

## *Modern Labor and the Catholic Church*

**Kevin Rudd MP**  
**Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and International Security**

### **Address to the St. Thomas More Forum**

**28 November 2005**

Yesterday's Sunday Age contains the following story.

*"In five days, a Vietnamese born Priest will walk a young Australian man, comforted by the writings of England's Catholic martyr, Sir Thomas More, to the gallows at daybreak in Singapore... Father Gregoire Van Giang, a Singapore prison chaplain who assists Nguyen and other inmates, will join the former Melbourne schoolboy in prayers and walk with him from his cell to meet the hangman. He will then administer the last rights to the 25-year-old... and Father Giang will see Van to the end on Friday. Nguyen's interest in Catholicism was stirred when he heard a chaplain reciting the Ave Maria in prison. Nguyen is known to have read the writings of Sir Thomas More, who was beheaded by Henry the Eighth for treason in 1535 after awaiting execution in his medieval death-cell in the tower of London. Nguyen is familiar with these words of More's: "to think my most enemies my best friends.."*

What is it about Sir Thomas More that more than 500 years after his death -his life, his example, and his writings continue to inspire people around the world?

So here are we at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century reading of a young Australian - coming from a country and a continent not yet thought of in More's England - seeking solace and comfort in the words of the great English saint and martyr.

More than half a millennium removed in history.

More than half a globe removed in geography.

And an entire world removed in culture when we think of England, Vietnam and Singapore.

Yet this goes to the heart of the inspiration we find in More: his example is timeless because the principles for which he stood are eternal.

Let me be very plain at this point. Nguyen Van Tuong is no Thomas More.

Nguyen has been convicted of drug trafficking.

More was convicted of treason because he refused to yield the dictates of his private conscience to the public necessities of the politics of the Tudor Court.

The eloquence with which More speaks to us through the ages is that More remained absolutely steadfast. A man who refused to budge on the basis of deep theological principle which in turn shaped the direction of his conscience.

It was the Catholic More who later inspired the Lutheran Bonhoeffer not to yield to the yoke of Hitler's Aryan race laws.

Bonhoeffer, like More, stood before his conscience and proclaimed: "Here I stand, Lord. I can do no other."

And so too was Bonhoeffer executed by a Nazi state which feared the power of a dissenting Christian voice which Bonhoeffer embodied.

I have often wondered whether it was the international publicity surrounding Thomas More's canonisation in 1935, precisely 400 years after More's death, that inspired Dietrich Bonhoeffer that same year to establish a theological college at Finkenwalde for Germany's Confessing Church. This was done at great potential peril to himself coming only two years after Hitler became German Chancellor. It was Bonhoeffer's Confessing Church that refused to submit to Hitler's authority.

Beyond the detailed debates of their age, however, both More's and Bonhoeffer's example bring into stark relief the question which has confronted us now for more than 2000 years - and that is the proper relationship between Christianity and the state.

Of course, today we live in less dramatic times than either the Tudor or the Nazi tyrannies. And we should be thankful for that. Thankful that generally we live in an age of peace and stable government.

But the tensions between Christianity and the politics, the tensions between Church and state, the tensions between the community of faith on the one hand and the demands of a pluralist democracy on the other, remain as acute as ever.

It is within that paradigm that I choose tonight to address the question that you have asked me to address this evening: modern Labor and the Catholic Church.

And in doing so, I will be drawing extensively on remarks I have made elsewhere on the general theme of Christian political engagement.

### **Christianity and the State in History**

First, an historical perspective, for at the end of the day - there is little that is new under the sun.

Remember the great exchange, recorded in the New Testament, where Jesus of Nazareth said "to render under Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's."

Of course, the Nazarine had the good sense not to define precisely what each proposition actually meant: ie. what are those things which uniquely belong to Caesar, and what are those things which uniquely belong to God?

And therein lies the dilemma which has confounded the engagement between Christians (of all persuasions) and the political process through the intervening 20 centuries.

