

# New College Lectures – Rev Dr Andrew Cameron

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## **Making it Work:**

### ***Proposals for Future Engagement between Church and State***

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If you go to Richard Johnson Square on the corner of Hunter and Bligh streets in the city, you'll find an old obelisk which has quite a story to tell about the rather messy origins of Christianity in this country. For me it's a bit of a parable.

Around the base of the memorial you'll find four plaques. The one facing west tells us that the memorial was laid down by the NSW Head of State in 1925. The southern plaque tells us that it is 'To the Glory of God' and commemorating the first Christian service held in Australia, on February 3rd 1788, about a week after the First Fleet landing in Port Jackson, and that Richard Johnson, chaplain to the Fleet, was the preacher.

What was it like to be at that first Christian service in Australia? The words on the eastern face begin to place us in the moment, telling us that the convicts and their jailers heard a sermon preached that day, based on Psalm 116:12 – "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits to me?" – or, in a popular modern translation, "How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?" (It is a rhetorical question, of course: the Lord's benefits, given to the Psalmist as a rescue from great anguish and the threat of death, are being pictured as so bounteous that the only possible response is joyful acceptance.)

This was either a great sermon, as the convicts and jailers thought about their rescue from another kind of suffering and anguish: landfall, after a jail sentence, and a long and treacherous sea-voyage, now with the hope of a new start in a big land.

Or, it was a terrible sermon, as the convicts eyed their chains, their jailers, the drab, alien and unremitting bush before them, and perhaps even the timid onlookers peeping from that bush, almost invisible, with their skin coloured to match a summer sun more unbearable than any London slum dweller ever had to endure in his or her life.

The fourth plaque tells us that the first church was built on the same site as that first sermon, and lasted only five years. I think we see a bit of laconic 1920's humour in ambiguity the key verb on this plaque, 'burned'. It's either a passive, as in 'the church burned down', or an active, as in 'they burned down the church'. It turns out to have been the latter: maybe that first sermon didn't really take.

Christianity has had messy beginnings in this country, and it has stayed that way to a certain extent. I want to explore what this messiness means for us.

My first section, 'messy Australia', will revisit and sum up some of what I said last night. I want to illustrate my view with my next section, 'the abortion example'. This example will enable us to consider a concept that is not talked about now, the 'common good'. I'll throw in a few more examples of how we relate when I ask 'what else is at stake?'; we'll have a short 'note on Islam', and I'll end with 'some tips for forward progress'.

## **1. Messy Australia**

Australia is in the fortunate position of being somewhere between the United States and the United Kingdom on Church and State. We don't have an established church, and we don't we

have the arguments that are rending U.S. public debate. Australia's free-wheeling, imprecise and sometimes frustrating Church-State relationship actually represents a not-so-bad state of affairs.

But for humanist Max Wallace, the imprecision of the Australian situation means that we have what he calls a 'flawed democracy'.<sup>1</sup> What makes it flawed for Wallace is, simply, that separation of Church and State has not been completed to his satisfaction.

I don't think Australia doesn't have flaws. For example, there are terrible flaws in our care for the mentally ill<sup>2</sup>; many of our populace feel insecure and alone; and Sydney doesn't know how to live within its water supply. But Wallace highlights the doctrinaire secularist assertion that the thing is broken just because it does not fit their purist ideal. I can't really fathom why someone would elevate that to being the chief flaw, or how someone could be so unhappy about a country that is generally so good.

What we have is a state of affairs that reflects how people are, how societies work, and where governments fit in.

Let us pause and remember Augustine's metaphor of the two cities, one meshed into the other, both jostling against each other, one with its eye on peace with Christ, the other with its eye on peace through the flesh. That metaphor does a lot better at helping us picture what is actually going on in our society than does the metaphor of two Institutions with a 'line', a 'wall' or even (as I now occasionally hear) a 'gap' 'separating' them.

