

2001 Presidential Address

Blackleg churches? The changing relationship between religion and executive government

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Since the election of the Howard-led Coalition government in March 1996, the relationship between government and religious organisations has undergone some significant shifts. My address draws on research I conducted as the 1999 Australian Parliamentary Fellow to chart some of these shifts, and assess their implications for the future involvement of religious organisations, especially the Christian churches, in public policy.

Churches in the Policy Marketplace

From time to time, political leaders charge that churches should ‘keep out of politics’ or ‘stick to their proper job’. Churches’ incursions into public debate are often said to be novel: in the past, church leaders stuck to spiritual matters, and when they now venture into politics it is as a result of new theology, misguided priorities or ‘trendy’ influences (Yallop, 1997; Devine, 1999).

Such exchanges (minus the ‘trendy’) are older than the Commonwealth. By Federation, church leaders were well-established—though not uncontroversial—players in public debate. Often, this was in their best-known roles as co-enforcers (with the state) of colonial authority and wowsers opponents of secular pleasure (Grocott, 1980). For almost as long (Border, 1962), however, church leaders have played a contrary part, as irritants to political authority.

At first, such interventions tended to be by individuals, rather than on behalf of any still embryonic church structure. Nevertheless, in the books, pamphlets, journalism, letters to the authorities and presentations to government committees through which they made their views known, they did not hesitate to state their arguments’ religious foundation. Thus Australia’s first Roman Catholic vicar-general, Rev. Dr William Ullathorne, fought against transportation in pamphlets entitled *The Catholic Mission*

in *Australia* (Cohen, 1837) and *The Horrors of Transportation* (Coyne, 1838). On the strength of that campaign, he was invited to give evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Transportation, chaired by Sir William Molesworth (Hogan, 1993; Butter, 1926).

Opposition to the treatment of transported felons was a point of political agreement transcending the doctrinal differences between Ullathorne and the vehemently anti-Catholic Presbyterian cleric Rev. Dr John Dunmore Lang, who similarly published on the subject and also gave evidence to the Molesworth Committee (Baker, 1998; Lang, 1837). Lang was then just beginning his political transition from Tory bourgeois moralist to the radical republican who eventually took his seat in the New South Wales Legislative Council on a platform of no transportation, no gerrymander and greatly extended franchise (Baker, 1998:118). The constant in his public career was the confetti of representations, letters, petitions, newspaper articles, books and pamphlets with which he showered the public and government officials in Australia and the United Kingdom. These regularly invoked his authority as 'senior minister of Scots Church' (Baker, 1998:208) and from time to time spelled out how he understood the relationship between his roles as a political activist and minister of religion. Critics urged that 'a professed minister of religion' should not 'meddle' with politics but 'mind your own proper business and leave these things to other people' (Headon and Perkins, 1998: 47-54). He replied that politics was as much the clergy's business as anybody's. For example, he claimed republicanism, underpinned by political equality, universal suffrage and popular election, as the only biblically-endorsed form of government (Lang, 1870:124-129). When detractors labelled his ideas '*Chartism, Communism and Socialism*', he replied that in that case, those 'isms' must, like his own 'objectionable principles', have originated in 'that *Word of God which endureth for ever*' (Lang, 1870:130).

Churchmen also took the state to task on matters of race. Lang's efforts at loosening the restrictions on Chinese immigration brought five hundred Chinese mourners to the head of his funeral procession (Baker, 1998). Similarly, Congregationalist Rev. Dr James Jefferis argued in the 1870s for equal wages for Chinese and Australian workers. Henry Reynolds has recently drawn attention to the role of English evangelicals, the 'Exeter Hall' reformers, in nineteenth-century campaigns for Indigenous peoples.

The 1890 Maritime Strike returned clerical political interventions to the public eye. The formation of ecumenical Councils of Churches in that decade enabled the churches, lacking the privileges of establishment, to speak with the authority of a shared position (Ely, 1976:9). The qualified pro-unionism of Roman Catholic Cardinal Moran, the moderate socialism of Anglican Bishop Barry and the full-blown Christian socialism of Congregationalist Rev. Dr Thomas Roseby and Anglo-Catholic Rev. H. L. Jackson alike drew the charge that social questions do not belong in the pulpit (Phillips, 1981).

