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POLITICS, POLICY AND FAITH: THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT IN AUSTRALIA

Abstract

In this paper we offer a critical assessment of the politics of the Christian Right and question the degree to which the religious values of the Christian Right are compatible with a democratic political culture. If religious values are equally political values making the separation of religious belief and political action a fraught exercise, then a number of issues arise. Political action inspired by religious faith should not prevent critical scrutiny of the underlying values, or more importantly, their influence in shaping public debate and public policy. If religious values are indeed political values, then do protections of freedom of religious expression privilege forms of faith-based politics over secular forms? And if so, to what end? We argue that a more nuanced analysis of the intersection of religion and politics is required to ensure that public politics is not threatened by particular forms of religious political activism that exhibit totalitarian tendencies. At the very least, close attention needs to be focused on particular policy advocates and the agenda they seek to advance with little accountability or transparency despite claims to represent the public interest. It is to these ends that this paper makes a contribution.

Key words: Christian Right, public policy, democracy, political values

Introduction

The rise of religious fundamentalism (along with secular fundamentalisms) as a political force has been the impetus for much renewed interest in the intersection of religion and politics.³ Strategic violence used as a means

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to achieve the political objectives of religiously inspired terrorist organizations brings forth all manner of sociological, political, and moral considerations as should be the case. However, the efforts of religious groups such as the Christian Right seeking to achieve similarly fundamentalist aims from within democratic institutions presents, in some respects, more perplexing problems as Ozzano recognises. To what extent can a democratic polity accommodate religious values that are entirely at odds with political values such as toleration, empathy and respect upon which democracy rests? How does one determine compatibility? Such questions imply that there are distinctions between religious and political values, yet this is not necessarily the case. A normative commitment to understanding religious values as intrinsic to political behaviour, as Jevtic argues “a determinant of politics,” does have analytical benefits.⁴ Approaching religion and politics in this way avoids the somewhat crude and unreasonable attempts of the new atheists to have religious faith deemed a pathology, as though religious faith can be medically compartmentalized and treated if not exorcised. By the same token, it is equally important to avoid the opposing inclination to embrace all faiths as though religion itself is not a deep source of friction between different communities of faith and non-faith.⁵ A more nuanced analysis is required to understand the relationship between religion and politics, one that recognizes the different expressions of faith and values that prompt political action and how these expressions are in turn influenced by their interaction in political contests that broad references to religion as a single category overlook.

It is with this level of complexity that we have undertaken our analysis of the Christian Right and the framework of values that drives their engagement in the public arena. It is not simply a matter of identifying particular values associated with the Christian Right that is at issue. The way these values are defined through political action and in turn contrary values are either disparaged or ignored is central to understanding the politics of the Christian Right. One of the key values of the Christian Right is the right of freedom of religious expression. It is precisely because the origins of this right lie in the long history of religious persecution that the Christian Right claim it is under threat, positioning themselves as the Christian voice excluded from the public arena by a hostile secular political culture.⁶ Yet it is the hostility of the Christian Right toward other communities (both of faith and non-faith) and their access to political leaders that has led to criticism of the politics of the Christian Right. There is certainly scope to interrogate the validity of the Christian Right’s contribution to public debate

4 Jevtic Mirosljub, *Politology of Religion*, Center for Study of Religion and Religious Tolerance, Belgrade 2009, cited in Miki Bozinovich, Review – *Politology of Religion Politics and Religion Journal* Vol.3 No.2, Belgrade 2009 pp.279–284.

5 See for example Armstrong Karen, *God. Think Again Foreign Policy*, November 2009, pp. 54–60, Washington.

6 See for example Kurti Peter, Religious freedom must not be taken for granted *ABC Religion and Ethics* 24. February 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2012/02/24/3438908.htm> (accessed 20.5.2012).

(as opposed to their right to express it). A deeper problem is that if religious values are intrinsic to their political behaviour, then political action prompted by religious faith can be privileged by the right to freedom of religious expression in a way that political action prompted by non-religious values is not. Such a proposition is even more problematic when what is rightfully regarded as religious can itself be subject to contest in the public arena and be used as both a source of legitimacy and disparagement. The debate over climate change in Australia features such paradoxes. Global warming has dismissed as a religion practiced by zealots immune to reasoned argument, yet theology serves as part of the reason for maintaining skepticism and religion a vaccine against the attraction of mythologies such as anthropogenic global warming.⁷ Indeed there are some climate skeptics that claim their fight against the dark forces controlling public institutions will be rewarded in heaven.⁸ The Christian Right in Australia may not represent a potent political force in and of itself, either electorally⁹ or in terms of particular policy outcomes.¹⁰ However, emerging networks of common interest, such as those between the Christian Right and conservative think tanks as identified by Maddox may extend the influence of the Christian Right in ways not readily apparent or quantifiable.¹¹ We argue that there has been a conservative shift in Australian political culture. Whether or not the Christian Right has contributed to this shift, it is clear that their involvement in public debates and consultation by political leaders is accepted in a way that may not have been the case prior to the election of the Howard government in 1996. If the values of the Christian Right are not compatible with a democratic political culture, can such access can be justified?

In this paper we examine the politics of the Christian Right through the discourse of family values and a case study focusing on opposition to same-sex marriage. After looking at the idea of political values and the Christian Right broadly, a brief introduction to the politico-religious landscape in Australia is offered in terms of basic demographic trends, public debate and the state of academic debate on the subject. This is followed by a close examination of the politics of the Christian Right, the marriage movement broadly and the National

7 See for example Pell George, One Christian Perspective on Climate Change, Global Warming Policy Foundation 2011 Annual Lecture, Westminster Hall, London http://www.sydneycatholic.org/people/archbishop/addresses/2011/20111026_1463.shtml (accessed 23.8.2012).

8 See for example Archibald David, Failure to Warm, Occasional Address AGM Lavoisier Group, <http://www.lavoisier.com.au/articles/greenhouse-science/solar-cycles/ArchibaldLavoisierAGM.pdf> (accessed 23.8.2012).

9 Smith Rodney, How Would Jesus Vote? The Churches and the Election of the Rudd Government, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No.4 Melbourne 2009, pp.613-637.

10 Gleeson Kate, Tony Abbott and Abortion: Miscalculating the Strength of the Religious Right *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No.3, Melbourne 2011 pp.473-488.

11 Maddox Marion, *God Under Howard. The Rise of the Christian Right* Allen and Unwin, Crows Nest NSW 2005.

Marriage Coalition. This covers the formation of the National Marriage Coalition and the inaugural National Marriage Forum, including some detail on key figures and organisations, their relationship with key politicians and the substance of claims being made. The merit of these claims is critically assessed in the next section and draws in links with key Christian Right figures and organisations in the USA that have been a source of support and attended Australian events as guest speakers. From this analysis, a detailed picture emerges of the politics of the Christian Right in Australia, one that we argue is incompatible with the values that underpin a democratic political culture.

