

Title: Australia's Christian heritage in public life
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This is an edited transcript of an address by Associate Professor Stuart Piggin at the City of Kingston Mayoral Prayer Breakfast on 10 May 2008.

1. The comments of a Sydney Bishop

Maybe it is because I am a [Sydney Anglican](#) (forgive me if you can) that I am fascinated by a suggestion relayed to me by a Sydney Bishop, which will sound absurd to you when you first hear it, namely that Australia is one of the few Western democracies which still has the opportunity to demonstrate what a Christianised democracy should look like. Europe has surrendered its Christian heritage.

Much to the chagrin of the current Pope, the European Community refused to include the word 'Christian' in its recent [failed constitution](#), preferring the word 'Reason'. And America, it has been suggested, has blown its Christian heritage to pieces with the antics of the current deplorable regime. So, it may just be that Australia becomes to the rest of the world what Ireland was in the [sixth century](#), the hope of the Christian movement.

Australia is one Western democracy which still has the opportunity to demonstrate what a Christianised democracy should look like. With that challenging absurdity in mind, let us address three questions:

1. Why would our democracy be better if it were more Christian, by which I mean if it retains and builds on the values of Jesus, so that Jesus becomes a greater part of our collective imagination?
2. How likely is it that our democracy is open to becoming more Christian?
3. What has to happen to make our democracy more Christian?

But before we look at those questions could I just explain that a couple of years ago Graham McDonald, a team leader with Campus Crusade for Christ, and I, together with Senator Guy Barnett, formed the [Australian Christian Heritage Foundation](#). Our purpose was to affirm that Australia's heritage is primarily a Christian one, that Australian public life will be strengthened in the future by the deliberate implementation of the values arising from that heritage.

To get started, we had to find a dozen federal parliamentarians to back us. Apparently if you want to hold a national forum in Parliament House, you have to have some backing. We were astonished at how easy that was. We have since been told that over 60% of federal politicians have a direct link with a Christian Church. So with 13 parliamentary hosts in place – 7 from the Coalition, 5 from Labor, and Family First – we held our first Christian Heritage National Forum in Parliament House, Canberra, in August 2006. 380 attended. The papers presented at the Forum are published in a book entitled [Shaping the Good Society in Australia](#), which is obtainable through the organisation's website (www.achf.org.au). It contains some of the latest, research-based findings on Christianity's contribution to the development of our nation and its role in public life. The chapter on Christianity and politics is written by Kevin Rudd.

1. Why would our democracy be better if it were more Christian?

First, there is a positive correlation between Christian belief and good citizenship. Rick Warren has said that ‘The church is the body of Christ, and for the last 50 years, the hands and the feet have been amputated. And all we’ve been is a big mouth.’ We Christians have had a negative attitude to engagement in the world.

Given this negative attitude it is not surprising that there are those who believe that the world has no need of us. Emily Maguire, the *Sydney Morning Herald’s* latest journalistic atheist, insists that Christianity is not needed to motivate people to love and good works. She claims: ‘Armies of non-believers work in both paid and volunteer positions caring for the homeless, the disabled, the poor and the ill. In any organisation devoted to social justice and environmental sustainability you will find many people who would describe their values as being secular or humanist rather than faith-based.’^[1] She makes no effort to quantify this claim. To have an army of non-Christians helping the needy was certainly what the emperor Julian wanted to achieve in the Roman Empire when he sought to reverse the christianisation which had overwhelmed the ancient world. Julian acknowledged that the Christians were so outstripping the Pagans in their practical commitment to caring for the poor and needy, that reversion to paganism would require the pagans to do likewise. The pagans did not take up the challenge. They did not then and they will not now, because it takes more than the demand of a Julian or the assertion of an Emily Maguire to make them do so.

We can demonstrate statistically, that even though we Christians have been saddled with a negative theology on public engagement and social concern, we have nevertheless greatly outstripped the rest of the population in that area. To my knowledge, the most concerted attempt to quantify and compare the respective contributions of Christians and others to social welfare and public engagement was in 1983 and is to be found in a book by two Melbourne sociologists, Beverly Dixon and Gary Bouma, called [*The Religious Factor in Australian Life*](#).

Their conclusions are quite striking.