Richard Ely (1976) describes the active engagement of clergy in the debates

prior to Federation, both locally and on the national stage. Their interventions covered not only the predictable topics of the Constitution's mooted 'recognition clause', religious freedom and the status of clergy in the new Commonwealth, but also the nature of social justice and the desirability of Federation itself. As Bathurst was preparing to host the 1896 People's Convention, for example, its churches observed a 'Federation Sunday' on which sermons with titles such as 'The Federal Lord' interpreted the fellowship of colonies as an expression of Christian ideals of love and unity (Ely, 1976:7-8).

Church services focussing on social issues—and promoting a particular view on those issues—remained common after Federation. For example, A. E. Talbot, Dean of Sydney's St Andrew's Anglican Cathedral from 1912 to 1937, made the Cathedral the venue for an annual Eight Hour Day Service (Mansfield, 1985:413). Such events, and a more general concern with the relationship between labour and capital, growing out of nineteenth century theology and practice, reflected the 'social gospel' strand of Christian theology which developed during the first decade of the twentieth century and remained influential until the outbreak of World War II.

In the past, as now, churches did not always agree with one another on the appropriate response to social questions. For example, Roman Catholic opposition to conscription in World War I is well-documented (Thomas, R. n.d. 14-25). By contrast, the Methodist Church of South Australia not only campaigned vigorously for the 'yes' case in the two conscription referenda, but directly attacked the Roman Catholic anti-conscription stance. The editor of the denominational newspaper at times found mere prose inadequate to convey the strength of Methodist passions:

Speak plain at the next Referendum,
 Reply by a thunderous 'Yes!'
 And show Dr Mannix' Sinn Feiners
 They cannot—yet—answer for us.
 Show those who would hoodwink the workers,
 The manifold pro-German crew,
 That tricks for betraying the soldiers
 Have no inch of quarter with you.

The front page of a subsequent issue carried the simple message, 'VOTE YES' (Hunt, n.d:25).

Not only have churches disagreed with one another; their public interventions have seldom gone forward without internal dissent. For example, Joan Mansfield describes the early years of the ideological divide in the Anglican diocese of Sydney which led to the conservative evangelical dominance which still distinguishes it. In the 1930s, two separate Anglican committees addressed social evils along the lines of the emerging tensions. The conservative evangelical Sunday Observance and Social Reform Committee battled specific failures of personal morality. The Social Problem Committee, drawing on 'social gospel' ideas, gave itself a broader brief: 'the Social Problem, rather than specific evils such as gambling, drink and vice, except in so far

as these are bound up with the structure of society'(Mansfield, 1985:411-433, 415). According to Mansfield, the latter group explicitly rejected a distinction between the 'moral' and the 'political' (Mansfield, 1985:411-433, 415). The presence of dissent within their own denomination did not delegitimise their activities, since they understood their political concern in a broader sacramental context. For these High Church Anglicans, Christian social concern was epitomised in the eucharist, which they saw as 'the whole Christian community, Sunday by Sunday, lifting up the whole social order—which the Bread is symbolizing—lifting it up to God to be redeemed'(Mansfield, 1985:411-433, 415).

Church and Government Under Howard

To understand the impact of church involvement in Australian public life, we need to keep an eye out for both the conservative and progressive dimensions. Governments, in other words, can find themselves simultaneously blessed and anathematised by different churches on different policies—or even by different parts of the same church, on the same policy.

In the Thirty-eighth and Thirty-ninth Parliaments, both strands have achieved public visibility. The Howard Government has drawn considerable religious support for socially-conservative moves in the areas of censorship, drugs and sexual morality. At the same time, the more progressive strand of Christian social thought has left some conservative Members and Senators feeling besieged on economic, industrial and race-related issues. Thus, *Native Title Amendment Bill* drew substantial church attention in the government's first term. For example, the Uniting Church New South Wales Council of Synod passed a resolution declaring 'that extinguishment or diminution of currently existing native title would be discriminatory and unacceptable on moral, legal and financial grounds' and calling the Government 'to abandon the amendments proposed in the Native Title Amendment Bill 1997' and 'to enter into negotiations in good faith with Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders' to produce a replacement Bill (Resolution 269/97S, 02/97). Indeed, church reaction was so widespread that Anglican Bishop of Canberra-Goulburn George Browning observed:

I can't remember any other issue in recent times which has gained such a broad consensus of opinion amongst church leaders. We're very difficult to get on with in many ways! We argue about ... a host of other issues, but on this one the unanimity of mind is quite extraordinary. (ABC TV 7.30 Report, 20/11/97)

That unanimity led the Executive of the National Council of Churches in 1997 to call on the federal Parliament, in amending the *Native Title Act*, 'to refrain from treating the rights of Native Title holders in a discriminatory way'. Its words were mild compared, for example, with Anglican Archbishop Peter Carnley's 1993 admonition that the Coalition's reaction to the *Native Title Act* was 'reminiscent of

Adolf Hitler's strategies to deprive Jews of their properties', a comparison which prompted West Australian Liberal front-bencher Wilson Tuckey to threaten resignation from the church.

