

THE FAITH OF AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTERS 1901-2010

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Introduction

The intersection between religion and politics has a long history. In recent times it has been accorded great academic and popular attention during the Howard era². One aspect of this broader interest, the religious beliefs of Australian prime ministers, was stimulated by the beliefs, writings and church attendance of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd³. He was described as "the most sincerely Christian Prime Minister Australia has had for a very long time"⁴, and has having identified himself more strongly as being "a practising Christian" than any Prime Minister since World War Two⁵.

More recently the dynamics of the interaction between Rudd and his long-time critic on religious matters, Opposition Leader Tony Abbott, has added to this interest. Together they have been describes as "the two most overtly religious party leaders Australia has seen" ⁶.

Two themes emerge from this discussion. Was Kevin Rudd the most religious Australian prime minister in recent times, or perhaps ever, as is sometimes claimed? Do the religious beliefs of prime ministers, unlike other personal beliefs, inevitably find their way into party and/or government policies?

Australian Prime Ministers have all been Christian or of Christian background, though for some their Christian beliefs have either been residual or rejected⁷. There have been no prime ministers of non-Christian belief or background. This is no surprise given how few non-Christians have been elected to the Australian federal Parliament. Only a Jewish prime minister would have been a slim possibility given parliamentary representation.

The prime ministers have mostly come from relatively mainstream Christianity, including the four largest denominations, though Alfred Deakin held spiritualist beliefs, J.C. Watson was married in a Unitarian Church, and John Curtin had a brief involvement as a young man with the Salvation Army. There have also been many prime ministers who have also been Freemasons.⁸ There has been little connection with smaller denominations, though Bob Hawke's father was a minister in the Congregational Church (the smallest of the three denominations-only about 2% at Federation and shrinking-later to become part of the new Uniting Church in 1977).

Alfred Deakin, a spiritualist, has been the most idiosyncratic⁹. He was a leading member of the Victorian Association of Progressive Spiritualists.

Perhaps he should not even be classified as a Christian; but Brett contends that his "religious imagination remained deeply Protestant"¹⁰.

Deakin was intensely religious. According to his biographer Stuart MacIntyre he believed his political destiny was divinely ordained and he "regarded the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia as nothing less than a sacred mission"¹¹.

Catholicism/Protestantism has been the big divide as in society at large. There has been much more interchange, often for practical reasons such as the distribution of churches in particular locations, between Protestant denominations. That makes Rudd's transition from Catholicism to Anglicanism all the more unusual. Though William McMahon, an Anglican, was of mixed Catholic-Anglican heritage and another Anglican John Gorton's natural mother was Catholic. Christopher Pearson has used Rudd's own polemical term "cafeteria Christians" to describe his adoption of Anglicanism as a young man¹². Perhaps the term, implying picking and choosing one's denomination, should be used more widely as it applies to several prime ministers, including Robert Menzies and John Howard.

There have been several so-called 'mixed' marriages between Catholics and Protestants, including Lyons whose wife Enid converted from Methodism and Chifley whose wife Elizabeth, a Presbyterian, did not. The wives of prime ministers may be an unheralded aspect of the faith of their husbands, but is largely another story¹³. Within Protestant denominations Menzies and Howard share a most interesting mix of Methodism and Presbyterianism (Menzies)/Anglicanism (Howard), which in both cases apparently occurred for practical reasons.

Prime ministers have rarely given personal explanations of their faith. Nor has it been expected. Of recent prime ministers Kevin Rudd was voluble but only occasionally deeply personal¹⁴. John Howard was notably reserved and even uncomfortable, even when given the opportunity on a religious affairs program¹⁵. Their predecessors rarely made such public statements, even in speeches about religious affairs, though this is not to deny their personal beliefs. They have been more expansive and comfortable about the beliefs of the nation than about their own. Both the Cold War and the War against Terror have encouraged such statements.

This paper maps the dimensions of the faith of the 26 men who served as Prime Minister of Australia till June 2010 when Julia Gillard deposed Rudd. It categorises the prime ministers according to a number of factors including denomination and religiosity. Then it draws the links with broader dimensions, such as vocation, wider politics and possible impact on policy. Along the way it will address the two hypotheses mentioned above that emerge from the literature.

Elements of Faith

Faith has a number of elements.¹⁶ Untangling them is a task in itself as it includes beliefs and actions. In this paper it will be defined broadly. The first meaning is religious belief and denominational affiliation, with an emphasis on the latter which is more easily measurable. The second is religious practice (religiosity) and the level of intensity of belief, with an emphasis on the former, based on the assumption that it is a consequence of the latter. The third is membership of a religious community with all the associated ethnic and class characteristics. Members of a religious community may have only residual beliefs and the association, though no less serious for the individual, may be primarily cultural or tribal.

The basic elements of the faith of each prime minister are listed in the Appendix One as far as can be ascertained. In some instances these basic facts are not easy to ascertain given that the faith of each Member of Parliament is not on the official public record. It is not listed, for instance, in the Parliamentary Handbook. For many MPs, even for some Prime Ministers, it must be implied from education, marriage and burial records. This shows that for some prime ministers, and for their biographers, their faith is almost irrelevant. Joan Rydon had to cope with this fact in her study of MPs during the first 80 years of the federal Parliament¹⁷.