Christians stand in an ambiguous relation to the state, supporting it, being helped by it, and often giving it a hard time. Hence a constitutive element of this thing called liberal democracy is that there will always be what Martin E. Marty calls "collisions and doubts" between Church and State. "The line has always been messy, the wall has always had breaches, and this will always be so."<sup>3</sup> In other words, there are no real 'lines', 'walls' or 'gaps' here: it is more like a sea, with currents. "Wading into the turbulent waters of the relationship between church and state is always a treacherous affair, whether entering from the church or state side."<sup>4</sup> So Terry Monagle can say of our local scene, "There have been three all-powerful tendencies in Australian society: the secular, the Catholic, and the Protestant forces. Some of Australia's life-changing debates have been determined by the fluctuating alignment of these forces."<sup>5</sup>

In other words, the thing is a mess. It is a mess of people who do not and often cannot agree. But perhaps it is the best kind of mess, because it has delivered a life together that is, overall, one of the most peaceful on the planet. It seems to get the poor fed and clothed, the kids educated and the crime rate low.

And outrageous blindspots do get noticed—Churchly ones (such as sexual abuse cover-ups), Stately ones (such as draconian incarceration practices), or both (such as State-Church collusions in the mistreatment of the Stolen Generation). This mess we call home seems to keep half-remembering, in the most faltering and tenuous of ways, the things that have always mattered: raising children well, telling the truth, keeping promises, not living for gold. Each side

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<sup>1</sup> Max Wallace, "Is There a Separation of Church and State in Australia and New Zealand?," *Australian Humanist* New Series No. 77, Autumn (2005); online: <http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/MaxWallace.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Mental Health Council of Australia, *Not For Service* (2005); online: <http://www.mhca.org.au/notforservice/index.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Martin E. Marty, "Collisions and Doubts," *Sightings* May 16 (2005); online: [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2005/0516.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2005/0516.shtml) (accessed 26/10/2005).

<sup>4</sup> Ken A. Grant, "The Two Swords of Pope Benedict XVI," *Sightings* May 5 (2005); online: [http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive\\_2005/0505.shtml](http://marty-center.uchicago.edu/sightings/archive_2005/0505.shtml) (accessed 19/07/2005).

<sup>5</sup> Terry Monagle, "The new Catholic ascendancy," *The Age*, August 13 2002; online: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/08/12/1029113893743.html>

yells ‘foul’ far too easily, but in so doing, we often seem to be able to come up with ways of proceeding that aren’t too outrageous.

Which is why, incidentally, I don't accept the ‘moral rot’ or ‘rise of the right’ theses. I do agree that often enough in human history, people have stopped caring for one another so that the social fabric has unravelled. I also agree that malevolent, ideological governments can arise. It’s not wrong to be vigilant. But it is also the case that, in the good purposes of God, societies can roll along for many years, and even centuries, oscillating drunkenly around some bearable average where life is good, and where the worst excesses are, in the goodness of God, somehow corrected.

In Australia, the current arrangements have not delivered either ‘city’s’ version of utopian peace, but it’s generally workable enough. So neither theocracy nor doctrinaire secularism are needed; and in the middle, there’ll be the continual, day-to-day battle for *wisdom* about what to do and what arguments for it are best. Life is too complex for anything better than that. We simply cannot parley some general protocol or grand theory or final treaty that will settle in advance how Church and State should interact. We’ll only arrive at new situations – new injustices gradually or suddenly recognised; new policies and laws proposed; emerging societal trends causing someone to worry; and then as always it will be on for young and old, until we can agree on something workable. U.S. Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff puts it well:

The agreement arrived at need not be an agreement based on principles rich enough to settle all substantial political issues whatsoever. Sufficient if it be agreement on the matter at hand. It need not be agreement based on principles shared by all alike. Sufficient if all, each on his or her own principles, come to agreement on the matter at hand. It need not be agreement for all time. Sufficient if it be agreement for today and tomorrow. It need not be agreement that one can reasonably expect of all human beings whatsoever. Sufficient if it be agreement among us. It need not even be agreement among every one of us. Sufficient if it be the fairly-gained and fairly executed agreement of the majority of us.<sup>6</sup>

## **2. The abortion example**

By way of example, I want to mention just one such parleying that is currently underway.

A recent round of so-called Church-State debate in Australia began when a Catholic Federal Health Minister decried the high abortion rate in this country.<sup>7</sup> He didn’t say that it was wrong because Rome told him so. He said that it seemed like too high a number, that something had gone wrong for a society to end one in five of its pregnancies in termination.<sup>8</sup>

The episode triggered by his view illustrates how the mess that I have been talking about proceeds.