Reconciliation, like Native Title, has attracted many theologically-driven interventions. One instance was an open letter on 6 April 2000, urging Prime Minister John Howard to 'think again' about an apology to members of the stolen generation and not 'allow his minister to trivialise the pain, documented so well in the *Bringing Them Home* report, by arguing about statistics' (Letters to the Editor, 6/4/00). The letter was co-signed by Rev. Tim Costello, President of the Baptist Union of Australia, Most Rev. Peter Carnley, Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia, Colin Wendell-Smith, Presiding Clerk of the Religious Society of Friends, and Barry Ryall, National President of the Churches of Christ in Australia.

Economic policy does not always draw the same unanimity, but attracts similarly strong religious language. For example, the Uniting Church in Australia New South Wales Synod's Board for Social Responsibility in April 1998 declared the proposed Multilateral Agreement on Investment to be 'from a Christian point of view ... idolatrous'. The National Council of Churches found Peter Reith's 1999 proposals on employment 'far short of what is required' to achieve a long-term solution to unemployment (National Council of Churches, 09/99). Two Uniting Church agencies, UnitingCare Australia and National Social Responsibility and Justice, comprehensively damned a range of welfare reforms, calling aspects of mutual obligation 'unacceptable' and 'inappropriate', while extending the activity test to people with disabilities they found 'morally repugnant' (Grattan, 2000).

Human rights is another perennial religious concern, as when Uniting Church Victorian Moderator Rev. Pam Kerr used her Good Friday sermon in 2000 to urge the federal government to show 'Easter generosity' towards Kosovo refugees (Canberra Times, 22/4/00). The waterfront dispute and tax reform are other areas in which church criticism of government was particularly stringent during the Thirty-Eighth and Thirty-Ninth Parliaments.

In from the Margins: New Blends of Church and State

In the issues canvassed so far, the various protagonists assume a sharp distinction between religion and the state. Government acts (or fails to act); churches criticise (or advocate action); government responds (or resists). However, the divisions between religion and the state in Australia are not as sharp as we might conventionally suppose. When churches seek to influence governments, the liberal wall of church-state separation is revealed as more permeable than some Members and Senators prefer. The wall is being breached with pressure from the other direction, too. Recent policy changes have made it weaker than ever, with a move towards explicitly involving

church agencies in delivering services once the domain of government.

One of the longest-standing strands of churches' public activity in Australia is social welfare services. For almost as long, Australian churches and statesmen have debated whether responsibility for welfare belongs more to religious organisations or to the state. Early in the nineteenth century, the general assumption was that welfare activities belong in the realm of 'charity' or 'philanthropy', dictated by individuals' generosity rather than being part of government's duty to its citizens. In any case, state aid to religion and the churches' disciplinary function in the convict colonies meant that the lines between church and state were, at that time, scarcely even notional. Stronger church organisation and increasing financial resources through the nineteenth century meant greater independence and an end to state aid. It also led churches to more hands-on involvement in the lives of the poor, resulting in philosophical changes. For example, churches extended their welfare activities in the wake of the 1890s depression. In turn, increasing first-hand observation of working-class conditions led to a revision of the assumptions which had prompted overwhelming Protestant opposition to the 1890 shearers' strike (Bollen, 1972:15-23). A sharper view of the relationship between labour and capital led to stringent criticism of inequality, and a renewed interest in the ideas of Christian socialism which had flourished in England in the mid-nineteenth century. Consequently, some churchmen began to rethink the basis of charitable welfare provision, coming to the conclusion, to quote one historian, that, in place of private philanthropy or church charity, it was for 'the State itself ... to direct and finance welfare work', but 'acting within guidelines drawn by the churches' (Ely 1976:5).

In practice, expanding government welfare activity has never absorbed all of those whose needs are not adequately taken care of by the market; although the state share increased dramatically with the rise of the 'welfare state', non-government organisations have remained one important haven. Different governments' varying philosophical commitment to greater or lesser state involvement has altered the balance from time to time. The Howard Government has a long-standing commitment to moving 'coal face' social welfare services out of the public sector and into the hands of community organisations (Howard, 13/10/95). In particular, religious organisations have been encouraged to take up much of the void left by shrinking government. The trend towards increasing involvement of 'faith based' organisations in delivering previously government services has subsequently been taken up in the social policies of US Republican President George Bush (The Economist, 19/5/01:17) and British Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair (Guardian Weekly, 5-11/4/01:10). The international embrace of a policy departure already well underway in Australia gives an added reason to pay detailed attention to some hitherto little-examined ramifications of its antipodean form.