My study of the prime ministers enables a simple five-part categorization of them according to their faith (see Appendix One for further detail). The five categories are observant Christians (regular church-goers), conventional Christians (occasional church-goers), nominal Christians (attendance only on formal occasions), articulate agnostics, who speak publicly about their disbelief, and nominal agnostics, who may be judged by their actions.

Nine prime ministers (Deakin, Fisher, Cook, Scullin, Lyons, Forde, Chifley, Howard and Rudd) have been observant Christians). Two (Menzies and Keating) have been conventional Christians. Eight or more (Barton, Watson, Reid, Bruce, Page, Fadden, McEwen, McMahon, Gorton and Fraser) have been nominal Christians. Four (Hughes, Curtin, Whitlam and Hawke) have been articulate atheists or agnostics. One (Holt) has been a nominal atheists or agnostic). Deakin's belief in spiritualism raises the possibility that he deserves a special category of "Other" of his own, while Watson was twice married in the Unitarian church in Sydney¹⁸.

Political life often makes it difficult for prime ministers to be regular church-goers, given the amount of travel and general disruption of daily life. Different denominations also have their own expectations in regard to church attendance. For these and other reasons I would expect these

categorizations to be controversial and in some cases mistaken. They are still a work in progress in several cases.

First Period: sectarianism, 1901-1965

There are two distinct historical periods so far as religious faith is concerned. The first, covering roughly the first sixty years after Federation, is one where religion was prominent, though not undisputed, and its practices relatively widespread, and one in which there was deep sectarian conflict between Protestants and Catholics¹⁹. Sectarianism permeated all aspects of Australian society, including the political parties²⁰.

Prime Ministers were caught up in sectarianism like everyone else, beginning with the very first prime minister, Edmund Barton, who was loudly criticized by Protestants in Australia for meeting the Pope in Rome²¹.

Lyons had to suffer silently the sectarianism directed at him during a 1935 visit to the United Kingdom, as it was presumed by some of those whom he met that he was Protestant because of his party. The Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, for instance, even warned him against Catholics²². But some did know that he was Catholic, and he suffered a "No Popery" demonstration in Edinburgh.

After Lyons death Lord Casey offered financial support to educate one of his children at Xavier College in Melbourne, while making clear his disdain for Catholicism (what he called his "residual anti-Papist scruples")²³.

Sir Robert Menzies, the last prime minister in this period, was implicated by one of his few Catholic MPs, John Cramer, in being part of an atmosphere of sectarianism within the Liberal Party²⁴.

Only two of the Prime Ministers in this period, Billy Hughes and John Curtin, stand out as a humanist who rejected religious belief. Though Deakin and Watson certainly deviated from the mainstream in a way not later repeated.

Second Period: ecumenism and secular humanism, 1966-2010

The second period begins roughly in the mid-1960's. It is characterized by lessening overt sectarianism and growing secularism. Another feature of this period has been the rise of parliamentary disagreements over sexual morality issues with religious overtones. Partly as a consequence of this development it is also a period of greater media attention to the personal beliefs of political leaders.

One of the ways in which disagreements over sexual morality and life and death issues reached the federal parliament was through a departure from normal political party discipline through parliamentary conscience votes²⁵. These votes inescapably focused attention on the personal views of prime ministers. Gough Whitlam revealed his support for abortion law reform during such a vote in 1973. Later John Howard led parliamentary opposition to euthanasia in support of a private member's bill and opposed embryonic stem cell research and changes to ministerial responsibility for the abortion drug RU-486. Kevin Rudd also voted against embryonic stem cell research, but not RU-486, and took a socially conservative position within his own Labor Party debates on the issue of the funding of abortion services as part of foreign aid programs.

This period has also seen a growth in the number of agnostics and atheists. Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke stand out in this regard for their openness in this regard, but Harold Holt is also a case in point.

It has also been a period of growing media interest in the personal beliefs of MPs, including prime ministers. This was so during the Howard era, though more on the government in general than Howard in particular. Nevertheless all political party leaders were interviewed about their personal beliefs on the ABC Compass religious affairs program²⁶.

The development of media attention reached new heights in relation to Kevin Rudd. He was regularly interviewed and photographed after attending church with his family on Sundays in a way no previous prime minister had been. This led to frequent allegations that he was misusing his religious practice for political gain. But his church-going certainly predated his election as Leader of the Opposition in 2006 and then Prime Minister in 2007.

The Major Denominations

The major denominations, now reduced to three, have shared the office of prime minister, reflecting both Australian society and the composition of the membership of the major political parties, Labor and Liberal (or its predecessors). There have been Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists. The three longest-serving prime ministers, Menzies, Howard and Hawke have been Methodist-Presbyterian, Methodist-Anglican and humanist respectively. The denominations have also shared the prime ministership in the sense that many not only had mixed denominational backgrounds but, like Rudd, have changed denominations in their adult lifetimes.

The prime ministers are listed by denomination in Appendix Two.

Catholics: There have been five Catholic prime ministers. Catholics are in a special category for several reasons. Their beliefs have always been accorded special attention, both in their own right and with regards to their supposed deference to their priests and bishops²⁷. The pattern of their beliefs is accorded a special intensity, so that the term 'devout' is applied almost solely to Catholics as its opposite 'lapsed' (the same is true of the term 'practicing'). Catholics themselves use these terms as well as others such as 'cultural' and 'tribal' to describe their belief systems and their attachment to their religious communities. There is also a sense in which Catholics are referred to collectively (the 'Catholic community') in a way that is rarely the case with other denominations.