- It is true that we have a pluralistic society and that it requires tolerance to make it work. It would seem that people who go to church weekly are the most tolerant and least racist group in Australia. People who say that they have no religion are also the most racist.
- If you are a non-churchgoer you are less likely to have children and more likely to shun commitment and insist on your own rights.
- If you have no religion you are less concerned about meeting people, you have less desire to be useful, you take less pride in your work, you want more holidays, and you feel more exploited.
- If you are a churchgoer you are more likely to take the opinions of other people seriously, you are more determined to make a contribution to society, and you are more inclined to think that life is meaningful and purposeful.
- If you are a churchgoer you are less likely to violate property rights or to harm other people or to cheat on your taxes or to avoid paying train fares or to take sickies, and you are 15% less likely to want to assassinate the PM. In 1983 our PMs were Fraser and Hawke.

[1] *SMH* January 13, 2007

Another Australian study demonstrates that churchgoers are far more likely to belong to welfare and community service organisations than non-churchgoers: three times as likely to belong to welfare and youth organisations, twice as likely to belong to community-service groups, and three and a half times more likely to belong to human rights groups.^[2]

A similar study in Britain in 2004 observed that those who did belong to a faith community exhibited comparatively high levels of interpersonal trust, trust in the police, respect for the law and of a citizen's duty to vote, higher than average levels of group membership, of engagement in informal activities, of political participation and of time donation.^[3]

If these things are the measure of citizenship, do church goers make better citizens than non-churchgoers? Not universally, just significantly. There is a direct positive correlation between Christian practice and the accumulation of social capital in terms of altruistic citizenship.

A second reason for believing that our democracy would be stronger if it were more Christian is that *there is a positive correlation between Christian heritage and strong nationhood.*

In 2005 a book written by American sociologist, Rodney Stark, was published called [*The Victory of Reason: How Christianity Led to Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success*](#). The 'modern world,' he argues 'arose only in Christian societies' thanks to Christianity's commitment to 'reason, progress, and moral equality'. The dust jacket to this book boasts that this is a revolutionary and long overdue idea. But it is actually a very old idea. We can trace it right back through history. The capacity which Christianity has to contribute to social, cultural and economic progress has been long observed.

In his book [*Jesus in Beijing*](#), the journalist David Aikman tells of a lecture he attended in China in 2002. A professor from the [*Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*](#) had this to say to a group of American visitors about his years of study in the West:

One of the things we were asked to look into was what accounted for the success, in fact, the pre-eminence of the West over all the world. We studied everything we could from the historical, political, economic, and cultural perspective. At first, we thought it was because you had more powerful guns than we had. Then we thought it was because you had the best political system. Next we focused on your economic system. But in the past twenty years, we have realized that the heart of your culture is your religion: Christianity. The moral foundation of social and cultural life was what made possible the emergence of capitalism and then the successful transition to democratic politics. We don't have any doubt about this.^[4]

Such an experiment to find the causes of national greatness and stability has a much longer history. Shortly after the [*Franco-Prussian War*](#) in 1871, in which the French were humiliated, the [*Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques*](#) was founded by a group seeking to diagnose the cause of French instability and weakness which they contrasted with British stability and strength. One [*Elie Halévy*](#) was invited to study in this school, and

[2] Kaldor, *Who goes where? Who Doesn't Care?* 1987, p.36f.

[3] Studies such as that by Charles Pattie, Patrick Seyd and Paul Whiteley, *Citizenship in Britain: Values, Participation and Democracy*, CUP, 2004 observed that those who did belong to a particular religion often exhibited exceptional characteristics: comparatively high levels of interpersonal trust, trust in the police, respect for the law and of a citizen's duty to vote, higher than average levels of group membership, of engagement in informal activities, of political participation and of time donation. Secular organizations working in the welfare sector reported that they had positive experiences of working with faith communities. So quantitatively faith makes a disproportionate contribution to social welfare.

[4] Cited in Cullen Schippe and Chuck Stetson (eds.), *The Bible and its Influence* (New York and Fairfax, Virginia: BLP Publishing, 2006) 373

he put forward what has become known as the [Halévy thesis](#) on the real cause of Britain's national greatness, namely the fact that it enjoyed a great religious revival producing the Methodist and evangelical movements.