No doubt Abbott’s Roman Catholic roots alerted him to what he saw. But his ‘religious motivations’ have not proven inaccessible to everyone: it turns out that many people think there is something wrong with the abortion rate.<sup>9</sup> Same shared environment, remember, which many of us want to be user-friendly for women and kids, yet the magnitude of our abortion practice is

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<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Why We Should Reject What Liberalism Tells Us about Speaking and Acting in Public for Religious Reasons," in *Religion and Contemporary Liberalism*, ed. Paul Weithman, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 181.

<sup>7</sup> Tony Abbott, *The Ethical Responsibilities of a Christian Politician* (2004); online: [http://www.tonyabbott.com.au/speech/04mar16\\_ethicalresp\\_politician.pdf](http://www.tonyabbott.com.au/speech/04mar16_ethicalresp_politician.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Parliament, *Answers to Questions on Notice re Abortion* (2005); online: <http://www.ronboswell.com/m2005.33.5.html> (accessed 26/10/2005).

<sup>9</sup> Southern Cross Bioethics Institute, *Give Women Choice: Australia Speaks on Abortion* (2005); online: <http://www.bioethics.org.au/docs/givingchoice/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>.

unheard of in human history. That suggests a society that might be under some kind of stress: each woman's free choice being affected by pressures and constraints upon them, which they may be unaware of.

And although feminist thinkers have no interest in being associated with Abbott and other Catholic men, they may wonder about those women having abortions who would prefer to have a child. The emphasis for feminists and traditional Christians is different: the first are thinking primarily about the woman, the second about the child, but surprisingly, a tenuous common ground is beginning to appear.

In this unruly debate, the disputants have different objects of love. Some love that all women may express their autonomy. Others love that communities may welcome children and care for their mothers. But even though these opponents have a longstanding habit of hating and fearing each other, there are moments when we angrily veer toward agreement.

Of course the polarised extremists in the debate want to argue that no new agreement can ever be parleyed. There is the Christian who thinks the only way forward is total repeal of existing abortion laws. There is the feminist who argues that a woman should be arrested immediately if her aborted foetus was, indeed, a person.<sup>10</sup>

But conversely, others begin to see each other a little more clearly. Catharine Lumby insists that she and the women she's grieved with over abortion have known that a child is being lost, but that those who oppose abortion have to come up with something much more helpful than law if to help to women.<sup>11</sup> Some are hearing this call, and thinking hard about what that different society might look like.<sup>12</sup> They are remembering that mere coercion of law is never a very useful way to really help people. They are wondering about workplace practises, social structures, and government policy, to try and make Australia more user-friendly for women and their children.

It turns out that Abbott's view hasn't changed Federal policy on abortion. The existing status quo remains. Yet a new generation of thinkers, both Christians and secular, are pondering if there is a new agreement for *this* day about how to structure our society, that might be more satisfying for all.

### **3. 'Common good'**

That new generation is reaching for a something that people used to think about a lot, but which is easily lost, and hard to find, but yet remains useful.

We are called 'the Commonwealth of Australia', which at first only looks as if we share riches, as in 'common wealth'. To an extent that is true: we do share riches in terms of participating in an economy, and using common infrastructures. But that economic truth is only one aspect of a deeper truth that was once being expressed by this term. 'Wealth' comes from an older word for what is good, 'weal', hence a 'commonwealth' was always meant to be about a society of people committed to a 'common good'.

Just pointing to the name of our country doesn't prove anything on its own. The name could be wrong. If social contractarians are right, we are all just a bunch of individuals rattling around alone before we die alone, negotiating contracts along the way to get what we want. Of course there are a lot of reasons to think that social contractarianism is not an adequate account of where our society came from, what is good for humanity or how best to think about our life together. (In my view, our government is not aware of the crippling extent to which its current

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<sup>10</sup> Emily Maguire, "If terminations are really murder, there should be no abortion debate," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 9 2005.

<sup>11</sup> Catharine Lumby, *Abortion, Tony Abbott and 'feminists'* (2004); online: <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=2437>

<sup>12</sup> Katrina George, "First Create Choice," *The Courier Mail*, 9 May 2005; online: <http://www.womensforumaustralia.org/docs/First%20create%20choice.pdf>.

thinking about industrial relations ‘reform’ relies upon social contractarianism.) The fact that we were called a ‘Commonwealth’ indicates that there has been an alternative tradition at work in Australia: the concept of a community who seeks together for a good life, in quality relationships with one another.