After failing to achieve the top position during the first thirty years (and eight prime ministers), despite making up 20% or more of the Australian population, Catholics had great success with four prime ministers over about twenty years (1929-1949) during the first period from the first Catholic, Labor's James Scullin, to Labor's Ben Chifley, including Joseph Lyons of the United Australia Party and the short-term Labor PM Frank Forde. Geoffrey Blainey later commented on this apparent over-representation in a review article²⁸.

But overall their percentage is probably less than their percentage of the whole population (now over 25%) and there has been only one Catholic prime minister, Paul Keating, in the second period. Only Keating of the four Labor Prime Ministers since the Labor-DLP Split has been Catholic and the Liberal Party has yet to produce a Catholic PM, though the past three Liberal Leaders of the Opposition have been Catholic and the next Liberal prime minister may well be a Catholic.

The first four Catholic PMs, while very different in many ways, share one characteristic. They were all practising Catholics. St Christopher's Cathedral in Canberra honours them among its famous parishioners for this reason²⁹.

Scullin was the first Catholic prime minister. He was active in the Catholic Young Men's Society. Molony is somewhat scornful of the intellectual character of Scullin's faith: "Scullin's knowledge of Catholic social teaching was minimal and had no appreciable effect on his consciousness". But he acknowledges that "he remained committed to his faith and its practice throughout his life"³⁰.

Lyons, who began political life in the Labor Party before switching to the conservatives, is variously described as a "loyal"³¹ and "devout"³² Catholic. He and his wife are known for their very large family, a Catholic characteristic in the eyes of many. According to Anne Henderson Joe and Enid

were "very faithful Catholics" and he "went to Mass a bit on the road, even as PM"³³.

Forde, who was only briefly Prime Minister had an unexceptional traditional Catholic education and life, common among many Catholic Labor MPs of his generation³⁴.

Chifley's faith story was complicated. Centred on his marriage it has been told many times³⁵. He married Elizabeth McKenzie in the Glebe Presbyterian Church in Sydney, to avoid controversy and embarrassment to their families in their home city of Bathurst. This was a big step at those times to go counter to the 1908 papal decree, called *Ne Temere*, against such mixed marriages. Bravely he decided that "One of us had to take the knock. It better be me"³⁶. Yet he continued to attend Sunday Mass regularly in Bathurst and Canberra, but he felt like an outsider and, at St Christopher's in Canberra, reputedly sat at the very back of the church. He reflected to a constituent later that "I do go to church regularly, but I am afraid the church does not regard me as one of its model children"³⁷.

Waterson concludes that, after 1914, there was "no evidence of religious zeal" and that Chifley's Catholicism was "strictly private"³⁸. This seems to be a harsh judgment. Eventually Chifley, prior to the Labor Split, was at odds with conservative Catholics within his own party, whom he condemned as religious fanatics for their anti-Communism.

Keating on the other hand is best regarded as a cultural or tribal Catholic. According to one biographer, Carew, "The Keating family illustrates the traditional pattern of Irish-Catholic life in Australia"³⁹. He is a typical member of the post-Labor Party Split NSW "Catholic Right". His father Matt had been a member of the anti-communist ALP Industrial Groups, and probably of the Catholic Social Studies Movement too⁴⁰.

According to another biographer, Gordon, he "attended Mass irregularly but was faithful to the tenets of the church"⁴¹. He exemplifies Irish-Catholicism in its Labor links. Bankstown, where Keating grew up, was once known as Irishtown.⁴² This must be what Paul Kelly means when he so emphatically describes Keating as a Catholic⁴³. He quotes Keating's chief of staff, Don Russell, as saying that "he was always the Catholic boy driven to do good"⁴⁴.

In his own words Keating describes the link between faith and politics in terms of community tensions and perceived discrimination against Catholics⁴⁵. In relation to his experience of sectarianism he recalled: "I

resented it. You wouldn't have those doors closed against you if you weren't a tyke"⁴⁶.

Anglicans: The first of the so-called establishment faiths, because of its upper middle class following and its English connections, was the Church of England (Anglicans), known as the Anglican Church of Australia since 1981. Blombery described one of the problems of the church (as well as being a great source of its strength) as being its "history of being the church of the British, of the ruling group, and of the privileged"⁴⁷. The church, through their governing boards and their names, is associated many of Australia's elite private schools, such as Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra grammar schools.

Anglicans were for many years the largest of the Christian denominations, until overtaken by Catholics at the 1986 Census. At the 1901 Census 40% of Australians were Anglican. While large, Anglicanism also suffers from frequent nominalism and a relatively low regular church attendance that may lessen its impact on society at large.

There have been about seven Anglican prime ministers. This means that fewer Australian prime ministers than might be expected, given the size and prominence of the denomination, have actively identified as Anglicans, though many have attended Anglican schools and colleges. Stanley Melbourne Bruce is a case in point. However the two most recent prime ministers, John Howard and Kevin Rudd, have been observant, church-going Anglicans.

Howard had a Methodist upbringing and attended Canterbury Boys High School rather than an Anglican private school⁴⁸. He led a Cabinet renowned for its Christian identification. Yet he himself was uncomfortable being called a Christian leader in public and when introduced as such he emphasised that he respected "fully the secular nature of our society"⁴⁹. He remains a monthly regular church-goer in his retirement from public life.