Political Values and the Christian Right

To align political values with religious thought and faith is hardly innovative, or a surprising convergence. But the form in which this takes reveals deeper complexities that reflect culture and traditions which can be singularly nationalistic or varied to resonate with sub-national communal enclaves. Either way the pattern of alignment is not of immediate interest but rather the values that underpin and provide a source of intellectual and emotional nourishment to particularly idiosyncratic political identity. What sort of politics is emerging from the Christian Right, not for one moment inferring that we can regard the Christian Right as a monolithic entity, that has definable values driving policy? A second order question is one of definition: can we discern a political value from a faith-based belief? And to what extent do political values emerging from some theological mindset embrace an inclusive liberal democratic polity? The constant focus on various expressions of religious fundamentalism and the politics of terror often associated with the extreme forms, may well be justified, but other more nuanced forms of alignment remain under-scrutinised. The theological-political connection requires close examination because it reveals and opens up space for radical opposition based more on a critical scepticism concerning the truth-claims and ethical and moral legitimacy of political decision-making – especially the normative framework of public policy.

In his study of millenarian sects in the Middle Ages, Cohn makes some interesting insights into the excesses of political vision based on a revolutionary eschatology borne out of social anxiety, poverty and utopian fantasy.¹² He points out that millenarianism was not monolithic but quite varied in the values and attitudes expressed, ranging from mild pacifism to violent forms of anarchism. The millenarianism that flourished among the rootless poor of western Europe often displayed a revolutionary character and exhibited peculiarities not shared by the usual revolts by peasants and artisans – an apocalyptic vision and exaltation of the life to come, an untrammelled belief in prophesy and a harsh intolerance of those

12 Cohn Norman, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* Pimlico, London 2004.

deemed unworthy. The intensity of these movements occurred in situations of mass disorientation and anxiety. Out of these circumstances, “traditional beliefs about a future golden age or messianic kingdom came to serve as vehicles for social aspirations and animosities.”¹³ The parallels with contemporary expressions of religious belief and the political implications emanating from a convergence of political values and faith-based pronouncements about the ‘good life’ and its composition should not escape even the casual observer. The work of Cohn has influenced John Gray most explicitly in his book, *Black Mass*, where he proclaims that Western civilization might be defined by way of millenarian thinking.¹⁴ The historical roots of this thinking, according to Gray, finds expression in modernity’s proclivity towards utopian political projects, most profoundly manifested in Bolshevism, Stalinism, Nazism and variety of Marxist-Leninist inspired ideologies. Gray points to the millenarian context of the ‘war on terror’ and in particular the Bush/Blair rhetoric about the ‘axis of evil’ and the pursuit of a ‘military neoliberalism’ and a democratic millennium.¹⁵ A religious fervour energises the political debate by the use of violence to realize liberal democratic ‘heaven on earth.’ The importance of Cohn’s work is that it provides pointers to the religious nourishment of ideas about the identification of an enemy. This is the political culmination of a fantasy or social myth around which a collective can be formed. Gray has extended this insight from Cohn to explicate the dangers of apocalyptic utopian political projects.¹⁶ Borrowing from Schmitt that ‘modern politics is a chapter in the history of religion’ politics is reduced to an insidious surrogate for religious salvation. Schmitt’s famous assertion that, ‘[a]ll significant concepts in the modern theory of the state are secularised theological concepts’ brings to the discussion important considerations of liberal democratic thought and religious values, that space does not allow for expansion.¹⁷ Nonetheless, the fact that Schmitt’s work is receiving critical attention in light of significant scholarship on questions of faith and secularism¹⁸ places the emphasis on the Christian Right as one expression of political dominance as proper and relevant. However, it is the utopian thought within this convergence of faith and politics that demands attention. Gray reminds us that Rightwing utopianism began as a secular movement, but as it became more militant it also became less secular.¹⁹ The joining of forces between neo-conservatives and Christian fundamentalists

13 Cohn Norman, *The Pursuit of the Millennium* Pimlico, London 2004, p.15.

14 Gray John, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*. Allen Lane, London, 2007.

15 Critchley Simon, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* Verso, London 2012.

16 Gray John, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*. Allen Lane, London, 2007.

17 Schmitt Carl, *Political Theory: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* George D. Schwab, trans. MIT Press, Cambridge MA 1985.

18 Taylor Charles, *A Secular Age*, Harvard University Press, 2007.

19 Gray John, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia*. Allen Lane, London, 2007.

has forged a defining moment in American political life over recent decades that has successfully mobilised dangerous myths –namely, the eradication of evil. To this extent, the politicisation of faith has fashioned a politics of despair and retribution against named enemies. Gray is right to argue that this violence can only be understood as an eschatological phenomenon.

The traditional values of Christianity are not out of sync with entrenched liberal democratic principles such as compassion, tolerance, justice and a heightened sense of what 'we owe each other'. Such values have not been corroded away by aggressive secular political movements but more compellingly by schisms within Christianity derived from a utopian-based zealotry. Hedges has defined some of these schisms as fascist in their strategems and rhetoric underpinned more by visceral utterances than reasoned propositionism.²⁰ His focus is on the Christian movement known as dominionism, which are small in number but influential in American politics. According to Hedges (2007) dominionists control at least six television networks, and a large proportion of the more than 2,000 religious radio stations. This movement departs from traditional evangelicalism in that it seeks to redefine traditional democratic and Christian values to support an ideology that calls on the radical church to take political power. This movement is sustained by a theology known as Christian reconstructionism that seeks to politicize faith. Hedges is quite candid with his argument that '...the radical Christian Right is a sworn and potent enemy of the open society.'²¹ Its ideology bears within it the tenets of a Christian fascism.'

Any form of extremism or crude fundamentalism is a threat to politics, and the nature of political life within the democratic tradition. The attribution of political power to religious belief is the core of what we understand to be a theocratic state, which is readily definable. The diminishing of liberal democratic political values by a growing religious radicalism determined to redefine these values by stealth, is not evidence of the supremacy of religious conviction over secularised political thought as the moral foundation of politics, but rather a diminishing of politics itself. The alternative is not to embrace some form of seeming progressive atheism, as advocated by Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, as this is just another pernicious expression of fundamentalism strident in its attempt to eradicate the spiritual life from political judgment. Neither is it an enlightened move to exclude the religious voice from democratic politics, but rather an ethical demand to be vigilant and mindful of any manifestation of totalitarianism, be it religious or secular. Strands of totalitarianism are not always readily apparent within the pluralism of modern polities, which is why close critical scrutiny of policy advocates and positions is imperative to ensure an ongoing presence of a robust democratic public politics.

20 Hedges Chris, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2007.

21 Hedges Chris, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2007, p.207.

Shifting (Religious) Contours in Australian Politics.

Within academic literature, the relationship between religion and politics has received more attention in recent years. Awareness of the dearth of scholarship in this area of academic study, especially within political science, has been documented,²² but in itself represents an acknowledgment of the importance of religion to the study of politics. The situation in Australia mirrors international developments. While it would be reasonable to suggest that religion has not occupied a prominent place in political science²³, it is nonetheless becoming a focus of scholarly study. This is perhaps as much a reflection of developments with the international field of political science as it is with trends within the Australian political context. The presence of religious influences within the political domain in Australia is becoming more evident. While no doubt never absent, the presence of religious faith and awareness of its influence in Australian politics has been more pronounced in recent years. Whether in terms of religious invocations in politicians' speeches²⁴, bipartisan political support for efforts to 'rediscover Australia's Christian heritage' through the establishment of the Australian Christian Heritage Foundation, or policy initiatives such as the controversial Chaplains in Schools program, religion is becoming more prominent in Australian political life. While these developments offer an interesting contrast to statistics suggesting a decline in religious observance, it is the political activism of the Christian Right that has generated the most controversy and sparked academic interest, particularly since publication of *God Under Howard* by Marion Maddox in 2005. The presence and political intentions of the Christian Right present a number of distinctive challenges. There are constitutional issues surrounding the separation of church and state²⁵ and debate as to the place of religion in the public sphere.²⁶ As alluded above, there is also debate as to whether the Christian Right should be considered a political force.²⁷ All have made a valuable contribution debate and to further understanding the role of

22 See for example Kettel Steven, Has Political Science ignored religion? *PS: Political Science & Politics* Washington, forthcoming <http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayJournal?jid=PSC>.