During the first three centuries of its history, Christianity did not just preach a Gospel for the oppressed. Christianity itself was in the act of being oppressed. Christianity began its life as an oppressed minority. Christianity coming from within Judaism and Judaism having in turn its own troubled experience within the confines of the Roman Empire. The New Testament therefore sees the world from that perspective. The later parts of the Old Testament also see the world from that perspective - particularly the literature of the Babylonian Captivity. The same tradition is also evident in the theological doctrines of the early church through the early Patristic writings. Christianity is therefore formed within the mindset of being persecuted by the State in an overt and ruthless fashion.

All this began to change with the Constantinian Settlement at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Once Christianity became part of the orthodoxy of the later Roman Empire, the greatest challenge of theology and politics was how to translate this "theology of the oppressed" into a new age when the Church was secure and legally protected through the offices of the State in itself. Furthermore, whereas for its first three centuries, Christianity represented an active counter-culture within the Jewish and Roman worlds, what was to be Christianity's message in a new age in which the Church had in fact become culturally dominant within the society? This became the continuing challenge

of Christianity in the Christian west for the subsequent one and a half thousand years.

Following the unleashing of the radical anti-clericalism of the French Revolution and the determination of the American revolutionaries to maintain an absolute separation between Church and State, for the last two hundred years we have entered a different phase. The impact of independent scientific inquiry, the increasing impact of secular humanism combined with the pervasive influence of modernism and post-modernism have had the cumulative effect of undermining the established culturally dominant positions of the mainstream Catholic and Protestant Churches across the collective West.

Where this all leads as Christianity embarks on its third millennium remains to be seen. But once again we begin to see the signs of the emergence of Christianity seeing itself, and being seen by others, as a counter-culture increasingly operating within what some have called a post-Christian world. In some respects, therefore, Christianity, within the collective West, may be heading towards returning to the minority position it occupied in the earlier centuries of its existence.

But whether we conclude Christianity represents a minority or majority position within society and the polity or not, this still leaves unanswered the question of how any informed individual Christian (or Christians combined in the form of an organised Church) should relate to the State.

I would argue that a core and continuing fundamental principle shaping this engagement is that Christianity is always on the side of the marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed. This must be argued as being one of Christianity's core fundamental principles that should guide Christian engagement with the state.

As noted before, this tradition is very much alive in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament.

It is also very much alive in the recorded accounts of Jesus of Nazareth: his engagement with women, gentiles, tax collectors, prostitutes and more generally with the poor – all of whom, in the political and social environment of first century Palestine, being fully paid up members of the “marginalised, the vulnerable and the oppressed”.

And parallel to all of this was Jesus' revulsion at what he described as the hypocrisy of the religious and political elites of his time.

Do these principles of themselves provide a universal precept upon which every element of social and economic policy can be constructed? Of course not.

But does it provide an illuminating principle (dare I say “a light on the hill”) in shaping our views of what constitutes appropriate policy for the community? Yes it does.

What does this then have to say of economic self-interest? What does it have to say about Max Weber’s Protestant work ethic? Or what constitutes the legitimate theological basis for private wealth accumulation?

On these questions we are left with troubling parables about camels passing through the eye of a needle.

But equally we are left with parables about the proper tending of the vineyard, the diligence of those who work the vineyard and the abundance of the harvest.

In this context, Catholic social teaching has long argued for a proper balance between the rights of capital and labour - in a relationship based on mutual respect as well as legal protection.

Apart from the great questions of wealth, poverty and social justice, a third area of long-standing contention in Christian theology has been the question of the doctrine of the just war. What is the Christian view of violence by the State? And what is the Christian view of the State itself employing violence against other States?

These debates are ultimately anchored within Christian theology’s concern for the sanctity of all human life. It argues that human life could only be taken in self-defence and only then under highly conditional circumstances - circumstances which include the exhaustion of all other peaceful means to resolve a dispute; and if war is to be embarked upon, then for the principles of proportionality to apply. On this point, for example, it is worth noting that Pope John Paul II did not support the Iraq war as a “just war” within the terms of Catholic social teaching.

We should also reflect on the implications of these principles of proportionality on the proper role of the State in providing, protecting or (in the current debate) circumscribing the freedoms of its citizenry. Christian teaching is sceptical about a State’s demand for more power and more power. And so should we be sceptical today.

And then there is the question of the right of the State to lawfully execute its own citizens. Christianity's belief in the sanctity of life causes us to conclude that capital punishment is unacceptable in all circumstances.

