practice and opinion.

Third, as values and religious ethics become more prominent in political debate there needs to be moderation on all sides. Churches must realise they have no claim, outside validation by the democratic system, to impose their beliefs upon others. Politicians, in turn, have an obligation to treat church views as legitimate expressions not as unwelcome intrusions into the political debate and decision-making. ■

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Timothy Samuel Shah and Monica Duffy Toft, 'Why God is Winning', *Foreign Policy* (July/August 2006).
- <sup>2</sup> Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p 95.
- <sup>3</sup> Shah and Toft, 'Why God is Winning'.
- <sup>4</sup> Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, pp 95–99.
- <sup>5</sup> As above, p 101.
- <sup>6</sup> Refer to John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *The Right Nation* (London: Allen Lane, 2004).
- <sup>7</sup> Tom Frame, *Church and State* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006), p 91.
- <sup>8</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The Great Disruption* (London: Profile Books, 1999), p 10.
- <sup>9</sup> As above, refer to chapter one, 'Playing by the Rules'.
- <sup>10</sup> Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2005).
- <sup>11</sup> Kevin Rudd, 'Faith in Politics', *The Monthly* (October 2006).
- <sup>12</sup> Frame, *Church and State*, chapter three.
- <sup>13</sup> As above, pp 55–56.

## Vote of thanks

His Eminence George Cardinal Pell,  
Catholic Archbishop of Sydney

I would like to begin by congratulating The Centre for Independent Studies for instituting this series of lectures on religion and freedom. This is the eighth such lecture and it was probably a marginally braver decision to hold this lecture eight years ago than it would have been now. Not just in terms of understanding the roles of voluntary associations but I don't think you can understand what is going on in many parts of the world, and even in Australia, unless you factor in the religious element. The fact that so many of our commentators are not religious themselves shouldn't blind us to the significance of religion for so many people.

The second thing I'd like to do is to congratulate Paul on his paper. I don't want to damage his reputation further in secular Australia by having two churchmen praise him but I don't think that there is anybody writing regularly in Australia with a better understanding of what's happening or who writes more usefully.

Paul's major thesis is I think that in many parts of the world, God is making a comeback. I hope he's right. I think that he probably is right talking about the world generally. He might be right talking about Australia but I don't think there's much evidence of God making a comeback yet in Western Europe.

The joker in the pack is Islam and for a whole variety of reasons—whether the terrorist attacks continue, whether the clash

of civilisations really becomes that or becomes worse, and one factor that Paul didn't mention, demography. In Western Europe the catastrophic decline of the birthrate, especially among irreligious people, and of course the corresponding increase in religious people and Islamic people in Europe.

I welcome the talk. It is further recognition that for those minority forces which were trying to exclude religious viewpoints from discussion in Australia, their time has passed. I could never understand why any person with any religious background should be inhibited from presenting their view for majority acceptance or rejection in Australia. Given the high percentage of Christians that we have here, many of them nominal certainly, it is not inappropriate or unusual for them to do so.

A useful distinction to remember is that the aims of political leaders when they are addressing a religious topic are not necessarily the same as the aims of religious leaders when they are talking about the influence of religion in public life. Undoubtedly political leaders want religiously inspired people to vote for them. If I was a Labor party politician, which I'm not, one of the interesting things would be to slow down or change the movement of the Catholic population into the conservative parties. This is a trend that is already very well established. Of course, leaders of all parties are happy when church leaders support their point of view and unhappy when we say something that they don't like.

Paul is vividly aware of the differences between the United States and Australia. We are a much less religious country than most parts of the United States and we are also less anti-religious.

Another fundamental misunderstanding in discussions of religion is to equate the position of the Catholic church with the Anglican and Protestant churches, sociologically speaking. If the economy of Japan is in decline, I think that this is different from saying that the economy of Hong Kong is in decline. You risk a fundamental misunderstanding of what is happening in Australian life if you think that politically, sociologically and religiously, the influence of those groups is the same.

The Catholic church has a useful distinction between the clergy and the laity. Traditionally the church leaders have used that to keep



the clergy out of day-to-day politics. I think this is good for the church and good for politics. Politics is the business for laypeople which doesn't prevent any church leader on some occasions pointing out the moral dimensions of an issue. But it's a difficult business: one to know when to speak and second, when to know to speak opportunely—when you would have more influence speaking publicly or privately.

Finally, I am a little nervous as a church leader with these models of More and Bonhoeffer—both of them were martyred. I would prefer there to be Christian influence, by way of rational discussion, lobbying and so on, rather than the extremities of violence.

The three final lessons from the lecture. I am more than happy to go along with Paul's idea that we shouldn't push too far on the limits of religious freedom. I don't think there are any worries about our religious leaders pushing too far on that. This will be something that will need to be remembered by Christian laypeople who are active in politics.

I agree too that the day has passed—it was never present in Australia—for those who want to try to exclude religion from public debate.

And I also agree that moderation on all sides will be necessary. I am certainly committed to the maintenance of religious peace in Australia and especially between Christians and Muslims. They are fellow Australians when they are here and we have an obligation to protect their minority rights. I regularly talk with them and I have said that when things went badly and there was violence that it wouldn't be from religious Christians. The Muslim leaders that I spoke to readily agreed.

I would like to congratulate Paul on his paper and for throwing, as he customarily does, very useful light on what is a significant area of public life in Australia because I don't think Australian public life can be understood without some understanding of religion. ■





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