23 Warhurst John, Religion and Politics in the Howard Decade *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 42, No.1, pp. 19-32.

24 Crabb Anna, Invoking Religion in Australian Politics *Australian Journal of Political Science* Vol. 44, No.2, Melbourne, 2009 pp.259-79.

25 See for example Lohrey Amanda, Voting for Jesus *Quarterly Essay*, Issue 22 Black Inc., Melbourne 2006; Hogan Michael, Worrying About Religion *Australian Review of Public Affairs* 2.October 2006 <http://www.australianreview.net/digest2006/10/hogan.html> (accessed 18.8.2008).

26 Maddox Marion, An Argument for More, Not Less, Religion in Australian Politics *Australian Religion Studies Review* Vol.22 No.3 Sydney 2009, pp. 345-367; Smith Marcus and Peter Marden, 2012. 'Capturing the Religious Spirit: A Challenge for the Secular State' *Journal of Church and State* Waco 2012, doi: 10.1093/jcs/css053, first published online June 29 2012.

27 Smith Rodney, How Would Jesus Vote? The Churches and the Election of the Rudd Government *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No.4 Melbourne 2009, pp.613-637.; Gleeson Kate, Tony Abbott and Abortion: Miscalculating the Strength of the Religious Right *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No.3, Melbourne 2011 pp.473-488.

religion, in particular the Christian Right, in Australian politics. However, few of these accounts have come to grips with the political aims and means of the Christian Right and the way in which political impacts can be achieved that are not explicitly evident in election results or particular policy outcomes. Ozzano has investigated various fundamentalist movements and questioned their impact on public policy.²⁸ An investigation of the politics of the Christian Right in Australia could usefully contribute to Ozzano's analysis, particularly given the relationship between the Christian Right in the USA and its counterparts in Australia that we have detailed elsewhere.²⁹ Even then, the question still remains as to what kind of politics this produces and how compatible it is with political values that underpin and sustain liberal democracy?

Australian experiences of religion and politics offer some useful insights. Australia is rarely counted among states that are identified as examples of the global resurgence of religion, neither does it feature the kinds of radical religious movements that use violence as part of a political strategy. Indeed, the proposition that Australia is primarily a secular nation-state is not unreasonable³⁰, yet there are some curiosities. Demographic studies do suggest a continuing overall trend of declining mainstream church attendance. In a survey conducted by the ABC as part of the Q&A program that pitted Richard Dawkins against Cardinal George Pell, 76% of over 20 000 participants voted that religious belief does not make the world a better place.³¹ Further to this, the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes suggests that churches themselves are among public institutions that are not held in particularly high regard.³² It may be that continuing scandal surrounding church (particularly Catholic) failure to protect children from predatory priests has had some impact as Hogan has acknowledged, however, there is no evidence to suggest that this has been decisive.³³ Despite these results, it is also apparent that 70% of Australians maintain, or at least are willing to acknowledge a nominal affiliation with Christianity.³⁴ There is a small, but noted

28 Ozzano Luca, Religious Fundamentalism and Democracy *Politics and Religion Journal* Vol.3 No.1, Belgrade 2009, pp.137-153.

29 Smith Marcus and Peter Marden, 2012. 'Capturing the Religious Spirit: A Challenge for the Secular State' *Journal of Church and State* Waco 2012, doi: 10.1093/jcs/css053, first published online June 29 2012.

30 Frame Tom, *Church and State: Australia's Imaginary Wall* University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2006; Maddox Marion, An Argument for More, Not Less, Religion in Australian Politics *Australian Religion Studies Review* Vol.22 No.3 Sydney 2009, pp. 345-367.

31 ABC1, Religion and Atheism Q&A 9.April 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/qanda/bxt/s3469101.htm> (accessed 31.8.2012).

32 Evans Ann, *The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes* 2009 [computer file], Australian Data Archive, The Australian National University, Canberra 2010.

33 Hogan Michael, Is Australia Losing Its Religion? *Australian Review of Public Affairs* 2009 <http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2009/11/hogan1.html> (accessed 16.9.2012).

34 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Religious Affiliation and Activity *Australian Social Trends, 2004* (updated 2007) <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/2f762f95845417aeca25706c00834efa/fa58e975c470b73cca256e9e00296645!OpenDocument> (accessed 20.8. 2012).

trend among Australia's youth of interest in the vibrant worship typified by the Australian Christian Churches (formerly known as Assembly of God), though it is not clear whether attendance or faith will be maintained in the long term.³⁵ While the deeper significance of these trends remains unclear – given that levels of spirituality and church attendance are hardly coterminous- it does appear that Australians maintain reservations about the role of the church and religious leaders in politics. This is perhaps best reflected in Gleeson's study of the political strength of the Christian Right in Australia in which she concluded that based on analysis of the abortion debate, suggestions that Australia was falling victim to a politically rampant religious right were over-stated.³⁶ Indeed, Gleeson notes that despite the efforts of key members of the Australian government and church leaders at the time to re-ignite debate about abortion in Australia, the issue instead seemed to galvanise support for the longstanding consensus supporting pro-choice.

However, a different set of statistics drawn from recent social research adds further detail and provides an indication of the political complexity of religion in the public arena. In April 2012, a number of Australian newspapers featured a story regarding survey results that suggested religious faith was an active and important component of life for a large number of Australians. The research suggested that Australia was more religious, indeed Christian, and more tolerant and accepting of the religious faith of others than would be expected given the commonly held belief that Australia is defined by a secular culture.³⁷ Coverage of the findings featured in the *Courier Mail*, *Herald Sun*, *Perth Now*, *Adelaide Now* and *News.com* at a time when spiritual reflection is already encouraged by the celebration of Easter.³⁸ Whatever the purpose of media coverage, it would seem that the point of the survey was to address what is described above as a general scepticism of the role religion should have in public policy, perhaps even politics more broadly. Drawing on the survey results, Rev Peter Kurti, Visiting Fellow of the Religion and Free Society Program at conservative think tank the Centre of Independent Studies, argued that these results demonstrate the acceptability of faith in public life and the shrillness of militant secularists' desire to have religion removed from the public sphere.³⁹ Based on the survey results the position adopted by Kurti would seem reasonable and media coverage would have

35 Simons Margaret, *Faith Money Power. What the religious revival means for politics* North Melbourne, Pluto Press, 2007.

36 Gleeson Kate, Tony Abbott and Abortion: Miscalculating the Strength of the Religious Right *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No.3, Melbourne 2011 pp.473-488.

37 McCrindle Research, Easter miracles and Jesus Christ have not lost significance for Australians 2012 http://mccrindle.com.au/ResearchSummaries/Easter-and-Australians_McCrimdle-Research.pdf (accessed 20.5.2012).

38 See for example Passmore Daryl, We believe in Easter but we mistrust the Church *Herald Sun* 8.April 2012 <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/we-believe-in-easter-but-we-mistrust-the-church/story-fn7x8me2-1226321168853> (accessed 20.5.2012).