Rudd had a Catholic upbringing through his mother's faith and attended first a Catholic school and then Nambour High School⁵⁰. He became an Anglican about the time he married Therese Rein in Canberra. Rudd attended church weekly. From the time of the 2004 election aftermath he began a political campaign to strenuously encourage the electorate to recognise and reward the Christian ethos within the Labor Party⁵¹.

Presbyterians: The second of the establishment Protestant denominations is Presbyterianism, which is associated particularly with Australians of Scottish background. At the time of Federation Presbyterianism was the fourth largest denomination, making up 11% of the population. Two of

Australia's longest serving prime ministers, Sir Robert Menzies and Malcolm Fraser, were of Scottish Presbyterian ancestry, though they were very different men in other ways. Gough Whitlam, too, was raised in a Presbyterian household. This means that the three great patricians of post-war Australian politics, at least by reputation, have had Presbyterian connections. But strictly speaking there have been only three Presbyterian prime ministers, including Menzies, despite several more, including the Country Party's Arthur Fadden and John McEwen, had Presbyterian antecedents.

Menzies was notably Scots in his personal identification. His father James, though not by first choice a Methodist was "a dedicated and highly emotional Methodist lay preacher"⁵². Growing up in Jeparit in country Victoria, where there was no Presbyterian church, Menzies lived in a largely Methodist world. Yet he maintained Presbyterian roots through his grandmother and from the time of his secondary school education in Melbourne attended a Presbyterian church. His wife Pattie was Presbyterian too and they married in a Presbyterian church. For the rest of his life he described himself as just 'a simple Presbyterian'.

His most famous statement of his values, "The Forgotten People" radio address, included a religious element. One of his themes in this address, though not the most important one, was spirituality.

If human homes are to fulfil their destiny then we must have frugality and savings for education and prayers.

We have homes spiritual. This is a notion which finds its simplest and most moving expression in "The Cotter's Saturday Night" of Burns.⁵³ Human nature is at its greatest when it combines dependence upon God with independence of man.⁵⁴

Fraser was notably of the Western Districts establishment. His grandfather, Senator Simon, Fraser was a Scots Presbyterian too⁵⁵. But Fraser himself, following his marriage to his wife Tamie, appears to have been an Anglican.

Much earlier, against the ideological tide of the church, Labor produced its own Presbyterian prime minister, Andrew Fisher⁵⁶. Few Presbyterians were socialists but Fisher was a friend and colleague of the Scot Keir Hardie, a Christian socialist as Kevin Rudd commonly points out, and one of the founders of the British Labour Party. Fisher, brought up in a staunch Presbyterian household, was a Sunday school superintendent as a young man, observed the Sabbath, and was teetotal as his faith demanded.

Among early prime ministers George Reid was also Presbyterian. He was the son of a Presbyterian Minister but he himself was only nominal in his adherence.⁵⁷

Methodists: The fourth major denomination, third largest at 13% in 1901, was Methodism,⁵⁸ known in part for its social justice values as well as an evangelical strand. There has been only one Methodist prime minister; but the wider role of the church has been greater than that.

Menzies and Howard were brought up Methodists, by force of circumstance apparently; although as late as 1975 Howard described himself as a "communicant member of the Methodist church".⁵⁹

Howard's Methodism, in particular, has been accorded particular attention. But Joseph Cook has been the only life-long Methodist among the prime ministers, which is something of a surprise given Methodism's role within the early Labor Party.

Cook grew up in the Primitive Methodist sect, and like many labour movement leaders in the NSW coalfields had been a Primitive Methodist preacher⁶⁰. His commitment to Methodism was life-long, unlike his commitment to the labour movement. Therefore, according to John Rickard, "his commitment to Methodism was the one continuity in his life"; although it appeared not to influence his ultimately conservative politics⁶¹.

The Humanists

The number of agnostic and secular prime ministers, while fewer than the religious believers and perhaps even fewer than their percentage of the population, is quite high in comparison with British Prime Ministers and American Presidents⁶².

Labor, despite being the party of Catholics for forty years, is also the party of agnostics. Agnosticism is acceptable for Labor leaders within the party on account of this in a way that does not apply to the Liberals where adherence is more the norm. The four most prominent prime ministers in this category are Billy Hughes (when he was Labor), John Curtin, Gough Whitlam and Bob Hawke. Of the three Hawke has given the most extended explanation of his loss of Christian faith, which occurred during and after travelling as a young man with a Christian group in India as a member of a delegation to the World Conference of Christian Youth.⁶³

For the other two the explanation was more intellectual and seems to have occurred even earlier during their secondary education.

Curtin was described by Geoffrey Serle as "a tolerant rationalist"⁶⁴. There is a sense in which Curtin replaced his Christian faith with his attachment to socialism. According to Serle "Labor and Australia were his two causes"⁶⁵ Scalmer on Labor as a political religion and Day on the religiosity of the

discourse of socialism contribute to the wider discussion of this point, which is beyond the scope of this paper.⁶⁶ Curtin also rejected his Irish heritage. Towards the end of his life he began to add "God Bless You" to the conclusion of his public speeches.⁶⁷ Perhaps, speculates Serle, he was "groping towards religious consolation"⁶⁸.