You may have heard of the suggestion that [Methodism](#) prevented revolution in England. That is the Halévy thesis. But before Halévy advanced his thesis to explain the stable prosperity of the then most powerful nation on earth, another Frenchman had put forward a similar argument to explain the amazing rise to power of the United States. [Alexis de Tocqueville](#) (1805-1859) was a French aristocrat who toured the United States to observe the American people and their institutions. In his book, which has become a classic, [Democracy in America](#), published in 1835 and in 1840, he noted:

I sought for the key to the greatness and genius of America in her harbours ... in her fertile plains, in her boundless forests, in her rich mines and vast world commerce; in her public school systems and institutions of learning. I sought for it in her democratic Congress and her matchless Constitution. Not until I went into the churches of America and heard her pulpits flame with righteousness did I understand the secret of her genius and power.[5]

We can keep tracing the pedigree of this argument back through history. And, according to Edwin Judge, Professor of Ancient History at Macquarie University, it was [Eusebius](#), the church historian, who first put forward the argument that the Roman Empire was the safer for every member of its extensive population who became a Christian.

For almost 2000 years Christianity has been producing citizens who have contributed disproportionately to the stability and progress of the communities in which they have lived. [Jurgen Habermas](#), the venerated leftist philosopher, has recently claimed:

Christianity, and nothing else, is the ultimate foundation of liberty, conscience, human rights, and democracy, the benchmarks of Western civilisation. To this day we have no other options [to Christianity]. We continue to nourish ourselves from this source. Everything else is postmodern chatter.[6]

One of the reasons why Australia still has the chance of demonstrating what a Christian democracy might look like is that research into its Christian heritage shows that it is an excellent case study of the truth of the strong dependence of national harmony and strength on Christian values. At the Forum, [Ian Harper](#), the fair pay commissioner, gave an economic history of Australia from a Christian perspective.[7] He wove the Christian story into the narrative of our history. Shortly after settlement we needed to expand, and it was the expansionist aspirations of missionary-minded Christians who wanted to take the world for Christ which spilt over into economic expansionism. When capitalist economies were established in the colonies they needed Christian values to make them work, the rule of law and procedural justice, transparency in administration and government, honesty in business dealings, equality of all before the law regardless of race, gender or creed. Then thirdly, once the economy had cranked up, there was a need to share the wealth

[5] Cited in Cullen Schippe and Chuck Stetson (eds.), *The Bible and its Influence* (New York and Fairfax, Virginia: BLP Publishing, 2006) 373. Don Watson, the biographer of Keating, is making remarkably similar observations in his most recent book *American Journeys*. He has the Australian cynical eye, but he is no doubt about what is at the heart of the American soul: religion.

[6] Philip Jenkins, 'Godless Europe,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 31.3, July 2007, 12

[7] Ian R. Harper, 'Christian Foundations of Australia's Economic Development' in Stuart Piggott (ed.), *Shaping the Good Society in Australia: Papers read at the First Australia's Christian Heritage National Forum, Parliament House, Canberra, 6th-7th August 2006*, ACHNF, Macquarie University, 2006, 139-146.

around and to care for the poor and provide for the needy in the great social welfare initiatives including the advent of unions and the Labor Party which owed so much to Christian values and the sacrifice of Christian people.

2. Is Australian democracy open to becoming more Christian?

Well, given that there is a positive correlation between Christian practice and national health, how likely is it that our democracy would be open to becoming more Christian?

2.1 *Opening up to the Christian heritage is happening elsewhere*

I remember in the late 1980s having a stoush with Professor A D Gilbert, soon to be appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne. He was then writing on the history of secularisation, and his argument was that it is an irreversible process, that the churches are on the way out, and that [Gough Whitlam](#) may have been only half joking when he remarked on the opening of the new Parliament House that there won't be any Christians left by the year 2000. I contended that there was a growing interest in spirituality which threw some doubt on this thesis. Since then, of course, September 11 has cast a lot more doubt on it. In fact, a recent study of the relationship between church and state in 152 states claims that in all of them, without exception, there is an increasing engagement of politics with religion.^[8] One of the 152 states is Australia.

Historically faith has long been a privatised matter and the public square has been the preserve of another religion, a pale offspring of Christianity itself, namely secular, liberal humanism. Because of the long slumber of privatised faith, religion was not on the national agenda or in the public domain for much of the twentieth century.

But now all that is changing. There is more coverage of religion in the media than 20 years ago.^[9] There is now in Europe a growing awareness of the contribution which Christianity makes to social values, to the charitable sector, to personal well-being, and to a sense of community and cultural identity. In seeking to make Australians aware of the same matters, our Christian Heritage Foundation is just part of an international movement.

Reinforcing the Christian arrival in the public square has been the acknowledged role of Christian groups in the charity and welfare sectors. Just as in Australia, where, as we saw at our National Forum, 23 out of the top 25 charities based on income are Christian, so in Britain the contribution of Christianity is increasingly acknowledged, and governments welcome the partnership of faith communities in the delivery of social services.