39 Kurti Peter, Aussies tell Dawkins: Live and let religion live *Incise* 14.April 2012 <http://www.incise.org.au/2012-04-14/aussies-tell-dawkins-live-and-let-religion-live/> (accessed 20.5.2012).

contributed to this end.

The problem, in part is the questionable practices of McCrindle Research who conducted the survey and analysed the data.⁴⁰ There are also questions surrounding the organisation responsible for commissioning the research. Olive Tree Media is an incorporated association and as a charity receives tax concessions. The board of Olive Tree Media is made up of various groups associated with the Christian Right.⁴¹ For example Karl Faase hosted the Australian Christian Lobby's (ACL) National Marriage Webcast in 2012. He also sits on the Boards of Samaritans Purse and Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) whose funders include the Walton Family Foundation, Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation and Orville D. and Ruth A. Merillat Foundation.⁴² Other members of the Samaritans Purse Board include Franklin Graham (also on the Board of BGEA and prominent figure among the USA Christian Right), Wendy Francis (Queensland Director of ACL and Committee member of the Family Association of Queensland) and Robert Greaves (Chairman of Youth for Christ International).⁴³ Youth for Christ International is another organisation whose various chapters have received funding from key financiers of the Christian Right in the USA including Lynn and Foster Friess Family Foundation, Dick and Betsy DeVos Foundation, Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation and True Foundation.⁴⁴ This is not to suggest that key conservative philanthropies are directing a campaign to assist the political aspirations of particular religious groups in Australia, but to indicate how particular these religious faiths are. This example also offers some insight into the political/religious networks that exist and the shared interests of the Christian Right in Australia with their counterparts in the USA. That such alliances exist suggests that the dominionist impulse and apocalyptic fantasies that define the Christian Right in the USA may well have some influence on the Christian Right in Australia and so the concerns raised by Hedges equally apply.

Population demographics, electoral trends and the outcomes of particular public policy debates offer limited insight into the significance of Christian Right values for Australia's political culture. Such indicators do not conclusively account for public policy outcomes, which more often than not are determined

40 ABC1, Researching the Researcher *MediaWatch* Episode 36, 17.October 2011 <http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s3341830.htm> (accessed 20.5.2012); mUmbrella, Research Body to investigate McCrindle Research after MediaWatch expose 23.October 2011 <http://mumbrella.com.au/research-body-to-investigate-behavior-of-mccrindle-research-after-media-watch-expose-62028> (accessed 23.8.2012).

41 Olive Tree Media, Board of Directors and Key Staff, 2012 <http://www.olivetreemedia.com.au/board.aspx> (accessed 21.5.2012).

42 Bridge Project, Recipient: Billy Graham Evangelistic Association <http://bridgeproject.com/?organization&id=273636&tab=connections> (accessed 24.8. 2012).

43 Samaritans Purse, Board of Directors and Key Staff <http://www.samaritanspurse.com.au/board-and-key-staff/> (accessed 24.8.2012).

44 Further details of the network of philanthropic foundations supporting neoconservative and Christian Right groups can be found at <http://www.bridgeproject.com>

at least in part safely between electoral cycles and not always openly in the public domain. Even the focus on public policy for signs of influence may be fraught given the recently reported assertion by former prime minister Rudd that his replacement by current prime minister Julia Gillard was in part owed to a deal with Christian Right figures Joe de Bruyn and Jim Wallace.⁴⁵ There is also no accounting for a long term commitment to act on religious values that seems to typify the Christian Right in Australia as Ozzano notes of the Christian Right in the USA. In this respect, the issue is not whether Christian Right values are influencing public policy, but rather, what would the impact on democratic political culture be if they did. Maddox has argued that the Christian Right (drawing on support networks linked to the Christian Right in the USA) identifies and cultivates wedge issues to gain political traction. This suggests that the attempt to shift public policy on abortion is as much a means to an end as it is a policy goal of the Christian Right. In which case, limited success on this issue will mean attention will shift to other issues or a reframing of the language that the broader public find more persuasive. In the meantime, the aim of having a greater say in the public area and policy debates is achieved as their continued contributions further normalises the presence and consultation of the Christian Right over key issues. If religious values are an intrinsic determinant of political action and faith among the Christian Right is an unwavering belief in biblical truth, then an analysis of events such as elections and particular debates offers little. What is more helpful is an analysis of the values of the Christian Right and the way in which these values shape public debate, especially in terms of the identification of problems for public policy to address and the impact this can have on various communities. This provides insight not only into the relationship between religious values and political action, it also offers a clearer picture of the kind of society the Christian Right are endeavoring to create and which particular interests this may benefit.

Family Values and Political Engagement

Developing an understanding of 'family values' cherished by the Christian Right is somewhat difficult as it a vague term, perhaps deliberately so.⁴⁶ Family values are often listed along other values that are associated with freedom of religion and sanctity of life.⁴⁷ Such values are unlikely to generate a great deal

45 Peatling Stephanie, Rudd "outed" PM's gay marriage support *The Sydney Morning Herald* 22 July 2012 <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/political-news/rudd-outed-pms-gay-marriage-support-20120721-22gxy.html> (accessed 23.8.2012).

46 The *Canberra Declaration* from the Australian Christian Values Institute (another organisation founded by Warwick Marsh) serves as a useful example. As a statement of faith, it associates family values with the idea of the family as a man and woman joined in lifelong union that guarantees children their biological birthright of a mother and father. *The Canberra Declaration* July 23 2010 <http://www.canberradeclaration.org.au/the-canberra-declaration/read-the-declaration.html> (accessed 31.8.2012). CultureWatch a website maintained by prominent Christian Right member and editor of Australian version of the *Marriage Manifesto* Bill Muehlenberg offers no further clarification or detail.

47 *The Canberra Declaration* July 23 2010 <http://www.canberradeclaration.org.au/the-canberra-declaration/read-the-declaration.html> (accessed 31.8.2012).

of controversy, likely owing to the broad appeal each set of values is likely to generate. After-all, there are few that would oppose family values, any more than values associated with the sanctity of life or religious freedom. Space does not permit an examination of the latter two and our focus remains family values even though each set of values has obvious interconnections based on the underlying Christian belief upon which each are based. Our examination of family values as affirmed by the Christian Right involves an analysis of what is conveyed publicly in terms of how problems are defined and what is at stake, for which family values are the answer. The picture that emerges is further enhanced by addressing the deficits in the Christian Right account, specifically what could be said, but is not. As a political project, the campaign for recognition and adoption of family values as the proper platform for public policy is conditioned by the need to disguise much of the religiosity that informs it. Indeed, the rather crude initial attempts to articulate a case for family values at the inaugural National Marriage Forum have given way to a more reasonable, nuanced and subtle defence of the Christian Right position. Such adaptation could be heralded as an outcome of engaged democratic debate in which ongoing public deliberation has shifted the Christian Right to a more reasonable position. Nonetheless, the framework of family values remains, for many, tied to a literal reading of select scripture and an unwavering faith in the inerrancy of the bible as the Word of God and thus absolute truth. The right to practice such dogmatic faith is protected in the Australian Constitution, however, this should not translate into the right to be heard by most political leaders, nor inform public policy.