One striking instance of this shift in Australia was replacing the Commonwealth Employment Service with a Jobs Network of competing government and private agencies. In late 1999, Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott announced the

results of the second round of tenders for job placement services: \$700 million worth of contracts had been won by church employment services, out of a total of three billion dollars awarded (Lawson & Burgess, 2000).

No sooner was the announcement made than observers began to discuss the propriety of government money, once used for public sector activities, being channelled to religious organisations. The most-publicised area of controversy was the possibility that religious bodies, exempt from some key human rights legislation such as the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, might prove less even-handed employers than a publicly-accountable government agency. Beyond immediate employment equity concerns, the increasing fusion of church and state implied in such moves calls into question the justification for maintaining such exemptions.

Employment equity fears were fuelled when one highly successful tenderer confirmed that it preferred employing practising Christians because 'those who share a commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ' are 'the best staff' (McGovern, 4/1/00; Koivu, 29/12/99). Civil libertarians and Jewish spokespeople were among those to question both the legality and the morality of taxpayers' money being spent according to such explicitly faith-based criteria. Critics feared such a requirement would disadvantage non-Christians previously employed by the CES or the rapidly-shrinking Employment National and seeking work with church agencies as their old positions were lost. Beyond that, some observers raised the possibility that job-seekers' agencies which believed Christians make better employees would automatically recommend Christian clients more highly than others to potential employers (Gordon 8/1/00).

A further ground of controversy was the question of whether, even aside from the possibility of religious discrimination, general services to the community, provided with tax-payers money, should be delegated to religious organisations. To some, it breached the principle of church-state separation (one of the rare instances of that Jeffersonian principle being explicitly raised in Australian public debate). Some warned that churches could be compromised by appearing 'to be cooperating with a government eager to use the church's fund of goodwill to overcome its own failures with a section of the long-term unemployed' (Murray 7/1/00; Robinson, 2/1/00).

Critics also pointed out that, as churches are increasingly built into government activity through receiving government funds, they find it harder to criticise government policy (for example see Canberra Times, 8/1/00). Indeed, refraining from criticism is now likely to be one of the terms of a contract (ABC Radio National, Religion Report, 24/3/99). In the view of Melbourne City Mission Chief Executive Ray Cleary, such restraint:

eats at the very heart of the mission and the value base of church-based agencies, which are there to demonstrate God's preferential or special interest for the marginalised and those at risk. (ABC Radio National, Religion Report, 24/3/99)

A further implication of the tendering out of government services to charities received only passing mentions in media discussion of the issue. One of the grounds

for awarding tenders was price. One reason why church tenders may have been more successful than those of commercial operations is that, as not-for-profit organisations, they could provide cheaper services than private enterprise. Wesley Mission's Gordon Moyes made a virtue of this in his defence of the agency's record, arguing that it can 'plough any surpluses back into benefits for the clients, not to shareholders or owners' (Moyes, 7/1/00).

There are further dimensions to the differences of organisation, practice and organisational culture which might make church agencies cheaper. One advantage which churches enjoy is tax exemption, leading a commentator to speculate that:

It may well be that all but volunteer organisations are ultimately cut out of the market because the relative cost advantages of charities—with their multiple tax exemptions—will sorely test private-sector organisations' capacity to compete (Tingle, 7/2/00).

Differences of culture may be less obvious than formal arrangements such as tax exemptions, but are at least as significant. Churches and other charitable organisations have a long history of providing much-needed services on tight budgets. Moreover, as beneficiaries of voluntary donations, their budgets are liable to fluctuation along with their donors' available surplus. As a result, they have historically relied heavily on the labour of volunteers, and paid workers have often been employed at lower rates than they could command in comparable secular employment. A sense of vocation is, in some ways, the unofficial trade-off for reduced pay and conditions, to the extent that, in many areas, 'volunteerism and amateurism are two hallmarks of church life' (Osborne, 1999:8-10). In addition, managers have often been appointed *ex officio* on account of other church positions rather than because of any particular management expertise, so the cultural norms governing worker-management relations in secular industries may be missing.