Behind the government support for such partnerships is the growing awareness of the role of Christianity in promoting strong citizenship and personal mental health and well-being. A recent survey of 100 studies of the relationship between religious practices and beliefs, and well-being and mental health, found that 79 studies reported a significant positive association.^[10] It has been claimed that 'One of the most robust

[8] Jonathan Fox, 'World Separation of Religion and State into the 21st Century', *Comparative Political Studies*, 39.5, June 2006, 537-569.

[9] In the *Guardian* newspaper in Britain, to take but one example, the number of articles mentioning the word 'Christian' in 1985 was 770; 1995 it was 1221, and in 2005 it was 2341. The word 'Muslim' in 1985 was used in 408 articles; in 1995 in 1106; and in 2005 in 2114.

[10] H Koenig and H J Cohen (eds), *The Link between Religion and Health: Psychoneuroimmunology and the Faith Factor* (OUP, 2002).

findings of happiness research is that people who believe in God are happier.’^[11] Australian economist Clive Hamilton has observed that ‘Religious commitment and participation consistently appear as significant contributors to life satisfaction . . . spiritual striving contributes more to well-being than any other type of goal, including the goals of intimacy, power and symbolic immortality.’^[12] In Britain since 1992 the contribution which faith communities make to the building of civil society has been recognized officially and put onto a formal footing through the creation of the Cohesion and Faiths Unit in the Home Office. Maybe Australian governments need to devise similar structures which will allow the more effective application of our spiritual capital to building stronger communities.

2.2 *We are already a strongly Christianised nation*

In 2004 Garry Bouma and others conducted a study published as *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia*^[13] which the government funded in the wake of September 11. Repeatedly the authors of the report tell us that we now live in a paradoxically secular and multi-faith society. They want us to acknowledge the old reality of Australian secularism and the new reality that we are a land of many faiths, and they want all faiths to be given a better deal in the interests of generating more social capital for Australia.

But the examples of the generation of social capital in Australia given in the report are almost exclusively Christian. At the 2001 census 68% of Australians identified with a Christian denomination (68% do not go to church but they have no religious tradition apart from Christianity). The representatives of secularism are far fewer in number (16%) and of other religions fewer still at 6%. The logic of the situation forced itself on Bouma and company who, at the end of their report, advocate building a multi-faith society *around its Christian core*.^[14]

So Australia is best understood, not as a secular nation, nor a multi-faith nation. Australia is best understood as a Christianised nation: not secular, not multifaith, not Christian, but Christianised. Christian in our values and therefore in our family and professional institutions, especially the law and education, and in our business and governmental structures.

But it is not primarily in such statistics that we can demonstrate how Christianised Australia is. It is in our Christian heritage which can be traced back at least as far as the huge vision which [Wilberforce](#) and company had for us and which has shaped us so much that like breathing we hardly notice it unless someone draws our attention to it. And then we see it everywhere – why even your finance journalist who writes for *The Australian* has named himself after one of Wilberforce’s closest mates, Henry Thornton, the banker who was said to be the second richest man in Europe.

[11] Richard Layard, *Happiness: Lessons from the New Science* (Allen Lane, 2005) 72

[12] Clive Hamilton, *Growth Fetish*, (Pluto Press, 2003) 53

[13] D. Cahill, G. Bouma, H. Dellal and M. Leahy, *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* (Melbourne: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Australian Multicultural Foundation in Association with the World, Conference of Religions for Peace, RMIT University and Monash University, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004).

[14] D. Cahill, G. Bouma, H. Dellal and M. Leahy, *Religion, Cultural Diversity and Safeguarding Australia* (Melbourne: Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs and Australian Multicultural Foundation in Association with the World, Conference of Religions for Peace, RMIT University and Monash University, Commonwealth of Australia, 2004). 126.

2.3 Our Parliamentarians are open to collaboration with Christians

The Howard years saw a quite astonishing interaction of religion and politics. John Howard had an intuitive understanding of the relationship between history and values and religion which the secularists who make up our fourth estate and who are educated in an enlightenment world view have found quite bewildering, and which our church leaders, focused on building the church rather than the nation, also failed to understand to the same degree.