The inaugural National Marriage Forum (NMF) was the first real attempt to organise a marriage movement in Australia. Under the banner of protecting and preserving family values, the Christian Right gathered in Parliament Hall in July 2004, along with representatives from both the Liberal National Coalition (who formed government at the time) and the Australian Labor Party (ALP). The NMF was designed to have a direct influence on the formulation and passage of legislation aimed at strengthening the legal definition of marriage and the conference was addressed by politicians from the major political parties.⁴⁸ Despite the complexity of problems and pressures facing Australian families, attendees and invited speakers represented a very narrow selection of views.⁴⁹ There was also a clearly demarcated religious narrowness evident in the organisations that organised the NMF that is typical of Christian Right forums. The Australian Christian Lobby (Jim Wallace), the Fatherhood Foundation (Warwick Marsh) and the Australian Family Association (Bill Muehlenberg), forming the National Marriage Coalition, all bear a striking resemblance. The broad values

48 See for example Muehlenberg Bill, Marriage Act: Major triumph for marriage in Australia *News Weekly* 28.August 2004 <http://newsweekly.com.au/article.php?id=1606> (accessed 13.10.2008).

49 Porter Muriel, *The New Puritans. The Rise of Fundamentalism in the Anglican Church* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2006.

framework to which each subscribe is generally underpinned by a conservative Christian faith and support for their agenda is commonly derived from but not limited to politically engaged Pentecostal and charismatic churches. For each, preserving family (Christian) values is central to the salvation of society, racked by the scourges of modernity or at least modern 'isms' such as secularism⁵⁰ and postmodernism.⁵¹ Indeed, same-sex marriage is identified as one of the greatest threats to the 'traditional family' that is already under siege from policy reforms such as no-fault divorce, access to abortion and a decline in observance of the traditional roles of parents. It should be noted that according to Porter, there was almost no representation of the mainstream churches.⁵²

Campaigns undertaken by these organisations are both designed to and in turn draw on the appearance of broad-based community support. However, closer examination reveals a small network of prominent figures running these organisations through which they appear to wield considerable and largely unaccountable influence.⁵³ At the same time, the Christian Right seeks to demonise and marginalise those advocating for marriage equality as a strident, but vocal minority.⁵⁴ Unlike their USA-based counterparts, there is much less indication to the uninitiated of the religious fervour that underpins their discourse family values. Indeed almost all the organisations are discreet about

- 50 See for example Australian Prayer Network, Protecting Our Christian Heritage from the Advance of Secular Humanism, no date http://ausprayernet.org.au/feature/feature_articles_04.php (accessed 24.8.2012); Anderson John, Lose the Faith, Lose the Culture, Keynote address of the Lord Mayor of Brisbane's Annual Prayer Breakfast (March 2011) http://ausprayernet.org.au/feature/feature_articles_19.php (accessed 23.8.2012). A former Deputy Prime Minister, Anderson's speech is an example of one of the more tempered criticisms of secularism, but still implies that the decline in Christian belief is a potential disaster for Western civilisation. There is evidence of similar thinking in the forum that launched the Australian Christian Heritage Forum in 2006. See report from Australian Prayer Network, Prominent Australians Call for Recognition of Australia's Christian Heritage *Display Newsletter*, 23 August 2006 http://ausprayernet.org.au/newsletter/DisplayNewsletter.php?e_id=0000001049 (accessed 25.8.2012).
- 51 See for example Bastian Richard, What's Wrong with Postmodernism *MercatorNet* 4.April 2008 http://www.mercatornet.com/mobile/view/whats_wrong_with_postmodernism (accessed 29.8.2012); Carlson, Jason and Ron Carlson, Why the Secular Left Despise the Christian Right *Christian Ministries International* <http://www.christianministriesintl.org/articles/Why-Secular-Left-Despise-Christian-Right.php> (accessed 31.8.2012). Both these articles featured on the Australian Prayer Network website. For a version of the postmodernism/feminism problem see Joseph Rita, Deconstructing the Family: Tampering with "the Deep Natural Facts of Begetting" *Remarks to the World Congress of Families II Geneva 1999* http://www.worldcongress.org/wcf2_sprks/wcf2_joseph.htm (accessed 20.9.2012).
- 52 Porter Muriel, *The New Puritans. The Rise of Fundamentalism in the Anglican Church* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 2006, pp.79-80.
- 53 See also Smith Marcus and Peter Marden, 2012. 'Capturing the Religious Spirit: A Challenge for the Secular State' *Journal of Church and State* Waco 2012, doi: 10.1093/jcs/css053, first published online June 29 2012.
- 54 This type of framing saturates the literature produced by the Christian Right. Typically the broader the target audience, the less explicit is the vitriol. The submission by Warwick Marsh representing the Fatherhood Foundation is a typical example. Marsh Warwick, To the Senate Standing Committee on Marriage, Submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Marriage 30. July 2004 <http://www.fathersonline.org/resources/30July04%20Marriage%20Submission.doc> (accessed 20.12.2010). In contrast, Bill Muehlenberg is much less guarded. Muehlenberg Bill, The End Is Near (Or It Sure Seems That Way) *CultureWatch* 28.August 2012 <http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/2012/08/28/the-end-is-near-or-it-sure-seems-that-way/> (accessed 30.8.2012)

the religious orientation each holds, the one exception being the generically named Australian Christian Lobby, who nonetheless adheres to a particular view about what being Christian means.

The Forum was addressed by senior political figures including former Prime Minister John Howard, former Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson and former ALP shadow Attorney General Nicola Roxon demonstrating the degree to which these interests command bipartisan attention.⁵⁵ The principal reason for the NMF was the possible delay in the proposed Marriage Amendment Bill (2004) being passed, particularly as the passage through parliament of its predecessor, the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill (2004) had met with resistance. The purpose of the Marriage Amendment Bill was to formally define marriage and to ensure same-sex unions were not recognised in Australia, including those performed in a foreign country that did legally sanction such unions, which received bipartisan support.⁵⁶ Its predecessor, the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill (2004) had been opposed by the ALP owing to a provision seeking to prevent same-sex couples from adopting children from overseas countries.⁵⁷ It is also worth noting the actions of the then government to hasten the passage of legislation seemingly to pre-empt two applications filed in court to have same-sex couple unions performed under the laws of another country recognised under Australian law and because of heightened concern among the Australian community.⁵⁸ A number of parliamentarians supporting the Marriage Amendment Bill spoke of the NMF as evidence of the 'silent majority'.⁵⁹ The ALP supported its passage albeit with reservations.⁶⁰ This is contrary to the provisions contained in the Marriage Act (1961) and the spirit that informed it⁶¹ and contrary

55 This continues to be the case. Similar representation of the major political parties was evident at the National Strategic Summit in 2007 and Julia Gillard has continued the trend of serving Prime Ministers meeting with religious leaders at functions organised the Christian Right. See Shanahan Dennis, Julia Gillard Reaches Out To Church Leaders *The Australian* 5.April 2011 <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/julia-gillard-reaches-out-to-christian-leaders/story-fn59niix-1226033650529> (accessed 11.5.2012).

56 Shaw Meaghan, Labor Backs Ban on Gay Marriage *The Age* 5.August 2004 <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/08/04/1091557919497.html> (accessed 1.9.2012).

57 Roxon Nicola, Address to the National Marriage Forum 4.August 2004 Parliament House, Canberra.

58 Haines Kim, Marriage Amendment Bill *Bills Digest No. 5 2003-04* <http://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/bd/2004-05/05bd005.pdf> (accessed 14.9.2012). Some critics suggested that the focus on same-sex marriage was nothing more than a 'wedge issue', a tactical move to stymie Christian concerns over the treatment of asylum seekers, especially as there was no evidence presented that either Bill enjoyed popular support. See Smith Tony, Election 2004: Marriage Legislation – the latest 'wedge' *Australian Review of Public Affairs*. <http://www.australianreview.net/digest/2004/07/smith.html> (accessed 25.8.2008).