For these historical and economic reasons, church agencies have arguably developed a culture in which employment relations are structured around a philosophy of selfless service. Indeed, that, according to Employment Services Minister Tony Abbott, was one key to the religious tenderers' success:

The fact is, these agencies do an extremely good job and why shouldn't people who work for organisations like the Salvation Army and Mission Australia be expected to uphold that ethos of love and compassion and the brotherhood of man, which helps to give them their very unique and special and magnificent identity (ABC TV 7.30 Report :7/100).

Churches justify their shoe-string operations on more than economic grounds. As the Minister pointed out, a theology of love and compassion challenges narrowly-economic thinking. But this ethos, transferred to the employment market, raises problems of its own. The problems are thrown into relief when the church acts as an agent for government.

We can see both the tendering advantage and the industrial pitfalls more clearly

by considering one example. Tim Costello's *Tips From A Travelling Soul-Searcher* describes the highly successful WorkVentures project, which:

Has created a lot of employment for disadvantaged people, achieving a multi-million-dollar turn-over and becoming a successful tenderer for the recent JobNetwork contracts with the government (Costello, 1999:77).

Costello attributes the success of WorkVentures to its workers' integration between working and private life. One calls her work 'a career without a salary'. The founder dreams of the project evolving into 'a "living-working" village', where 'work is so meaningful and integrated with life that the distinction between the two disappears' (Costello, 1999: 77). Costello cites a study of WorkVentures by Melbourne theologian Gordon Preece, who, in Costello's words, 'sees the WorkVentures success as due in large part to its workers' approach'. This includes being 'willing to blur the lines between paid and unpaid work' Costello, 1999: 77). That view is apparently shared by the government. Christian agencies, according to Alan Cadman, Liberal Member for Mitchell, were successful tenderers because they were the ones 'prepared to go the extra miles and spend the extra time' to see results.

The government's view is that such willingness makes for a better quality of service. The implication is that high quality service involves high staff input—'extra miles' gone and 'extra time' spent. But the issue in tendering is not quality alone, but a relationship between quality and cost. One way to offer high quality for a low cost is to make some of that staff input unpaid. In the Jobs Network tendering system, WorkVentures and similar organisations are pitted against commercial job placement services, which are required to operate at a profit and whose employees do not have the luxury of pursuing 'a career without a salary'. Translated out of New Testament phraseology, it is hard to see what 'extra miles' means other than that the successful Christian agencies were the ones whose employees did more work than they were paid for.

Although Costello applauds WorkVentures, another section of his book indicates that he is as aware as anyone of the ambiguities involved. The book in which he advocates blending work and life also warns against believing 'the GDP story', his shorthand for a view of life centred around economic gain. According to that 'story', the Gross Domestic Product is the sole indicator of national success, and from it flows an ideology of 'hard work leading to reward and material wealth for the individual' (Costello, 1999:20). This 'GDP story' damages both individuals and communities, as the pressure to 'do it faster, smarter and more efficiently' leads to the 'ratcheting up of tension and stress' (Costello, 1999:131). Individuals see no choice but to try to out-compete one another. This leads, Costello reminds us, to spiralling working hours (Costello, 1999:65), a vanishing sense of security (Costello, 1999:176), and decimated families where no member has time to attend to the others. If we apply Costello's critique of the effects of believing the 'GDP story' to the job network issue, we might see similar patterns, even though motivated by an entirely

different 'story'. There is, of course, nothing wrong with individuals choosing, out of a sense of vocation or for personal fulfilment, to 'blend work and life' or undertake extra, unpaid work in their paid position. However, if that choice becomes a requirement, either explicitly or as a result of the transformation of an entire sector of the economy through the competitive advantage of agencies staffed by people who have taken such a choice, then we would surely see workers experiencing similar personal and family pressures (without, in this case, even the chimerical compensation of material wealth offered by the 'GDP story'!)

One traditional bastion against such pressures has been trade unions. Church agencies' mix of volunteer workers and paid workers organised around a volunteer ethos has meant that church employees are among the least likely in the Australian workforce to be unionised. One effect of the Commonwealth Employment Service's replacement by the Jobs Network, not picked up in media discussion of the church-state fusion fostered by the move, has been to reduce substantially the rate of unionisation among job placement workers. Anecdotal reports suggest that up to eighty per cent of CES employees were union members, making CES the Community and Public Sector Union's 'flagship portfolio'. By contrast, the parcelling out of job placement services has led to many being redirected to church-based agencies, in which unionisation is estimated at a fraction of that rate. If that effect did not stand out in public commentary, it did to the move's initiators: according to the Minister, one of the Jobs Network's achievements was its departure from 'the ... union-dominated, bureaucratic monolith of the CES' (ABC TV 7.30 Report 7/1/00).