We are not great at seeing ‘common good’ at the moment, because at the moment, our intellectual habit is to think that the atomic unit of society is the individual rather than her relationships, and so we stress her rights. But whatever we make of these rights, the concept of ‘common good’ hasn’t disappeared. When government deliberates about a new hospital or freeway or tax policy or laws against terrorists, it is making moral judgments about what is good for us all – that is, about the common good – all the while balancing interests and rights and preferences as best it can.

Once we’ve remembered that there is such a thing as a common good, we can better understand two aspects of our life together: the Stately function of political representation, and the Churchly function of prophecy .

### *a) Representation*

Many of our fights about ‘Church and state’ are actually fights about how we think it works to have a member of Parliament ‘representing’ us. We are in fact fighting about the concept of political representation.

In the mess of human society, rulers are going to turn out to be Christian. The first one happened to be Constantine, but it was always going to be someone. Today, some MPs are going to turn out to be Christian too. Even if they weren’t voted in that way, Christianity has the most annoying habit of bagging people when they least expect it, so some sitting MPs are going to become Christians. Are they expected to switch off Christian thinking in order to represent their pluralist constituency, as the Governor of California does?

Schwarzenegger, who is Catholic, said he had no trouble squaring his faith with his support of abortion rights and other moderate stances contrary to church teachings. Religion should not shape public policy, he argued.

"The people of California, all of them are not Catholics. So therefore, I do not bring in my religion into this whole thing," Schwarzenegger said. "As a matter of fact, religion should have no effect on politics."

"If you make a decision it should not be based on your religious beliefs," he added. "I'm a big believer in separation of church and state."<sup>13</sup>

I fear that Governor Schwarzenegger has erroneously accepted the view that to follow Christ is to adopt an inner private posture called ‘religion’. How do I suggest he might think instead?

Christianity has the theological resources to produce representatives who care justly for others. Caring for others Christianly is going to include not forcing them, by law, to do what only the Spirit can bring about within them; however their care for others is not going to be uninformed by their Christianity.

We misunderstand the task of our MPs if we think they must somehow embody each and every view of all their constituents, or as if they are just a delegate to enact what we want. Without getting too far into heavy political philosophy, Edmund Burke (1774) hit on something when he told the electors of Bristol that “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.”<sup>14</sup> Good

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<sup>13</sup> AAP, "Arnie's never considered White House bid," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 28, 2005; online: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Arnies-never-considered-White-House-bids/2005/02/28/1109439481761.html>.

<sup>14</sup> *Speech to the Electors of Bristol (1774)*, in Edmund Burke, *Select Works of Edmund Burke, and Miscellaneous Writings* ed. E. J. Payne and Francis Canavan, (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, Inc, 1999); online: <http://www.econlib.org/library/LFBooks/Burke/brkSWv4c1.html> (accessed 24 October 2005).

doctors know what we do not about the operation of the body, and we trust them. Good plumbers know what we do not about pipes, and we trust them. Good government officials know what we do not about what is happening in society, and while their judgments demonstrably assist the common good, we trust them.

Where will we get such people from, that are able to make wise judgments for the common good? We should expect that the kind of people who care for others will emerge from what philosophers call “thick traditions of moral enquiry”<sup>15</sup>—that is, from places that are rich with stories, theories and practices that have taught a person how people might live well together.

However Rawlsian liberalism teaches that we must all pretend to come to the public table without any of those pasts, with the result that Muslim Ed Husic, and Christian Steve Fielding, are expected not to advertise their religious identity, and are then treated as if they’ve done something dirty or wrong when their religion becomes known. (The high-camp ‘intrigue’ surrounding the Family First Party’s Assemblies of God connections in the 2004 campaign is well known. Ed Husic was an ALP candidate who remains convinced that his political enemies used the fact of his religious belief against him.<sup>16</sup>)

The bottom line is that our leaders need to deliberate about what kind of society we would like to inhabit, and then make *judgments* accordingly. Of course Christianity, for some of them, will help them to shape such a view. In allowing it to shape their view they have not done anything remotely like having ‘established a religion’, ‘imposed a religious observance’, or ‘prohibited the free exercise of a religion’, to use the words of s.116 of our Constitution.

### *b) Prophecy*

Likewise church leaders are not stepping beyond their purview when they consider the common good, when they speak about what kind of society we might inhabit, and when they attack proposals and policies which Christian wisdom says are disastrously opposed to the human good. Of course we do need to emphasise something often-misunderstood by observers: in making their prophecies, Christians do *not* perceive themselves to be ‘better’ or ‘more righteous’ or ‘morally superior’ to those around them (or at least in the terms of the Christian gospel, they are not meant to and have no such warrant). In words attributed to Sri Lankan Christian D.T. Niles, Christianity is just “one beggar telling another beggar where he found bread.”