### **The Catholic Church and the Labor Party**

So where does all of this lead us in our understanding of the impact of the Catholic Church on the evolution of the Australian Labor Party?

Irish Catholicism was one of the three main impulses alive within the Australian Labor movement during its most formative decade in the 1890s: the other two being Wesleyan Methodism and so-called 'continental socialism'.

The Wesleyan Methodists came out of the Great Awakening of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century England. They later evolved into what became known as the Christian Socialist movement of Kier Hardie of the British Labour Party and his Australian co-worker Andrew Fisher.

The continental socialists were of a different philosophical (as opposed to theological) hue altogether. Their influence on the Australian Labor movement came primarily through the agency of Sydney and Beatrice Webb. Their creed was inherently secular and based on Marxist notions of the universal brotherhood of man. While they were readily able to find common cause with their Irish Catholic and Christian Socialist co-workers, their different world views were bound to rise to the surface when from time to time when questions of faith came into headlong conflict with questions of politics.

Irish Catholics in Australia, for more than one and a half centuries, continued to find themselves to be a minority within an overwhelmingly Protestant (and primarily Anglican) majority.

Just as Christianity during its first three centuries found itself to be the religion of the oppressed, Irish Catholics in Australia often felt themselves to be the denomination of the oppressed.

It was only in 1820 that Governor Macquarie first gave formal permission for Catholic Fathers Therry and Connolly to come to the colony. They were given a stipend of 100 pounds per annum – insultingly determined at a rate one third of that paid to the Anglican chaplains.

But even the generally benevolent and enlightened Governor Macquarie feared that if Catholic masses were celebrated with the masses, they could become centres of sedition.

Macquarie in fact issued a set of regulations for the Catholic chaplaincy. He warned the priests against acting as “itinerant, political demagogues, long practiced in the arts of faction, and right before anarchy and confusion..” which had made it necessary for the colonial government to tread in the steps of those of the mother country, in enacting and enforcing certain laws against sedition.

In fact, Macquarie went on to stipulate that:

*“no meeting or assemblage of the Roman Catholics, consisting of more than five persons, for the celebration of the rights or your service of your church, is to be convened or held at any other place or places than those approved...”*

The Irish Catholic legitimate sense of oppression in early colonial Australia corresponded in some ways with the sense of oppression of the nascent Labor movement.

We see this, for example, in the life and career of Cardinal Patrick Moran – Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney between 1884 and 1911.

Cardinal Moran’s episcopate coincided with the rise of the Labor Party – and the election of the first Labor candidates to the colonial and state Parliaments and then to the Commonwealth Parliament following federation.

Cardinal Moran became a great Labor interventionist. When the Holman Labor Government started to come apart in New South Wales in 1911, Moran intervened with individual Catholic Members of Parliament to ensure that none of them played ‘Judas’ by “betraying his party at such a crisis”.

At the federal level, Moran spectacularly intervened in strong public support for the ‘yes’ case for the 1911 referendum of the Fisher Labor Government. That referendum sought increased power to deal with commercial and financial corporations, and specifically, the power to nationalise monopolies. The referendum failed equally spectacularly– being voted down 61% to 39%.

In fact, Moran’s political intervention was challenged by a number of his fellow Cardinals in the United States who warned Moran about the socialistic nature of the referendum proposal.

The American Cardinals also warned Moran over their concern at the Australian Labor Government’s intervention in industrial relations – warning that such legislation would “create a wide breach between this country (that is America) and your country (that is Australia)”.

The American Catholic Cardinals appear to have spoken with a prophetic voice because until next week, the American and Australian industrial

relations systems have in fact been radically different for the last 100 years as a result of Fisher's legislation – something for which the Australian people have in the main been thankful.

Of course, the historical relationship between the Australian Catholic Church and the Australian Labor Party did not remain as politically intimate as it has been during Moran's time.

The great conscription debates of World War One between Archbishop Mannix on the one hand and William Morris Hughes on the other have become the stuff of legend.

They led the first of the three major splits that the Labor Party suffered during the course of the twentieth century.