In this instance, the gradual incorporation of religious organisations into secular government structures has had substantial effects on secular arrangements. In government accounts of the transition, the liminal elements of religion feature strongly. Religious organisations treat everyone equally, demonstrate love and compassion, break down conventional barriers between paid and unpaid work. The shift might be read, then, as an attempt to incorporate these elements of religious *communitas* into secular structure.

In practice, however, the closer association between government and Christianity arguably intensifies the strand of religion which aligns it, in the public arena, with a drive towards hierarchically-ordered stability. This occurs in at least two ways. The first is by weakening the church agencies' prophetic voice, either by 'no-criticism' clauses in church agencies' contracts, by the fear of loss of future contracts, or because the church agencies, being increasingly built into the same set of mechanisms as the government departments they previously challenged, find it harder to distinguish government's goals from their own.

A particular, and little-noticed, instance of that weakening is the way church agencies have come to function as a wedge to reduce union power (at least, on the Minister's account of one of the Job Network's achievements) in a once comprehensively unionised sector. One result is that religious agencies are open to being construed as actors in a political agenda beyond the immediate question of

delivering job placement services. That result may not have been anticipated by the church agencies themselves.

Churches, Government and Unions

Although churches are notable employers of non-union labour, they have often been among society's stronger advocates for protecting working conditions in the labour market at large. The irony is not lost on many church people: indeed, the Uniting Church Assembly in 1991 passed a resolution deploring what it saw as the 'serious threat' to trade unions in the 'political, economic and industrial climate' of that time, and affirming 'the need for Christians to express their discipleship in trade unions and professional associations'. Alert to logs in its own eye, the Assembly also resolved that 'Synods, Assembly agencies and other Church bodies be requested to encourage employees to join and be active in an appropriate trade union and/or professional association'.

With decisions such as these on the books, not to mention their long standing commitment to solidarity with the poor and marginalised, it is hard to imagine church agencies deliberately embarking on an explicitly anti-union exercise. At the same time, however, the cultural aspects of church employment described above remain a point of potential contradiction. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that, in practice, the Uniting Church Assembly resolution is more rigorously carried out with respect to professional associations than with respect to trade unions. One reason, of course, is that many church employees work in areas whose union affiliation is not immediately apparent. It may be difficult to suggest off-hand which union a Minister of the Word should join. However, the pattern remains even among church employees whose union eligibility is more obvious. For example, Andrew Dutney, Principal of the Uniting Church's South Australian theological institution, Parkin-Wesley College, guessed that 'very few' academic theologians employed by the church as tertiary lecturers would be members of the National Tertiary Education Union:

The reasons would include the fact that the Colleges are separate from Universities (even if linked in a variety of ways according to local arrangements) and the union has traditionally been seen to be a University matter. Another reason is the cost of membership ... A further factor may be the 'all hands to the pumps' attitude that has developed in recent years. People who make their living out of the church are willingly accepting reduced working conditions out of a sense that the church needs its members and leaders to make sacrifices in this period of decline/change.

The "'all hands to the pumps" attitude' is perhaps the professionals' version of the spirit of 'volunteerism and amateurism' noted as general characteristics of church work above. From corner cake stalls to internationally recognised tertiary institutions, church activities have undoubtedly benefited from the willingness of volunteers and employees alike to go mile after extra mile; and the communities they serve have benefited as a result. However, if aspects of church culture which make unionisation

harder are built into the working relationship between churches and government, at the same time as government is handing over increasing amounts of its own services to church agencies, the effects may go well beyond the working conditions of church personnel. One such effect may be to make non-union labour a more accepted part of once heavily unionised sectors. Another may be to make it harder for churches to oppose anti-union moves.

Love, Compassion and the State

At this point, I feel I have talked myself into a corner! I certainly do not want to knock what Tony Abbott called the ‘ethos of love and compassion’. On the contrary, I badly want to live in a society full of it. None of us would be able to do any of the things we do if it were not for others doing things for us out of love and compassion. However, risks come when acts of sacrifice are implicitly—or even explicitly—built into the requirements for people’s everyday working conditions. The sacrifice is not longer voluntary, but coerced.

The story of contracting out previously government services to church agencies reveals some of the ways in which the language of love and compassion can become part of a quasi-religious lexicon which imparts a spiritual aura to one set of government-preferred political and economic arrangements.