59 For example, see the speeches made during the second reading of the Bill. See Parliament of Australia, Marriage Amendment Bill 2004 Second Reading *Senate Hansard* Canberra, 2004 <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansards%2F2004-08-12%2F0402%22> (accessed 13.9.2012).

60 Roxon Nicola, House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 24 June 2004, p. 31460

61 Haines Kim, Marriage Amendment Bill *Bills Digest No. 5 2003-04* <http://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/library/pubs/bd/2004-05/05bd005.pdf> (accessed 14.9.2012), p.2

to the recent opinion of the full bench of the Family Court which stated 'it would be potentially highly destructive to the institution of marriage for its definition to be frozen at any point of time'.⁶² Such circumstances and the nature of the issues described above would be expected to warrant broad public consultation, however as indicated, this was not the case.

With the above policy issue in mind, speakers addressing the audience attempted to convey the dire circumstances facing Australian society owing to a decline in esteem for the institution of marriage and why it needed to be saved. Only three of the speakers addressing the forum are available from the National Marriage Coalition website. Perhaps the most controversial address was given by Dr. David van Gend (2004), who spoke of the need to protect the integrity of marriage from destructive social trends evident in certain 'lifestyle choices'.⁶³ In seeking to affirm the basis for his support for the Marriage Legislation Bill, van Gend argued that 'every little mammal needs both the warmth and comfort of the mother and the playful rough and tumble and as well as the protection, of the father'.⁶⁴ van Gend was insistent that homosexuality not only existed outside the 'circle of life', but that as it was a choice, homosexuals were excluding themselves, therefore opposition to same-sex marriage and adoption was not discriminatory. van Gend cited the study of homosexual behaviour by American psychiatrist Dr. Robert Spitzer. Both the study and its conclusions were controversial, in particular the claim that homosexuals can make a choice to maximize heterosexual tendencies while minimizing their unwanted homosexual inclinations. Drawing on the study, van Gend insists that '[b]eing gay is more truthfully understood as a deeply ingrained but treatable psychological condition like any other, not an inborn identity'.⁶⁵ As a consequence, those determined and dedicated enough to seek proper treatment can become 'biologically marriagable' and re-enter the great circle of life.

Bill Muehlenberg (Culture Watch, National Vice President of Australian Family Association and former Research Coordinator for Focus on the Family Australia) spoke of the 'overwhelming and irrefutable' evidence that families

62 Cited in New South Wales Council for Civil Liberties and University of New South Wales Council Civil Liberties, Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Committee's Inquiry into the Provisions of the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill 2004, Sydney 2004. <http://www.nswcccl.org.au/docs/pdf/marriage%20bill%20submission.pdf> (accessed 20.8.2008)

63 van Gend David, Re-Entering the Circle of Life: Gays, Ex-Gays and Marriage, Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2012, Parliament House, Canberra http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=3 (accessed 21.8. 2008).

64 van Gend David, Re-Entering the Circle of Life: Gays, Ex-Gays and Marriage, Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2012, Parliament House, Canberra http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=3 (accessed 21.8. 2008).

65 van Gend David, Re-Entering the Circle of Life: Gays, Ex-Gays and Marriage, Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2012, Parliament House, Canberra http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=21&Itemid=3 (accessed 21.8. 2008).

have almost always consisted of a man and a woman joined in matrimony from which children follow, which was now in jeopardy from an intelligentsia bereft of commonsense.⁶⁶ In what begins as a scathing attack on both intellectuals and politicians, Muehlenberg's address to the Forum cites a number of academics, mainly anthropologists, as support for his argument that marriage defined as "mum dad and the kids" is a geographical and historical universal human norm. Muehlenberg states '[i]n virtually every known human culture, the family unit, cemented by marriage, has been the norm. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise'.⁶⁷ He goes on to provide a snapshot of supposed findings from social science research. The findings are largely quotes from various academics that includes Robert Lowie, Amitai Etzioni, James Q Wilson, Lewis Terman, Kingsley Davis. Each furnishes Muehlenberg's speech with some statement affirming the presence and persistence of family and marriage as important institutions. Despite this, Muehlenberg is not clear, nor is any evidence offered in terms of why, how or from whom the idea of marriage or family is under threat. Nevertheless, Muehlenberg concludes by imploring his audience to 'redouble your efforts to protect marriage. It is too valuable to let go of without a fight'.⁶⁸

Mary Louise Fowler (from the Australian Family Association) impressed upon the audience that they were faced with 'a defining moment in our nation's history' and the need to rally support for the Marriage Amendment Bill, which if not passed threatened to 'drive a knife deep into the flesh of marriage and family'.⁶⁹ Like Muehlenberg, Fowler was emphatic that the very future all that marriage means and represents could "slip from us" if the Marriage Amendment Bill was not passed. Fowler proceeded to explain her convictions by outlining the 'Principal of Unity' that essentially means '1+1 =1'. She reinforced this principal with an anecdote from a kitchen renovation during which a builder 'married' two pieces of wood, making two into one piece. She continued with a description of the virtues and dedication required to make a marriage work and the quasi-religious mysticism of the 'conjugal act' – known only to married couples. She finished with a description of the importance of family and the benefits for children of having married parents, because "[m]arriage provides a framework of stability and certainty".⁷⁰ Not unlike Muehlenberg, Fowler offered no indication of how the institution of marriage and the families constituted within it was un-

66 Muehlenberg Bill, Marriage as a Universal Norm Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2004 Parliament House, Canberra http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=22&Itemid=25 (accessed 21.8.2008).

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 Fowler Mary Louise, 2004. Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2004, Parliament House, Canberra. http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=25 (accessed 21.8. 2008).

70 Fowler Mary Louise, 2004. Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2004, Parliament House, Canberra. http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=25 (accessed 21.8. 2008).

der threat. This did not preclude her from concluding that failure to pass the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill would 'divest 'marriage' of all meaning, and [would] propel our families further into a tail-spin of destruction'.⁷¹

Problems with the Christian Right Case

In all three cases, the insistence that without legislative action marriage, families and society as we know it are doomed is reminiscent of the campaign conducted by the Christian Right in the USA, in many cases drawing on the very same documents.⁷² In much the same way, all three addresses display a cavalier regard for evidence-based argument that typifies much of the Christian Right's effort to justify their agenda. That is, rather than draw on scripture, the Christian Right camouflages religious objections in social science. In doing so, social science is presented in the same way as their Christian faith – in absolute terms beyond any form of fallibility and yet this is very far from the truth. For example, the study referred to by van Gend was so compromised that in 2012 Robert Spitzer offered an unqualified apology to the gay community for the damage it had caused since.⁷³ In many cases, the quotes used by Muehlenberg are highly questionable. Some quotes are taken out of context so that a particular passage is cited as though the entire body of the original author's work concurs with Muehlenberg's very narrow understanding of marriage. For example, he quotes anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Robert Lowie to this effect. However, Malinowski's work on the Tobrianders in some respects indicates only passing similarities with the Western concept of family as described by Muehlenberg. Again, Muehlenberg's quote from Lowie that denies any historical validity for "sexual communism" ignores a great deal of empirical evidence of tribal culture that embraced many and varied forms of family units – including polygyny and polyandry – for economic, political and demographic reasons quite apart from some notion of deeply spiritual connection as described by Fowler's 'conjugal act'. Among some tribes there was no recognition of biological bonds

71 Fowler Mary Louise, 2004. Address to the National Marriage Forum, 4.August 2004, Parliament House, Canberra. http://www.marriage.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=25 (accessed 21.8. 2008). It should be noted that Fowler (like others at the NMF) focused on the Marriage Legislation Amendment Bill, as opposed to the Marriage Amendment Bill as the former legislated explicitly to prevent same-sex couples adopting children, whereas the latter focused specifically on same-sex marriage.