And we are all familiar with the history of the third of those great splits during the 1950s. Once again, Archbishop Mannix was a key player. Together with B.A. Santamaria and what became known as The Movement.

The rise of the DLP in part kept Labor out of office for more than a generation.

This brings us closer to the present where the memories of the split still haunt our party historians – if not so much our active party membership.

If it has had a lasting legacy, it is perhaps that the modern, secularist, pluralist Labor Party has until recent decades had reservations about re-engaging the Church in those states where the party was literally torn apart.

We are well past that now – particularly given the bipartisan consensus which was achieved during Whitlam's period on state aid to Catholic schools.

But for the Labor Party, indeed for all major parties engaged in contemporary Australian politics, it leaves unresolved some core questions about how politicians could, should and actually do engage the Christian Church in the twenty first century.

### **Models of Christian Engagement with the State**

There are a number of models on offer in terms of how Christians in politics conduct themselves in seeking support from the wider Christian community and below I list five of them.

These are not models that seek to describe how the church engages the state – but rather how Christian politicians seek to engage the state.



How the church conducts itself in relation to the state is a matter for the church.

*Model number one* is what I call the “vote for me because I’m a Christian”.

This is the model that I find to be most repugnant.

It is the model that says that simply on the basis of my external profession of the Christian faith, that those of similar persuasions should vote for me.

This is about as persuasive as saying that because I am a Sydney Swans supporter, that all other Sydney Swans supporters should vote for me as well because we ostensibly adhere to the same belief system.

This model is alive and well in the United States. Thankfully it is much less alive and much less well here in Australia. Although there are some dangerous signs that for certain Christian constituencies within our country, this represents an increasingly appealing message.

It is a model for which I can find no underpinning scriptural, doctrinal or theological authority.

*Model number two* says “vote for me because I’m Christian and because I have a defined set of views on a narrowly defined set of questions concerning sexual morality”.

Regrettably this model has an increasing number of supporters within the broader Christian community.

It is a community which tends to read down rather than read up the ethical teachings of the New Testament – producing a narrow “tick the box” approach to passing so-called Christian “morals” tests.

I see very little evidence that an exclusive pre-occupation with questions of personal morality is consistent with the spirit and content of the gospels.

I see much more evidence of this narrow approach in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century European pietism.

Once again it will come as no surprise to you here that I am not attracted to model number two either.

*Model number three* says something like this: take models number one and two above and add to them the additional tag of “family values”. That is “vote for me because I am a Christian; vote for me because I have a defined

set of views on questions of private sexual morality; and vote for me also because I wrap myself in the garments of something called ‘family values’”.

Regrettably it is my view that the term “family values” has become one of the most used and abused terms in the Australian political lexicon.

Once again, I beg to part company because this concept of “family values” is invariably a narrow one and invariably leaves to one side the ability of working families economically to survive.

*Model number four* is along the following lines: tick models one, two and three above but then add the following offensive play. Unleash a political fusillade against anyone who dares suggest that Christianity might have something concrete to say about the broader political, economic and social questions in life. And justify this fusillade with that hardy perennial: “religion should be kept out of politics”.

This is a view which says anyone who seeks to articulate from a Christian perspective a view on Iraq, a view on poverty in the world, a view on foreign policy more generally, a view on refugees and asylum seekers, a view on indigenous Australians, or a view, dare I say it, on workplace relations, then a pox on your houses, and may judgement be rained down upon you from the heavens above.

That’s what I’d describe in a somewhat partisan note as the Gospel according to St. Pete – particularly if you were to look at what the Treasurer, Peter Costello had to say most recently about Phillip Aspinall, the Primate of Australia and Head of the Anglican Church. When Aspinall raised some questions about the workplace relations debate, Pete responded by saying the Archbishop “hasn’t studied industrial relations, he’s only studied theology”. Of course that’s code language for saying Christian leaders cannot have an informed and legitimate Christian view of policy matters beyond the simple mantra ‘I’m a Christian, I have a defined set of views on the life issues and I talk about family values.’

That’s model number four. And I don’t like this model either.