Whitlam made an intellectual departure as a school-boy. He said, in typical fashion, that he had no working relationship with God, but "an intense interest in the Judaeo-Christian religion"⁶⁹.

After he entered Parliament in 1953 the Labor Party was mired in the Labor Split that led to the emergence of the Democratic Labor Party. He had plenty of opportunity to reflect on the divisive interaction of religious beliefs and politics. He, like other Labor figures of his generation and even later, was disinclined to court trouble by speaking about their religious beliefs in public. This attitude was shared by many ordinary Australians and became part of entrenched Australian cultural attitudes.

At Canberra Grammar School Whitlam won the divinity prize but it was held back by the headmaster because of his evident lack of faith⁷⁰. Although he once described himself as a fellow-traveller with Christianity he told his biographer Laurie Oakes that after attending university college he only went to church once more and that was to be married⁷¹. Whitlam's parents were staunch Presbyterians his parents were "pious church-goers"⁷².

Hawke, "a child of the Manse"⁷³, made his agnosticism even more public than Whitlam, reflecting his much more open character. Later, in 1988, as he recalls in his later autobiography, he made a remarkable outburst against the rationality of Christian beliefs in the course of defending Aboriginal spiritual beliefs⁷⁴.

On the conservative side of politics it was inappropriate to declare disbelief, given the Protestant imagination of the Liberals⁷⁵. But Harold Holt is best described as an agnostic⁷⁶. It has been said that his only credo apart from dedication to advancing his career in politics was Kipling's "If"⁷⁷. Several other conservative PMs, including John Gorton, were merely nominal Christians.

Vocation

Religious upbringing was one factor that pointed some of our prospective PMs towards politics as a noble vocation. Fraser has stressed the importance in his case of the link between religion and public service: "If I did not have that attitude to belief I would not have wanted to go into politics"⁷⁸. Keating has said that:

"Catholicism gives you this view that we are born equally and we die equally, and that no one of us is intrinsically worth more than another"⁷⁹.

Faith played some part in the career choices of our prime ministers even for those for whom religious belief waned. It is quite common for Labor MPs, including prime ministers, to link faith with their social justice aspirations and their choice of the Labor Party as their vehicle. Bob Hawke has written that "the basic Christian principles of brotherhood and compassion...would stay with me for the rest of my life...to guide me in my future career"⁸⁰. Howard, after years inParliament, said that Methodism had instilled in him "a sensitivity to social justice.. a sort of social justice streak"⁸¹.

The religious vocations of parents played a part in the backgrounds of numerous prime ministers. Several, including Reid and Hawke, had fathers who were ministers, while several more, including Menzies, had fathers who were lay preachers. Cook had studied for the Methodist ministry.

For many future prime ministers it is also notable how their early involvement in church activities gave them an opportunity to hone their practical organizational skills that would prove so useful in later political life. They were joiners and organizational leaders from their youth onwards. It is notable how many held official posts in church youth groups, including Reid, Hawke and Howard.

Politics

Politics cannot escape religion. The big issues in Australian politics have all had a religious dimension. These issues include the conscription referenda in World War One, the Cold War, the 1950s Labor Party Split and public-private education politics. Above all they include inter-party competition.

The political ramifications of these issues tested the faith of prime ministers as well as giving them a chance to expound on their Christian beliefs in public forums.

For Menzies the Cold War demonstrated the gulf between Christian Australia and atheistic Communism. This is demonstrated in the language of his political campaigning against both Labor in federal elections and against the Communist Party when he attempted to ban it in 1950-51.

Howard joined in the acclamation for what became known as Australia's Judaeo-Christian heritage that became common during the War against Terror, though his proclamations were not as frequent or as fervent as those of some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Policy

The relationship between government policy and the personal values of the prime minister at the time is a big and complex issue.⁸² Whatever their own values may be they are surrounded by Cabinet ministers and public servants responsible for particular portfolios. They are also part of a system in which party policy sustains the non-religious character of the link between ideology and policy.

The impact of religious beliefs on government policy, often touted as a dangerous threat by defenders of the purity of the secular state, is more difficult to locate. Sometimes policy has been contrary to the religious beliefs of prime ministers, as in the case of the evolution of state aid for private religious schools. Several morality issues, such as abortion, have only had intermittent policy consequences because of the constitutional position. State rather than federal government has primary responsibility.

The best place to start is the contemporary debates. Marion Maddox and Carol Johnson, for instance, have argued that the personal religious beliefs of both John Howard and Kevin Rudd have an impact on the development of socially conservative government policies.

Maddox has made a complicated argument, not always understood by her critics, about whether or not his Methodist upbringing had an impact on Howard⁸³. She actually concludes that "John reflected the family ethos much more than that of the church; he stood out as a conservative".

She argues that the Methodism of his youth did not influence his public policies, but that he cloaked his social conservatism in religious language in order to gain the electoral support of the religious community.

Johnson concentrates mainly on Rudd's opposition to same sex marriage⁸⁴.