There was considerable depth in Howard's ministry of those who shared their leader's rather conservative Christian values. There were not only Protestants like himself, Downer, Costello, Ruddock, and the Reformed Church Senator Abetz, the chief spokesperson of the Lyons Forum, but there were even more Catholics: Abbott, Vaile, Coonan, Nelson, Andrews, Turnbull, McGauran, Pyne and Brandis. George Brandis, Howard's Minister for Arts and Sport, succeeded Rod Kemp, himself an old-style Presbyterian and a critic of the Australian Christian churches for being so wuzzy in public affairs.

The preponderance of Christian sentiment in Howard's ministry allowed for some striking social engineering along Christian lines: generous support of Christian schools, chaplains in schools, religion in the Australia-wide history syllabus.

Will there be a backlash against this overt engagement of Christianity in the public domain now that Labor is in power? Some secularists hope so and have expressed their hopes; many conservative Christians believe so and have filled our inboxes with emails prophesying the last days and reflecting adversely on Rudd's Christian credibility.

But whatever you make of Rudd's Christianity, it has already changed Australia. Asked how he wrote his apology to the stolen generations, Rudd replied that he went to Church and then he returned to the Lodge and there in his study he wrote the speech. The language of his speech has a biblical provenance and liturgical cadence rarely found in public life, and it has brought moral clarity to an issue which has bedevilled our nation, and it will shape our future by holding us to moral account.

Rudd is keen to bring the Labor Party back to its roots, which as we demonstrated at the National Forum, owed a great deal to Jesus. Rudd is an articulate spokesman for the prophetic tradition of [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#). His recent insistence on raising human rights issues in his first visit as PM to China has been acknowledged as courageous by the media, some of whom have attributed his courage to his Christian convictions. And he has encouraged church people to be likewise. 'Throughout, this country's history,' he wrote, 'the church has been at its best when it has been both fearless and informed in its ethical critique of government and corporate behaviour.'

He wants the prophetic voice of Christianity to speak into the political process, and bring some life to it. He wants it to do what he believes it is best at doing, namely making history from below, by taking the side of 'the marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed'. He wants to energise the Christian capacity for compassion and social justice, and he would be delighted, I'm sure, if Christians were to engage with enthusiasm in the government's present programs of social inclusion, indigenous reconciliation and uplift, and an improved contract with the charitable sector.

Rudd's ministry may not at first sight have the same depth of Christian commitment as Howard's and there are those who believe Rudd's Christian convictions will be swept away in a tsunami of Marxist revenge from the Union bosses who really control the party. But so far Rudd has proved sure-footed in this matter as in

most other matters, and he is not alone in his Christian conviction. [Senator Ursula Stephens](#) is a warm-hearted Catholic with a very good mind and her thinking on social inclusion is impressive. Rudd appointed her to meet with the representatives of the good and God, that is, charities and faith-based institutions.^[15] And Julia Gillard has met with some of the school chaplains appointed by Howard in his last year in office, and they reported being very happy with her attitude to their role.

Politics makes us focus too much on personalities, but Howard and Rudd are not two religious freaks. Maybe they are just reflective of a new, more religious age, with an informed appreciation of the value of the Christian heritage. Certainly this is no time for pussy-footing over our Christian heritage out of an imagined fear that our government is unsympathetic. It is quite the reverse.

We have every reason to be confident that our democracy is more open to enshrining Christian values in its public life than it has been for a long time.

3. What has to happen to make our democracy more Christian?

3.1 Rethink the relationship between Church and State

Australia has actually been very creative in its treatment of the relationship between Church and State. That relationship has changed a lot over time, and any view that we have never had an establishment or that Church and State have always been vigorously separated from each other is unhelpful because it is untrue. We have passed through four phases in the relationship between Church and State. It may be that NSW never had an established church, but there is no doubting that the first 50 years from 1788 to 1836 was effectively an Anglican establishment where the state paid the Church of England for its ministers and to conduct schools.

Then from 1836 with the Church Acts to about 1880 with the Education Acts, there was a plural or multiple establishment. Then from about 1880 to the early 1950s there was fairly clear separation of Church and State, but since the first granting of state aid by Menzies for the teaching of science in Church schools, we have had what has been called 'pragmatic pluralism'; the government will give any religious body the resources to run schools and increasingly welfare organizations if they deliver on government conditions which do not include denouncing God.

The study of our Christian heritage actually shows that we have enjoyed many experiments in the relationship between the Christian churches and the public domain, and it would be a loss if further experimentation were to be blocked through the insistence on too rigid a separation of church and state.