*Model number five* is along these lines: it says that the Gospel is both a spiritual Gospel and a social Gospel. And if it is a social Gospel then it is in part a political Gospel because politics is the means by which society chooses to exercise its collective power. In other words the Gospel is as much about the decisions I make about my own life as it is about how I act in society and how in turn I should act, and react, in relation to the exercise of the coordinated power of society through the State.

This view derives from the simple principle that the Gospel which tells humankind that they must be born-again, is the same Gospel that says that at the time of the Great Judgement that Christians will be asked not how pious they have been but instead if they helped feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the lonely. In this respect, the Gospel is an exhortation to social action.

Does this mean that the fundamental ethical principles that I have sought to outline earlier in my address concerning the protection of the powerless, the accumulation of wealth and the great questions of war and peace provide us with an automatic mathematical formula for determining every item of social, economic, environmental, national security and international relations policy question before government? Again I would say no.

But what it does mean is that these policy debates could and should be debated by Christians within an informed Christian ethical framework of the type I have described above. And what it also means is we should repudiate the proposition that these policy debates are somehow simply “the practical matters of the State” which should be left to practical politicians like us rather than impractical pastors, preachers and theologians like you.

Sometimes you also encounter in the broader Christian community the view that a Christian view on policy should always prevail no matter what. I respond by saying that’s terrific, but we don’t live in a theocracy. We live in a democracy which by definition is secular. If you want a theocratic form of government then you’re several centuries too late.

But if you want to live in a secular democracy, you are in a contestable polity where different views will be distilled through the ballot box. And if Christians are of the view that their views are not being reflected sufficiently through the ballot box, then I would suggest that has more to do with the changing shape and architecture of Australian society than it does with the representativeness of Australia’s political processes. That is, you end up electing the people that the society itself ultimately reflects.

If you look at the census data, the number of people who profess an active belief in God has gone down over time. The most recent census data says that about 69 per cent of Australia. It’s somewhat less than that in Western Europe. Somewhat greater than that in the United States. But the trend line in recent times has been in one direction. So the secularity of the views reflected into the political process directly express what’s happening in mainstream Australian society.

Whereas a Christian perspective on contemporary policy debates may not, therefore, prevail, it must nonetheless be argued. And if argued it must therefore be heard by those in authority. It should not be rejected

contemptuously by secular politicians as if these views are an unwelcome intrusion into the political sphere.

If the Churches are not allowed to participate in the great debates about the values that ultimately underpin our society, our economy and our polity, then we have reached a very strange place indeed.

### **Christian Perspectives on Industrial Relations**

This brings us to our current great debate on industrial relations. We argue that this debate is about core Christian business because what we are dealing with here is the relationship between the interests of the powerless against the powerful. There is no escaping that point.

Let us be clear-cut about the radical and indeed revolutionary set of workplace relations changes that we are about to see passed.

- First, the minimum wage for working Australians will no longer be determined by the independent umpire - the industrial relations commission. It will be determined instead by a so-called "Fair Pay Commission" - itself an almost Orwellian celebration of language. The minimum wage being the final wage safety net for the lowest paid Australians - of whom there are millions, literally millions in our workforce.
- Second, individual protections provided by industrial awards for working families will be reduced from 20 down to five - which means that previous provisions concerning overtime allowances; shift allowances; the spread of hours worked (including weekends worked), meal breaks, holiday pay and holiday leave loadings are now up for individual contract negotiation. This means that each individual employee, including very young employees, may now be required to negotiate these matters directly with their employer in a relationship which can scarcely be described as fair, just or equitable. The protections which employees currently have from unfair dismissal will be in large part removed - including protection from unfair dismissal if your boss decides he or she doesn't like you.
- On top of all these, if a trade union presents an agreement on behalf of a group of employees for certification by the Government and that agreement does not comply absolutely with the provisions of the new industrial laws and the individual contract philosophy on which the new law is based, then trade unions become liable for fines up to \$33,000.

The central organising principle behind these new industrial laws is simple: it is a redistribution of wealth and power away from the weakest Australians to the wealthiest Australians. It is not the thin edge of the wedge when it comes to the Americanisation of the Australian industrial relations system. It is *in fact* the Americanisation of the Australian industrial relations system.

Because these laws so directly confront Christian precepts concerning the protection of the powerless, that is why we have seen a virtual unanimity in the condemnation of these laws by the Australian Christian Churches.