State aid to church schools, especially Catholic schools, makes an interesting case study. Various Catholic prime ministers failed to either introduce it or even argue for it, despite official church support. In the 1930s and 1940s this applied to Scullin, Lyons⁸⁵ and Chifley⁸⁶. The politics was not easy, of course, within Labor, Scullin reportedly said that he "could not vote for the inclusion of a plank in the platform which would entirely disrupt the Labor movement"⁸⁷, and it was little better within the conservative side. Authors like O'Farrell, Brett and Murray confirm this. Brett, in reference to Catholics within the Liberals, says that the "welcome" was "conditional, following Patrick O'Farrell, on them not acting politically as Catholics"⁸⁸. Catholics were expected to be "conventional" Catholics, Robert Murray's term, and not to press their claims on education⁸⁹.

Freudenberg famously concludes that "The state aid controversy was ended in favour of the Catholic Church after a century and a half by two men- Menzies, the self-proclaimed "simple Presbyterian" and Whitlam, the exemplar of the humanist heresy"⁹⁰. The (Catholic) Democratic Labor Party played a part as well.

Menzies strongly supported Christian education. His view was that Australian education would become pagan if church schools disappeared. I hope that Christian education will help revive Christian ideals and faith in the second half of the [20th] century.⁹¹

Other policy examples are hard to find. The Catholic-republican link is one possibility. Keating, for instance, told an Irish TV interviewer that he was republican not because he was Irish but because he was a Catholic⁹². Controversy followed as may be imagined as other Catholic MPs complained.

Conclusion

The importance of religious belief (or the lack of it in the sense of being non- or anti-religious) among prime ministers should not be exaggerated. But for a number of prime ministers it has been one of their defining personal characteristics. Rudd certainly is one of the most religious prime ministers in Australian history, but there have been others for whom religious belief and observance was important.

Emphasis on the religious beliefs of the prime minister has been growing. This has occurred despite declining adherence to religion in the general community, though there is an important lag effect at play here. Rudd is the first Prime Minister born after World War Two. The growth of media attention on the religious practice of leaders has been significant. This is one aspect of the continued Americanisation of Australian politics. This factor demands further attention.

Any substantial link between faith and policy is unproven in this context. Australian prime ministers have mostly separated, or been forced to separate, the two whatever their personal inclinations may have been.⁹³

The trend is set to continue, given the leadership of Rudd and Abbott, whatever the outcome of the forthcoming 2010 federal election. For this reason the questions raised, data gathered and issues discussed in this paper may provide a platform for future discussions by political scientists of the faith of Australian political leaders.

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Appendix One:

Australian Prime Ministers and Religion

First Period: Sectarianism, 1901-1965 (16)

Edmund Barton: nominal Christian, educated at Fort St Model School and Sydney Grammar School, married Watt Street Presbyterian Manse, Newcastle, buried in Church of England section of South Head cemetery

Alfred Deakin: observant religious, Melbourne Grammar School

John Christian Watson: nominal Christian, married twice in the Unitarian Church in Sydney, funeral service in St Andrews Anglican Cathedral, Sydney

George Reid: nominal Presbyterian, son of a Presbyterian minister (Free Church of Scotland), educated at Melbourne Academy (later Scotch College), active member of Young Men's Presbyterian Union

Andrew Fisher: observant Presbyterian, described by Kevin Rudd as a Christian socialist,

Joseph Cook: observant Methodist, educated at St Luke's Church of England School, studied for Methodist ministry, lay preacher

William Morris Hughes: nominal Anglican, educated at St Stephen's Church of England School, Westminster, married Christ Church South Yarra, funeral St Andrews Anglican Cathedral, Sydney

Stanley Melbourne Bruce: nominal Anglican, son of an Ulster Protestant immigrant, Melbourne Grammar School, buried St Martin's in the Fields

James Henry Scullin: observant Catholic, educated Victorian government schools, married St Patrick's Cathedral Ballarat, buried St Patrick's Cathedral, Melbourne, first Catholic Prime Minister

Joseph Aloysius Lyons: observant Catholic, married Methodist convert

Earle Page: began life as a keen Methodist, educated at government schools, funeral at St Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney

Robert Gordon Menzies (1 and 2): nominal Christian, Methodist as a child, educated Wesley College, married Kew Presbyterian church, buried at The Scots Church, Melbourne

Arthur Fadden: nominal Christian, grandfather was a Presbyterian minister, state funeral at Toowong Presbyterian Church, Brisbane

John Curtin: articulate atheist or agnostic, born Catholic, some Christian brothers education, altar boy, married registry office, buried in Presbyterian section of Karrakatta cemetery

Francis Michael Forde: observant Catholic, educated CBC Toowoomba, married St Michael's Cathedral Wagga Wagga

Joseph Benedict Chifley: observant Catholic, married in Presbyterian church, educated Patrician Brothers Bathurst, buried St Michael's and St John's Cathedral, Bathurst

Second Period: Ecumenism/Secular Humanism, 1966-2010 (10)

Harold Edward Holt: nominal agnostic or atheist, educated Wesley College, married to Zara in private home by Presbyterian minister, memorial service at St Paul's Anglican Cathedral, Melbourne

John McEwen: nominal Christian, several Presbyterian ministers in his father's background

John Grey Gorton: natural mother Catholic, nominal Christian, educated at Sydney and Melbourne Grammar schools, married twice in Anglican churches

William McMahon: nominal Christian, Catholic-Anglican background, Sydney Grammar, St Paul's College, University of Sydney, decided to become Anglican while at university, attached to St Mark's Darling Point

Edward Gough Whitlam: articulate atheist or agnostic, born Presbyterian, attended Telopea Park High School and Canberra Grammar School, university at St Paul's College