I won’t say much more about this prophecy, because I’d prefer to say something about how our government interacts with Christian comment.

Alexander Downer<sup>17</sup> was absolutely right to attack one church leader for being misinformed about the most basic facts of a discussion. Anyone is at their most helpful when they limit their comments to what they’ve researched properly, and church leaders don’t have any exemption from this rule. In this particular case, Downer was disappointed that the leader in question seemed to be able to display enormous confidence in complex matters of foreign policy, while yet being filled with doubt about whether Christ might have risen from the dead or not. You can trust your plumber on Iraq just that little bit less when you find that he doubts the existence of pipes.

But the current Liberal government does exhibit a vice to which all governments are prone: the tendency to punish Christian commentators for speaking against Government policy, while enfolding and praising those who endorse it. A government with proper respect for the Church-

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<sup>15</sup> David Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56.

<sup>16</sup> Ed Husic, "Religion was used as a weapon," *Sydney Morning Herald*, October 20 2005; online: <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/religion-was-used-as-a-weapon/2005/10/19/1129401314365.html>

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Downer, *The Sir Thomas Playford Annual Lecture* (2003); online: [http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2003/030827\\_playford.html](http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2003/030827_playford.html) (accessed 24/08/2005).

State relation neither feels threatened by Christian disagreement nor overtly courts its approval. It just listens carefully, to discover if it has drifted into any of the pretension, hubris and self-deception into which the powerful are always likely to drift. When governments drift that way, they forget that the purpose of a State is to protect the people. True Christian prophecy calls the State back to the common good.

#### **4. What else is at stake?**

I've already touched on our abortion debate, and we're pretty used to the idea of religious contributions to law and policy on bioethics and sexual ethics. But where else do we find the church-state discussion appearing?

In the U.S., it has surrounded prayer in public schools, tax breaks, and religious symbols and texts on public property. The debate has never been quite so heightened in Australia. There have always been issues surrounding town planning, tax breaks (although different to those in the U.S.), church employment policy, state aid for church social welfare, and state aid for religious schools. I will go on and say a little about three of these – tax breaks, social welfare and schooling

**Tax breaks.** As I've said yesterday, there has always been a greater sense in Australia that impartial help to all religions is not going to harm the common good. The tax breaks, for example, have been a recognition that churches are not a business and have a low cash flow which is just enough to cover their overheads. The tax breaks are a *quid pro quo* for the way churches contribute to social cohesion, social capital, and assistance to the marginalised. Of course I'd agree that the terrain has changed in the case of churches that seem primarily to be running a profit-making business.

**Social welfare.** Government funding for a church to help the poor is often when we'll see the most spectacularly nutty use of 'separation of Church and State' language, because in that case, there is no doubt that the government has furthered the Church's goals (to help others), and that the Church has furthered the State's goals (to protect its people). But doctrinaire secularism at its most inane will question even this cooperation. Consider this sad attempt by *The Age* to beat up government assistance to Hillsong's welfare work.

##### **Church blessed by liberal handout**

An evangelical Christian church with links to the Liberal Party has received almost \$800,000 in grants from government departments in the past five years.

The Sydney-based Hillsong Church has received \$473,588 from the Department of Family and Community Services since 1999 [+ \$300k from Department of Workplace Relations in 2003-04] ... The money was given to fund various programs, including family workers, youth activity services and 'emergency relief'.

I have concerns about whether Hillsong has a profit-making wing, but this report, and the ALP line of attack that it was based on, was rather pathetic. The \$473k averages into \$94k per year for an area of ministry that does not just include the affluent Hills district, but also a significant chunk of Western Sydney. So I find those suspicious inverted commas around 'emergency relief' a bit forced, and a little ridiculous, as if people don't get poor and desperate just because they live in Baulkham Hills.

The report went on to outline the 'links to the Liberal Party', which weren't very sinister, and then quoted the ALP's Dr Carmen Lawrence: "I just think that there's a potential recipe for a failure to separate church from state," which is a kind of tentative way to put it; but even so, it remains unclear just what she wants separated. And neither the reporter, nor Dr Lawrence, noticed the irony of the next line: "Hillsong was a 'quite extreme' brand of Christianity, she said." When, on anybody's reading of 'Church and State', does a government minister get to make a value judgment on a religion? I do have some questions about whether Hillsong always

conducts their affairs wisely; but this unselfconscious doctrinaire secularism of this story is the real story.