The Uniting Church has called on the Government to rethink its approach to the further deregulation of the industrial relations system. The National Director of Uniting Justice Australia, the Reverend Elenie Poulos, has stated: “the Government’s proposal to strip so many workers of their rights to challenge unfair dismissal is immoral”.

The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Dr Peter Jensen, has criticised the legislation, highlighting the “need for preserving shared time for child, families and relationships for all Australians”.

Cardinal Pell has also been critical of the legislation.

It is curious that the implementation responsibility for the ideological revolution should in recent years have fallen to Ministers Abbott and Andrews. Both these Ministers grew up in the tradition that I grew up in – the tradition of Catholic social teaching. But as they embark on this brave new ideological world I have asked both Ministers, but Minister Andrews in particular given that he currently holds the job, to reflect on how this proposed industrial relations revolution stands with more than a century of Catholic social teaching.

How does it square with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical of 1891, *Rerum Novarum*, which states: “*it is a natural human right to form professional associations of workers*”.

How does it square with Pope John Paul II’s encyclical of 1991, *Centesimus Annus*, where in reference to the observation of *Rerum Novarum* about the natural human right to establish professional associations Pope John Paul II states: “*Here we find the reason for the Church’s defence and approval of the establishment of what are commonly called trade unions...*”

Both encyclicals refer to the right to a just wage, which John Paul II states “*...cannot be left to the ‘free consent of the parties, so that the employer, having paid what was agreed upon, has done his part and seemingly is not called upon to do anything beyond’*”.

John Paul II continues, in an even starker criticism of industrial agreements which rest exclusively on individual contracts, when he states of the conditions which prevailed in 1891: *"It was said at the time that the State does not have the power to intervene in the terms of these contracts, except to ensure the fulfilment of what had been explicitly agreed upon. This concept of relations between employers and employees, purely pragmatic and inspired by a thorough-going individualism, is severely censured in the Encyclical as contrary to the twofold nature of work as a personal and necessary reality."*

Furthermore, on page 33 of *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II states: *"... society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings ... The role of trade unions in negotiating minimum salaries and working conditions is decisive in this area."*

That does not sound like a marginal role for trade unions to me. More explicitly, in connection with the role of the state in arbitrating between industrial parties, Pope John Paul II, in reflecting on *Rerum Novarum*, states: *"The State, however, has the task of determining the juridical framework within which economic affairs are to be conducted, and thus of safeguarding the prerequisites of a free economy, which presumes a certain equality between the parties, such that one party would not be so powerful as practically to reduce the other to subservience."*

That, to me, does not sound like any explicit disendorsement of the concept of an independent industrial relations commission. If Minister Andrews thinks these observations are marginal to Catholic social teaching, I would draw his attention to John Paul II's 1981 encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, which deals explicitly and at length with the rights of labour in the modern economy. *Laborem Exercens* says: *"The experience of history teaches that organisations of this type are an indispensable element of social life...especially in modern industrialised societies ... They are indeed a mouthpiece for the struggle for social justice, for the just rights of working people ... their union remains a constructive factor of social order and solidarity, and it is impossible to ignore it."*

These various encyclicals have been brought together in the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. I would draw your attention in particular to Chapter Six, entitled 'Human Work'. Quoting more recent authoritative statements by Pope John Paul II, the pontifical council states: *"Today, unions are called to act in new ways, widening the scope of their activity of solidarity so that protection is afforded to the traditional categories of workers but also to workers with non-standard or time limited contracts, workers in those jobs are threatened by business mergers..."*

And, on the broader role for unions, what does the Government have to say about paragraph 307 of the Pontifical Council's *Compendium* where it states: *"...beyond their function of defending and vindicating, unions have the duty of acting as representatives working for the proper arrangement of economic life..."*

*unions and other forms of labour associations are to work in cooperation with other social entities and are to take an interest in the management of public matters. Union organisations have the duty to exercise influence in the political arena”.*

My point to Minister Andrews is that the core documents of Catholic social teaching in no way seek to marginalise the role of trade unions. Nor do they seek to marginalise the role of the State in bringing about a fair industrial system through instrumentalities such as an independent industrial commission. In fact, the reverse.