John Malcolm Fraser: nominal Christian, Presbyterian family, educated Glamorgan and Tudor House, Melbourne Grammar, married All Saints Anglican Church, Willaura, Victoria

Robert James Hawke: articulate atheist or agnostic, raised Congregational, married Trinity Congregational Church, Perth

Paul John Keating: nominal Catholic, educated De La Salle College, Bankstown

John Winston Howard: observant Anglican, raised Methodist, Canterbury High School, married St Peter's Anglican Church, Watson's Bay, Sydney

Kevin Rudd: observant Anglican, raised Catholic, attended Catholic and public high schools, Burgmann College, ANU, married Anglican at St John's Anglican Church, Reid, ACT

Appendix Two:

Prime Ministers by Denomination

Anglicans:

Barton
Deakin
Hughes
Bruce
Gorton
McMahon
Fraser
Howard
Rudd

Catholics:

Scullin
Lyons
Forde
Chifley
Keating

Methodists:

Cook

Presbyterians

Reid
Fisher
Menzies
Fadden

Other

Watson
Page (Methodist?)
Curtin
Holt
McEwen
Whitlam
Hawke

Endnotes

¹ I am grateful for the support of David Hilliard, who read a draft of this paper very closely and made many useful suggestions, and Tom Frame, who consented to be interviewed by me about John Howard, Harold Holt and other prime ministers for the Museum of Australian Democracy. In thinking about categorization of PMs according to their faith I also benefitted from reading Hilliard's paper, A Short History of Anglicanism in Australia, Australian Anglican History Seminar, Brisbane, 20-21 September 2003.

² M. Maddox, God Under Howard; Crabb, AJPS (2009); R. Smith AJPS (2009); J. Warhurst AJPS (2007)

³ J. Warhurst, "Religion", Australian Cultural History (2010)

⁴ R. Boer, "Our Christian Prime Minister", New Matilda, 2 June 2009

⁵ N. Stuart, "Mixed in a miracle and a mess", Canberra Times, 22 December 2009

⁶ G. Young, "It's real man versus metro man in the new culture wars", Online Opinion, January 2-3 2010; the Scullin-Lyons contest in 1932 was also between two observant Christians, the first and only election in which both party leaders were Catholics (Henderson, "Joseph Aloysius Lyons", in Grattan, p 164).

⁷ M. Grattan, ed, Australian Prime Ministers, New Holland, 2000, is the starting point for general research. In her introduction Grattan, p 12, makes one reference to faith. She writes: "Half of the Labor PMs were

from Irish Catholic backgrounds, with Watson, Fisher, Whitlam and Hawke notable exceptions. Lyons has been the only conservative Prime Minister, and he came from Labor ranks". She does not mention other denominations; the Australian Dictionary of Biography is the other most informative general source; also B. Carroll, *From Barton to Fraser*, Cassell Australia, 1978 and M. Bellanta, "A Hard Culture? Religion and Politics in Turn-of-the-Century Australian History", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 56, 1, 2010, pp 55-65.

⁸ Note Henderson's comment on Lyons in Grattan, p 164 that he was one of the few conservative leaders before 1972 who was not a Mason..

⁹ S. Macintyre "Alfred Deakin" in Grattan; also Al Gabay, *The Mystic Life of Alfred Deakin*, CUP, 1992, and D. Langmore on Pattie Deakin in *Prime Ministers Wives*, 1992, p 7.

¹⁰ J. Brett

¹¹ McIntyre "Alfred Deakin" in Grattan, p 44

¹² C. Pearson, "Rudd a Cafeteria Christian", *Weekend Australian*, February 10-11 2007

¹³ D. Langmore, *Prime Ministers' Wives*, 1992, see especially pp 310-311

¹⁴ K. Rudd, "Faith in Politics", *The Monthly*, October 2006.

¹⁵ Compass ABC programs; see also W. Errington and P. Van Onselen, *John Howard: The Biography*, Melbourne University Press, 2007, p 349

¹⁶ Clive Bean and Rodney Smith papers on dimensions of faith (denomination, attendance and others)

¹⁷ J. Rydon,

¹⁸ See James Jupp on "Unitarians" in the *Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp 581-582

¹⁹ M. Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand*

²⁰ Brett various

²¹ G. Bolton "Sir Edmund Barton" in Grattan p 33

²² Carroll, p 80

²³ Henderson "Joseph Aloysius Lyons" in Grattan, p 162, based on Hudson, Casey, 1986, P 108

²⁴ Australian Broadcasting Commission, *The Liberals*,

²⁵ J. Warhurst, "Conscience Votes in the Australian Federal Parliament", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 2009

²⁶ The interviews were conducted by Geraldine Doogue

²⁷ J. Warhurst, "Catholic MPs", in *Australian Quarterly*,

²⁸ G. Blainey, "Men with a Mission", *The Australian's Review of Books*, March 1997: "Catholics for a long period had far more political power than such a minority could reasonably expect".