72 For example *The Canberra Declaration* was inspired by *The Manhattan Declaration* (2009) produced by prominent architects of the Christian Right in the USA such as Chuck Colson (Prison Fellowship Ministries; Chuck Colson Center for Christian Worldview), Jim Daly and James Dobson (Focus on the Family), Maggie Gallagher (Institute for Marriage and Public Policy), Robert George (Professor of Jurisprudence, Princeton University), Tony Perkins (Family Research Council) Alan Sears (Alliance Defense Fund, now Alliance Defending Freedom) and Mark Tooley (Institute for Religion and Democracy). For more information on Chuck Colson see Political Correction, Chuck Colson and the Manhattan Declaration 25.November 2009 <http://politicalcorrection.org/factcheck/200911250002> (accessed 20.5.2012).

73 Carey Benedict, Psychiatry Giant "Sorry" for Backing Gay Cure *The New York Times* (May 18 2012) <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/health/dr-robert-l-spitzer-noted-psychiatrist-apologizes-for-study-on-gay-cure.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed 31.8.2012).

in family or kin formations.⁷⁴ Other academic authorities quoted by Muehlenberg include Lewis Terman, a controversial figure given his interest in eugenics and credited with developing IQ tests (Mitchell, 2000).⁷⁵ Like Muehlenberg, Fowler offers little evidence to support the central concern of her address. The anecdote describing the marriage of two pieces of wood illustrates the significance of marriage, but not why same-sex marriage could not emulate such a union. Indeed, the anecdote offers more support for same-sex union for if two pieces of wood are married to 'look as one piece of timber', then each piece would need to look the same to begin with.⁷⁶

Although none of the speakers specifies Christian marriage, family values are framed in Christian terms. Indeed, both the conjugal act and the circle of life metaphor have religious resonance, yet neither is explicitly Christian. It is worth noting that the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) shows that trends in marriage and divorce rates have been relatively stable over the period from 1996 to 2011⁷⁷. In fact the number of marriages has slightly increased while the number of divorces has declined slightly. Further ABS data also offers some other interesting trends⁷⁸. As the average age of couples getting married has increased, the divorce rate has actually declined and the average duration of a marriage before separation has also increased. As the number of registered marriages has increased, the number of marriages involving religious ceremonies has continued to decline and the number of couples cohabiting has also increased. In 2009 and 2010 the number of marriages performed was 120 000 and 121 000 respectively – a record for Australia in a calendar year. This could be compared with 46 300 people living in a same-sex relationship in 2009-10. Such figures tend to suggest a few trends pertinent to the case for marriage presented by the Christian Right. Religion, at least in an organised sense, is of decreasing importance to marriage (and perhaps by inference families) since the appointment of the first civil celebrant in Australia in 1973, yet there remains a strong culture of marriage. Broad trends suggest the majority of Australian families are constituted by registered marriage. Despite the declining role of religion, the advent of no-fault divorce among other reforms, this culture appears to be strengthening if anything. Based on these statistics,

74 Lowie Robert, *Primitive Society* New York, Boni and Liveright, 1925.

75 Leslie Mitchell, The Vexing Legacy of Lewis Terman *Stanford Magazine* July/August 2000 http://alumni.stanford.edu/get/page/magazine/article?article_id=40678 (accessed 21.8.2012).

76 For further critical review of NMC literature see Keane Bernard, Why plagiarism doesn't matter on National Marriage Day *Crikey* 13. August 2009 <http://www.crikey.com.au/2009/08/13/21-reasons-why-plagiarism-doesnt-matter-on-national-marriage-day/> (accessed 22.8.2012).

77 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends, Data Cube – Family and Community 1998-2011* Catalogue Number 4102.0, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011.

78 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Love Me Do Australian Social Trends March Quarter* Catalogue Number 4102.0, Commonwealth of Australia, 2012 <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30March+Quarter+2012> (accessed 20.8.2012).

there is little evidence of a cataclysmic decline in family stability and given the very small number of same-sex relationships (not all of which desire to marry), it would appear that legalising same-sex marriage would be unlikely to have a dramatic impact on the trends evidenced above. Thus to suggest that the most common form of union in Australia is under threat from either same-sex couples seeking to adopt children overseas or have their relationships legally recognised is a vast over-statement, especially with no evidence.

In the absence of solid or reliable evidence, the apocalyptic rhetoric and dominionist tendencies of the Christian Right in Australia are more apparent. This is not coincidental, as mentioned above given the influence of the Christian Right in the USA. Among the Christian Right in Australia there is a very clear demarcation between good and evil and the constitution of each. Though the context and content can change depending on the circumstances and the audience, it is nonetheless presented in very simple binary terms of absolute right and absolute wrong. At the 2012 marriage panel broadcast on Vision Radio Australia (a Christian network of local stations supported by United Christian Broadcasters), a panel member noted that Australia had moved beyond homophobia.⁷⁹ Yet in less public forums, the vehemence of anti-gay feeling is evident. In September 2009 at the Fellowship of the Round Table debate on internet censorship, Jim Wallace Managing Director of the Australian Christian Lobby voiced his opinion of homosexuality when questioned about the moral authority of the church when over 600 clergy have been prosecuted for abuse of children. Wallace almost seemed to suggest that the church was a victim, linking homosexuality to paedophilia and insisting that had the church known the sexual orientation of the clergy involved they would never have been placed in positions of authority.⁸⁰ Bill Muehlenberg continues to rage against same-sex marriage on CultureWatch. In the section on ethics, homosexuality is by far the largest category and in one post for example he went as far as agreeing with a comment that religious believers who disagree with same-sex marriage will have electronic chips implanted to 're-educate' or zombify them.⁸¹ As mentioned, the Christian Right maintain such steadfast convictions even when the basis for their case is drawn from supposedly empirical research. As the speakers at the inaugural conference demonstrate, there is no evidence of doubt or circumspection. Yet reports released by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) indicate that based on currently available studies, there is little to no evidence of systematic detriment to children raised

79 Australian Christian Lobby, *Defining Marriage. Does it matter anymore?* National webcast June 26 2012 <http://marriagewebcast.acl.org.au/index.php> (accessed 30.7.2012).

80 Wallace Jim, *Cyberhate? Censorship on the Internet*, Fellowship of the Roundtable NSW Parliament House 8. September 2009.