**Schooling.** Perhaps the biggest area, both in U.S. and Australian history, where church and state collide is over the education of our children. That's unavoidable, of course, because all the different 'objects of love' that adults have get cashed out with a weird intensity when it comes to their kids. I can't possibly unravel for you all the ins and outs of when it comes to education: it's a microcosm, if you like—a laboratory version of all our more general disagreements. The U.S. argument over the First Amendment has turned questions about schooling into a very close-quarters battle indeed, as indicated by this summary from the *Harvard Law Review*:

The Court has held that the state may reimburse parents for the costs of public bus services to take students to and from non-public schools, but it may not pay for buses to take students on field trips. The state may furnish textbooks, but not other educational materials such as maps or film projectors. Publicly funded remedial teaching off the school premises is allowed, but remedial teaching on the school premises is not. The state may reimburse a sectarian school for administering state-created tests, but it may not fund tests created by school's [*sic*] own teachers. Finally, the state may fund a wide variety of institutions and activities indirectly through tax subsidies that it may not fund directly.<sup>18</sup>

Our own system, where public money goes directly to religious schools, is quite alien for anyone from the U.S. We have a group call the 'Defence of Government Schools' (who actually like to call themselves 'DOGS'), which is hostile to the current arrangements, and lost a High Court case in 1981, where it was found that §116 did not prohibit state aid to schools, because state aid was about education, not religion.

I'm really not expert enough to say much for or against any of this Australian story. I'm a fairly ignorant observer, and I certainly want to see more government funding for both of the state schools that my children attend; but I'm also happy to say that religious schools, and state aid to them, exemplify Church and State cooperating for the common good. (Of course just distribution of funding to schools is a moral issue, but is a different moral issue than that of religious schools receiving assistance.) Theologically, I think this cooperation also exemplifies another truth that Augustine noticed: that *scarcity is not the problem*. God has graciously placed us in such a richly abundant setting that there is enough for generosity toward both Church school kids and State school kids.

## **5. Note on Islam**

I promised that I'd offer a small note on Islam.

I've not wanted these Church and State lectures to becoming proxy for a discussion of pluralism. Don't mishear me, though: I'm not against a multicultural society. It is just that some perspective is needed.

The 2001 census figures show 20.7% Anglican, 26.6% Catholic, 20.7% to be other Christians, 15.5% no religion, 11.7% not stated, and 4.9% identifying with other religions.<sup>19</sup>

These numbers can be abused. I don't think they mean that the Christians have an automatic authority to rule in any way they want. Anyone who is not a Christian must be absolutely safe and secure under our laws and social policies, with as much freedom to speak and persuade, even if their numbers dropped to 0.01%. I hope that at no point you've been hearing me to say,

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<sup>18</sup> Cited in Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Year Book Australia: Culture and recreation: Religious affiliation," (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005); online: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/E4F6E98AA14943F3CA256F7200832F71?Open>.

‘hey, we have the numbers, so others should shut up’. Indeed I oppose this kind of Christian argument, which does occasionally arise.

The numbers simply show that there has been some warrant for our emphasis upon the Christian Church over the past two days. In some ways, it is still the sea that our culture and history swims in. *Of course* there is a place for us to discuss how the most dominant form of religious thought in this country should be expressed politically.

The figures also give one clear reason for why the undertow of fear and paranoia about Muslim people is unwarranted. Remember they are only some proportion of the 4.9%; and a small group of people like this has much more to fear from the majority than the majority does from them. The other obvious reason why fear and paranoia are wrong, is that we can point to historical examples of Muslim and Christian communities living alongside one another in peace.<sup>20</sup>

I oppose the lazy secularism that tries to bunch all religious people together under general claims. Religions are either all made out all to be bad, because they have a holy book or believe in an afterlife and therefore somehow promote anti-social behaviour. Or they are made out all to be good, because of course it is the moderates in each religion who are ‘truly’ religious since they believe nice things about respecting life and caring for others; and anyway, all religions believe the same nice things. Or so the story goes. But neither story is true. Those kinds of stories are just inventions by modern people who don’t know what real people actually believe, either because they don’t know anyone religious, or haven’t been bothered to go and find out.