²⁹ Cathedral parish newsletter, 25/26 July 2009

³⁰ J. Molony "James Henry Scullin" in Grattan, p 173

³¹ Blainey op cit

³² Carroll, p 83

³³ J. Henderson email to author, 14 January 2010

³⁴ Saunders and Lloyd, "Frank Forde" ADB, 17, pp 401-403, E. Brown, "Francis Michael Forde", in Grattan, pp 238-245

³⁵ Crisp;

³⁶ Crisp; Waterson, ADB,

³⁷ Crisp

³⁸ Duncan Waterson, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 13, 412-413, at 413

³⁹ E. Carew, Keating, 1988

⁴⁰ J. Edwards, Keating, 1996, p 35

⁴¹ M. Gordon, Paul Keating, 1993, p 33

⁴² Edwards, p 27

⁴³ Paul Kelly, *The March of Patriots*, Melbourne University Press, 2009

⁴⁴ Kelly, p 38

⁴⁵ Don Watson, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart: A Portrait of Paul Keating PM*, Randon House, 2002, pp 4-5

⁴⁶ Watson, pp 4-5

⁴⁷ T. Blombery, *The Anglicans in Australia*, p 81

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- ⁴⁸ Errington and Van Onselen, pp 349; D.Barnett and P. Goward, John Howard, Prime Minister, Viking, 1997, p 4
- ⁴⁹ Errington and Van Onselen, pp 350
- ⁵⁰ N.Stuart, Kevin Rudd: An Unauthorised Political Biography, Scribe, 2007; R. Macklin biography; ABC Compass program on Rudd and religion, "The God Factor"
- ⁵¹ Warhurst, "Religion"
- ⁵² Martin "Sir Robert Gordon Menzies" in Grattan, p 177
- ⁵³ Robert Burns, The Cotter's Saturday Night,
- ⁵⁴ J. Brett, Robert Menzies Forgotten People,
- ⁵⁵ M. Fraser and M. Simons, Malcolm Fraser: The Political Memoirs, The Miegunyah Press, 2010
- ⁵⁶ D. Day, Andrew Fisher,
- ⁵⁷ bio
- ⁵⁸ Bentley and Hughes, The Uniting Church in Australia
- ⁵⁹ M. Grattan, "John Winston Howard", p 442
- ⁶⁰ J. Jupp, "Wesleyan Methodists", The Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia, p 592
- ⁶¹ Rickard
- ⁶² See A. Weiss, "God and the prime ministers", The Guardian, February 9 2010
- ⁶³ The Hawke Memoirs, p 20
- ⁶⁴ G. Serle, ADB, 13, pp 550-558
- ⁶⁵ Serle; S. Scalmer; D. Day "John Joseph Curtin" in Grattan, p220
- ⁶⁶ Scalmer "Crisis to Crisis: 1950-66" in J. Faulkner and S. McIntyre, eds, True Believers, p 91; Day in Grattan
- ⁶⁷ Blainey
- ⁶⁸ Serle
- ⁶⁹ C. Lloyd "Edward Gough Whitlam" in Grattan
- ⁷⁰ L. Oakes, Whitlam PM, Angus and Robertson, 1973, p 24
- ⁷¹ Oakes
- ⁷² Lloyd in Grattan
- ⁷³ N. Blewett "Robert James Lee Hawke" in Grattan
- ⁷⁴ R. Hawke, The Hawke Memoirs, William Heinemann, 1994, p 509: "The monumental hypocrisy of this position is mind-boggling. The same people who denigrate blacks in this way can easily accommodate and embrace the bundle of mysteries which make up their white Christian beliefs: the virgin birth, the Holy Trinity, God in His heaven-where is He?"
- ⁷⁵ Brett
- ⁷⁶ Tom Frame, The Life and Death of Harold Holt, p 266. See also Professor Tom Frame interviewed by John Warhurst, 16 June 2010, Museum of Australian Democracy (OPH-OHI-171/1/1, 60:04 mins). In an email to the author, 25 February 2010 Frame concludes of Holt that "deep down he was a rather lazy agnostic"; also IR Hancock, ADB 14, 474-480
- ⁷⁷ Frame p 266
- ⁷⁸ P. Ayres, Malcolm Fraser: a biography, William Heinemann, 1987, p 53 [check]
- ⁷⁹ Gordon, Paul Keating, 1993, p 33; see also Watson p 422 (speech in Ireland in 1993)
- ⁸⁰ Hawke, The Hawke Memoirs, 1994, p 22; see also Speech by the Prime Minister, 10th Anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia, Melbourne, 21 June 1987
- ⁸¹ Grattan
- ⁸² P. Weller, Menzies to Keating, The Development of the Australian Prime Ministership, 1992
- ⁸³ Maddox, God Under Howard, chapter 1 "Sunday Morning at Earlwood Methodist"
- ⁸⁴ C. Johnson, "Kevin Rudd's Muscular Christianity", Online Opinion, 17 October 2006; see also "John Howard's 'Values' and Australian Identity", Australian Journal of Political Science, 42 (2), June 2007, 195-2009
- ⁸⁵ Email from Anne Henderson to the author, 14 January 2010
- ⁸⁶ Crisp p 384, footnote 5
- ⁸⁷ Footnote to Crisp
- ⁸⁸ Brett, Australian Liberals, 2003, p 54
- ⁸⁹ Grattan "Caucus and the Factions" in Faulkner and McIntyre, eds, True Believers, p 250
- ⁹⁰ G. Freudenberg, A Certain Grandeur, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1977, p 25

⁹¹ Sir Percy Joske, Sir Robert Menzies, 1894-1978-a new informal memoir, 1978, p 237

⁹² Watson p 442

⁹³ Crabb, AJPS, 2009, is relevant here.