3.2 Be aware of the roles of government and how closely they parallel Christian concerns

[Geoff Mulgan](#), who headed up the Strategy Unit for Tony Blair's government, has written a stimulating book entitled [Good and Bad Power](#). Governments all over the world and for much of recent human history, he argues, have been concerned with four matters:

[15] There is Peter Garrett and Senator Nick Sherry who has gone public with his conviction that 'in our Western society these Judeo-Christian principles are very important and should be preserved'.^[15] Wayne Swan made a very forceful statement on the value of Christian principles to social and economic health at the National Forum, writing a fierce condemnation of a poor *Financial Review* journalist who was too stupid to see the connection. Anthony Byrne, Member for Holt in Victorian, who, along with Maxine McKew is a parliamentary secretary to Mr Rudd, at our Forum's first evening, made a striking call to deepen our understanding of the power of Christianity to shape our nation. Penny Wong is a Christian who said in Parliament that compassion, not economic efficiency, must be the core value of our collective consciousness.

- security;
- welfare and prosperity;
- justice;
- and knowledge^[16]

Governments are also increasingly concerned about satisfying the even more fundamental needs of citizens, namely the need to be in

- a family
- a community
- a spiritual dimension
- a situation of autonomy – we need freedom as well as responsibility

Do notice how compatible most of these needs are with the church. Secularisation involves the taking over by public authorities of responsibilities previously met by the church. It is just remarkable the extent to which governments are taking over more and more roles traditionally filled by churches. Governments now tell us how to behave just like the church used to; they condemn binge drinking for example and excessive use of poker machines and gambling; they have a high moral stance; and they have a strong ethic of service. They don't only do what the church used to do, but they seek to do it in the same way, morally, and with the same value attached to service.

Secularisation involves doing churchy things in a churchy way by non-churchy people, and while this has resulted in decades of marginalization of the church, it is now recognized that a very obvious partner for governments in the church-type activities is the church itself. Governments cannot do these things on their own. They will increasingly look to the church for co-partnering. The church can hardly credit that this suitor who has ignored them for so long has suddenly become interested in them, and so the church is tongue-tied in the presence of the suitor. But the church is exactly what the government needs, not only because it produces great citizens, and is capable of engendering great enterprise, but also because it knows what makes people tick. The church is everywhere, close to people in all the circumstances of their lives. It is much closer to people than governments and councils and hospitals.

[16] These four areas create the need for ministerial roles and departmental structures:

- Defence and Police;
- welfare and health;
- justice;
- and communications, science and education,

and these structures are in turn aligned with the professions:

- the defence forces and police;
- doctors; nurses; social workers and economists;
- lawyers and judges;
- scientists and academics.

And the four areas, their corresponding departmental structures and the professions, are expressive of sedimentary human motivations and needs:

- the drive for survival;
- the drive for happiness;
- the deep-seated orientation towards fairness and justice;
- and the need to learn.

We are at a crossroads. Will we become more secular or less? There is something unresolved about modern government in a secular society such as ours. It has evolved from less complicated societies where the church was at the centre. Government today takes on many of the roles and aura of the church and disavows the spiritual premises which it is dependent upon for its power and prestige. Taken to its extremity, this development led either to communism or to pro-market neoliberalism.

Both of these were destructive of core elements in human wellbeing: the family, the spiritual life and to the environment. So recent governments in Western democracies realise that, for the sake of the wellbeing of those whom they govern, they must preserve more of what they inherited from an earlier age when the church was less marginalized. This includes the essential insight that humans are spiritual beings and they need strong family and community structures in which to flourish.

Secular governments will not only wish to mine their mineral resources to promote material wellbeing, but they will need to mine their Christian heritage to promote social wellbeing. Only when we draw more on our spiritual capital will the nation find the resources to deal with our deepest problems.

Conclusion

Labor icon [Ben Chifley](#), in 1951, three days prior to his death, stated:

You have to be quite clear about what you believe in, whether popular or unpopular, and you have to fight for it ... if I think a thing is worth fighting for, no matter what the penalty may be, I will fight for the right, and truth and justice will always prevail.

I believe that Jesus' influence is to be found at all times in Australian history and in all places throughout our land. His influence is there to be discovered. It will be discovered not only by the Christian historian, but by every Australian Christian, all of whom have a story to tell, an experience of Jesus to relate. By discovering and telling these stories, Jesus will reoccupy the collective imagination of Australia, and this will transform our nation, for his influence has always been the key to good government, good citizenship and strong nationhood. There are great advantages for all Australians in building our national future on the foundation of our Christian heritage. On that foundation we can build a safer, healthier, more prosperous, more just, and more knowledgeable nation.

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