I’ve asked you in these lectures to deal with Christianity *in its particularity*. I’ve asked you to hear why it has the resources and convictions to help build a common good, and a peaceful society, free of the fear of religious rule. If you are concerned about Islam for some reason, my suggestion is that you deal with it *in its own particularity*. Find three Muslims and three imams and ask them: “What does Islam teach on the Mosque-State relationship? We want to hear about your theological resources.”

Islam would approach the matter rather differently than does Christianity. My understanding is that rather than pointing to a tradition like the one Jesus began when he talked about Caesar’s coin [Matt. 22:15-22], I understand that Muslim answers would have to do with Mohammed’s different experiences in the hostile Meccan and friendly Medinan communities.

But I’ve only read a very little about Muslim political philosophy, so I’m not going to share any more on the matter, for the same reason that I’m not going to try and lecture you about plumbing. You want to know how to live with Islamic people? Go and talk to them – or at least keep asking the media to go and do so for you, because that is meant to be part of their job. Deal with religions in their particularity. Don’t do that lazy and indeed *intolerant* manoeuvre of trying to sum them all up under some general idea called ‘religion’.

One more point. Sometimes decisions are going to have to be made. David Fergusson points to the problem liberalism has with “communities whose practices and convictions reject the priority attached to the autonomous self” and “the example of a Muslim community committed to schools which teach young girls the importance not of autonomy and choice, but of obedience and piety.”<sup>21</sup> Should that be permitted? If you are politically liberal, and if you think that ‘Church-State separation’ equals ‘Religion-State separation’, then this case will be a rather acid test for you.

## **6. Some tips for forward progress**

Here then is a summary of my tips for forward progress

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, 151.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

a) *Everyone*

1. **Distinguish ‘Church and State’ from ‘religion and politics’.** Stop talking as if the language of ‘separation’ can solve every problem. Start talking of a ‘difference between’ church and state, and understand there will always be overlap.
2. **Reject doctrinaire secularism** as just another form of ‘establishment’.
3. **Argue content, not meta-debate.** For example *explain why* Abbot is wrong about the abortion rate. Don't just slur his Christianity, because that's not an argument, it's just an insult.

b) *Non-religious people*

4. **Deal with religions in their *particularity*.** Stop trying to apply what was learnt in this culture, via Christianity, to other religions. Religions are different, each will have to give its own account of its relationship to the State, and the modern liberal state will have to try to articulate its relationship to each religion.
5. **Stop being ‘chicken little’ about religious conflict** and demanding that religious disagreements, and ‘unpleasant’ religious claims, must be censored. This patronising stance assumes religious people are so crazily unstable that a moment of verbal disagreement will result in all-out war. But the more you talk like this, the more it will become a self fulfilling prophecy: the continued censoring of religious disagreement only deskills the populace from learning how to discuss and handle and navigate their differences. Rather, accept that religions disagree, encourage them to talk about it, and ask and expect that they will handle disagreements civilly.<sup>22</sup> And of course *precisely* the reason we separated religion from State government was so that the State may intervene if anyone does try to hurt anyone else.
6. **Stop making public figures have to hide** their religion, so that you can then act as if you've caught them doing something dirty when it emerges. Make it that people running for public office can be up-front about their religion, without penalty.
7. **Entertain the possibility** that religious people may be on to something, even if you can't see it. Prophecy is never going to obey the terms of the dominant paradigm—that is the whole point of it.
8. **Think again about Christ.** Christians think that so-called freedom from religion is overrated, To honour only oneself is a form of slavery, and your attempts to you stay away from Christian discourse just does yourself a disservice. Another reason to think again about Christ is because his Lordship keeps ending ecclesiastical and secular tyranny.<sup>23</sup> Christian will always put the brakes on government, and will keep bearing witness against the titanic pretensions of government, either until they are martyred, or until government humbles itself again.