Coming closer to our own time and place, I am sure the Government will also be interested in the views of Bishop Kevin Manning, the Catholic Bishop of Parramatta, who recently told the ‘Sydney Morning Herald’: *“Labour market flexibility is not a good in itself. If flexible arrangements undermine the ability of workers to earn a living wage or to plan a family, then the state has a responsibility to intervene in favour of the common good.”*

That is what we find in Catholic social teaching. That is exactly what Justice Henry Bourne Higgins, the son of a Methodist minister, concluded when he inserted the arbitration power in the Constitution and when he handed down the Harvester Judgment in 1908.

Labor’s view of industrial relations is rooted in fundamental Labor values. We do not see human beings as simply equalling any other commodity which can be traded on the market like any other commodity. Human beings, in our view, have an inherent dignity and from a Christian point of view, an inherent solidarity. Therefore, they cannot simply be regarded as a piece of property out there, a piece of land or a bucket of coal. Human beings require particular protections.

### **Labor’s Engagement with the Churches**

Beyond the industrial relations debate, Labor is now in the process of examining how to more broadly engage the Christian churches in the future.

Following Labor’s last federal election loss, the Shadow Cabinet asked me to chair a newly established Caucus Committee on Faith, Politics and Values.

This arose in part from the Family First phenomenon of the last federal election, where Family First preferenced the Liberal Party in all seats in the House of Representatives except two.

But the Faith, Politics and Values Caucus Committee has had a broader concern than Family First. We have also been examining the broader question of values within contemporary Australian society and the values that underpin Australia’s major political parties.

This necessarily has meant engaging the Christian churches and thinking through how that engagement could be made more comprehensive in the future.

The Labor Party, like the Liberal Party, is a modern, secularist, pluralist political party.

The democracy within which Labor operates is a modern, secular, pluralist democracy.

The churches have as much right as any other non-government organisation to argue their case on policy with government – whether they choose to do so privately or publicly.

In fact, given the continued size, strength and representation of the combined Christian Churches, the churches arguably have more right than many smaller organisations to put their views to the political process.

And when these views are put, they should be listened to with respect – and responded to accordingly.

Listening to the churches does not necessarily mean agreeing with the churches. Once again, that brings us back to the secular, pluralist nature of the democracy that we in this country cherish.

But those in Australia that argue that the churches have no legitimate voice in the political process, deploying the fatuous argument that the ‘church should not interfere with politics’, are just plain wrong. Why should the churches be discriminated against in relation to other community organisations seeking to influence government policy?

While the churches may rarely speak in absolute unison, the fact that nearly 70% of Australians continue (through the census) to profess a belief in God means that Christian perspectives on the current political and policy debate must be taken seriously.

More will be said about the conclusions of the Faith, Politics and Values Caucus Committee recommendations when it reports back formally to our Shadow Cabinet in the very early new year.

But if the existence of this Committee and the content of its recommendations symbolises one thing and one thing alone at this stage – it is that the Labor Party has not the slightest intention of simply conceding the question of Christian engagement to the conservative side of Australian politics.

## **Conclusion**



It may be an unfashionable view in twenty first century Australia – but I intend to argue it anyway.

Namely that the Christian churches have been an overwhelming force for good in Australian history.

The churches pioneered our hospitals.

They pioneered our schools.

They pioneered our earliest forms of social welfare.

They provided much of the social capital that held many of our local communities together during the first two centuries of our settled history through church halls, church sporting organisations and most importantly pastoral care.

Have the churches made mistakes? They have made many. Many of them serious. Some grievous. Some even criminal.

But the same could be said of political parties and other social organisations and corporations that have contributed to our country's development.

But the fact that mistakes have been made should not obscure the underlying fact that much, much good has been done.

Much, much good in schools like at St Thomas More's here in Campbell in Canberra.

And thousands of schools like it across our country today.

As Australia charts the third century of its settled history and as the Catholic Church charts the third millennium of its mission, our challenge for the future is to work collaboratively, co-operatively and constructively in continuing to nurture our families, our communities and our country.

I am confident that under a future Labor Government that this relationship can be developed further and embraced fully in order to enhance the public good.