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<sup>22</sup> Locke's ‘marketplace test’ asserts that the likelihood of causing offence in the marketplace is the test of whether a religious utterance should be said. Peter Young applies this test when he says that “an opinion ... that ‘Christians are deceived heretics because they divide the Deity and ignore the Prophet’s revelation’ could well express opinions that inflame the market-place and campus and disturb civil order.” [Peter Young, "Church and State in the Legal Tradition of Australia," *Journal of Anglican Studies* 1 no. 2 (2003), 117.] But this ‘test’ is surely overdone, because it excludes the possibility of prophecy and replaces it with a canonical form of politeness. In societies bound to the ‘marketplace test’ and to canonical politeness, the realm of ‘acceptable’ public discourse inexorably shrinks; a community becomes de-skilled in verbally navigating difficult differences; the concept of ‘taking offence’ is too easily pressed into service as a mock display to silence disagreement and consolidate power; and differences are driven underground to fester in potentially a far more dangerous mode than when they are aired. As an evangelical Christian, I would ask for the kind of society where Muslims are free to openly accuse me of heresy, so that I might (a) learn how to receive this critique appropriately, (b) exhibit modes of reply that model civility and acceptance of the other, even during disagreement; and (c) consider whether they are, in fact, giving me opportunity to be freed into the truth.

<sup>23</sup> In Geoffrey Robertson's recent study, Christian theology contributes significantly to the ending of Charles I tyrannical seventeenth-century reign. [Geoffrey Robertson, *The Tyrannicide Brief: The Story of the Man who sent Charles I to the Scaffold* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2005)].

c) *Christians:*

9. **Get your facts right.** We've heard this point made repeatedly already, so I won't labour it again here.<sup>24</sup>
10. **Stop relying on the political process** as cheap opportunity to make a point. Christians might need to be working harder at finding creative ways of making their point about how society works, when the stakes are not as high as that time when the parliament is about to make a decision. Something like these lectures are a good model! Write an essay, run a seminar, have a reading group, just find new ways to get people around you thinking through ethics and politics from the perspective of Christian theology.
11. **Watch your language.** Fights about religion and politics are sometimes about what kind of language can be expected to work.<sup>25</sup> Rorty's complaint is that our sacred texts just carry no force for him; they are a 'conversation stopper'.<sup>26</sup> Now I think his problem is actually connected to some hangups about how Christians think the Bible works. The Bible gives epistemic access to the ontological layout of our world, but some Christians think the Bible is an ontological endpoint in itself. They think that simply saying its words is sufficient, but they make no attempt to think through what the Bible is saying about the reality that surrounds us, and they make little effort to explain to mystified others in what way the Bible has decoded the complexities of our world. That God commands us not to commit adultery, for example, carries more freight than simply to prevent a behaviour. It shows that there is something glorious about faithfulness, and loyalty, and that good relationships have a long time-line, and that these are somehow constitutive elements of community. And suddenly, a simple biblical command is ringing all sorts of bells for people about all sorts of yearnings stitched deeply into them, for participation in a community that cares for them loyally and deeply over a long time.
12. **Stop playing the 'principles game'.** We Christians don't like it when liberal secularists just apply universal principles unthinkingly. Yet we often go in swinging into political debate determined to win the whole point or nothing: for example, since abortion is wrong, some Christians will settle for nothing less than total repeal of all abortion law. I understand their pain and longing, and there is a certain goodness of heart that wants to see our society welcome all its children. But our doctrines of the fall and the 'secular' allow us, sometimes, to think in terms of compromise toward a common good that is less than perfect but better than evil. This posture is has been called a 'retrieval ethic' by Michael Hill, senior ethicist at Moore College.<sup>27</sup> Such 'retrieval' is unavoidable in politics.
13. **Have a go.** I'll give the last word again to Oxford Professor O'Donovan, New College Lecturer for 2007

[C]andour is of the greatest importance for the public realm itself. Candour is a / simple public duty, often unperformed, or preformed badly, out of simple reluctance to take responsibility for the truth on which the community depends. Behind many a story of tyranny lies collusion between oppressor and oppressed, a community that prefers to accept a shrunken public realm

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<sup>24</sup> This point has been made repeatedly to clergy. Cf. William Temple, *Christianity and social order* (London: Shephard-Walwyn, 1976; originally published Penguin, 1942); Geoffrey Brennan, *The Christian and the State* vol. 7 (St. Leonards, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 1983); Downer, *Playford Lecture*, passim.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fergusson, *Church, State and Civil Society*, 52.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Rorty, "Religion in the Public Square: A Reconsideration," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31 no. 1 (2003).

<sup>27</sup> Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2002), 132-34.

rather than pay the price of discerning and articulating complex truths in public.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Oliver M.T. O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment: The Bampton Lectures, 2003* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 138.

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