81 See Muehlenberg Bill, *Homosexual Marriage: Everything will change* CultureWatch 15. May 2012 <http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/2012/05/15/homosexual-marriage-everything-will-change/> (accessed 31.8.2012).

by same-sex couples.⁸² In fact, the AAP finds that where evidence does suggest detriment to the child, this is more commonly associated with exogenous factors such as the absence of rights and recognition of same-sex relationships rather than some dysfunction intrinsic to the relationship itself. Such findings stand in stark contrast to the efforts of Focus on the Family, American Family Association and the Alliance Defending Freedom to substantially weaken anti-bullying measures being promoted in the USA. The actions of these organisations are prompted by the fear that such measures will successfully combat bullying of LGBT youth.⁸³ In essence, the actions of the Christian Right contribute to the social stigma that generates the very dysfunction they misattribute to same-sex families and homosexuality. As J Matt Barber from Liberty Council and Liberty University brazenly argued “Kids who are engaging in homosexual behavior often look inward and know that what they are doing is unnatural, is wrong, is immoral, and so they become depressed and the instances of suicide can rise”.⁸⁴

The selection of guest speakers to address the National Marriage Day Rally also demonstrates the very narrow range of views that punctuate the Christian Right case for family values. Recent speakers have included Allan Carlson and Rebecca Hagelin who are noted members of the Christian Right in the USA.⁸⁵ The speaker invited to address the National Marriage Day rally in 2012 was Don Feder. Although unable to attend (the head of the National Civic Council Peter Westmore addressed the rally instead) Don Feder shares Allan Carlson’s affiliation with the World Congress of Families (WCF) and antipathy to any form of marriage other than that celebrated by the Christian Right. The World Congress of Families (and its parent organisation the Howard Center for Family Religion and Society) has connections to most Christian Right organisations in the USA, including the Americans for the Truth About Homosexuality, Focus on the Family and Family Research Council, Concerned Women of America, Institute of American Values and the Population Research Institute.⁸⁶ Supporters also include the Alliance for Defending Freedom which engages in litigation around the globe in defence of religious liberty from a Christian Right perspective, much like

82 Pawelski, James G., et.al., The Effects of Marriage, Civil Union, and Domestic Partnership Laws on the Health and Well-being of Children *Pediatrics* Vol.118 Burlington 2006, pp. 349-364.

83 People for the American Way, *Big Bullies: How the Religious Right is trying to make schools safe for bullies and dangerous for gay kids* People for the American Way, Washington DC 2011 <http://www.pfaw.org/rww-in-focus/big-bullies-how-the-religious-right-trying-to-make-schools-safe-for-bullies-and-dangero> (accessed 14.9.2012).

84 People for the American Way, *Big Bullies: How the Religious Right is trying to make schools safe for bullies and dangerous for gay kids* People for the American Way, Washington DC 2011 <http://www.pfaw.org/rww-in-focus/big-bullies-how-the-religious-right-trying-to-make-schools-safe-for-bullies-and-dangero> (accessed 14.9.2012), p.10.

85 Smith Marcus and Peter Marden, 2012. ‘Capturing the Religious Spirit: A Challenge for the Secular State’ *Journal of Church and State* Waco 2012, doi: 10.1093/jcs/css053, first published online June 29 2012.

86 People for the American Way, World Congress of Families Welcomes Peter LaBarbera to the Family *RightWingWatch* 17 June 2010 <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/world-congress-families-welcomes-peter-labarbera-family> (accessed 20.8.2012).

the Liberty Counsel, and was founded by key Christian Right Leaders. The WCF organises conferences for the purpose of networking and strategising on how to protect 'the natural human family [a]s established by the Creator and essential to good society'.⁸⁷ The influence of the WCF stems less from grassroots support (a recent conference in the Netherlands attracted only 400 supporters), but from their well-connected and established leadership strengthened during the Bush Administration⁸⁸, which granted a number of its membership NGO consultative status at the United Nations. The next congress is to be held in 2013 in Sydney Australia. The organising committee for the Australian congress includes Mary Louise Fowler (Australian Family Association); Ron and Mavis Pirola (Catholic-based Renaissance of Marriage); Trafford Fischer (Seventh Day Adventist Church Department of Family Ministries); Peter Westmore (National Civic Council) and Greg Stone (Universal Peace Federation – Unification Church). Upon a recent visit, WCF managing director Larry Jacobs was greeted by Cardinal Pell and Liberal MP Kevin Andrews.⁸⁹

In 2010, Jacobs endorsed an article written by WCF Communications Director Don Feder. In the article, Feder lambasted a host of right-wing luminaries such as Glen Beck and Ann Coulter for failing to defend families by not opposing gay marriage vociferously enough.⁹⁰ In Feder's words 'surrender on gay marriage is ... surrender on civilisation' which appears to imply the end of freedom of conscience, free speech and the free exercise of religion and a dramatic increase in social traumas such as 'illegitimacy, juvenile crime, drug abuse and female-headed households'.⁹¹ Other contributions to the WCF website include a critique of same-sex marriage as symptomatic of larger social problems, the latest in a long line of initiatives that have undermined marriage in the USA. Like Feder, Baskerville (whose position at the Howard Center for Family

87 World Congress of Families, Our Purpose http://www.profam.org/THC/xthc_principles.htm (accessed 1.9.2012). For a clear picture of the narrow range of speakers that have addressed its Congresses see World Congress of Families, Speakers: World Congress of Families VI, V, IV, III, II & I, http://www.worldcongress.org/WCF/wcf_spkrs_bio.htm#F (accessed 19.9.2012).

88 Kane Gillian, Exporting "Traditional Values": The World Congress of Families *The Public Eye Magazine* Winter 2009/Spring 2010.

89 The World Congress of Families, Press Release 12.August 2012 <http://profam.org/press/wcf.pr.120809.htm> (accessed 1.9.2012).

90 Feder Don, Queerly Beloved – If marriage is lost, we lose everything *WorldNetDaily* 31.August 2010 <http://www.wnd.com/2010/08/197353/> (accessed 26.8.2012)

91 WCF is among a host of Christian Right organisations that has also promoted the controversial documentary *Demographic Winter: The decline of the human family* directed by Rick Stout and released by Family First Foundation. The documentary claims large portions of the human race (notably predominantly in the West) are hurtling toward extinction, owing largely to anti-natural family measures/trends such as use of contraception and abortion, cohabitation, divorce and especially same-sex marriage and anti-child cultures all seemingly stemming from a loss of faith. See Feder Don, The Philosophical Roots of Demographic Winter *Remarks to The World Congress of Families V* August 2009, Amsterdam Netherlands. Netherlands. Feder was the Communications Director and public spokesman for the documentary. No doubt this material would have figured in the speech he would have delivered at the National Marriage Day Rally had he been able to attend. For a critique of the documentary, the theology and the organisations behind it see Joyce Kathryn, Missing: The "Right" Babies *The Nation* February 14 2008; Joyce Kathryn, The Dead of Winter. The religious war for women's wombs *Search Magazine* January/February 2009.

Religion and Society was funded by the conservative philanthropy of the Earhart Foundation) argues that the decline of marriage was strongly associated with the institution of no-fault divorce in the 1970s.⁹² No fault divorce has effectively undermined the principal purpose of marriage, that is to establish fatherhood. Since that time, domestic violence and child protection have become state sanctioned growth industries used to subvert the role and position of men, creating a culture of fatherlessness and therefore social instability. In Baskerville's worldview, parenthood is first and foremost biological, a private realm of adult freedom once protected from an intrusive state but now subject to all manner of interference (much as seat belt laws to tobacco and gun lawsuits to welfare) in the 'interests of the children'. Baskerville laments '[t]oday it is not possible to form a binding agreement to create a family' and there is nothing to stop biological parents having their children confiscated through no fault of their own and given to groups with political influence. Even if there is any truth to the claims made by the WCF, it represents at best a fringe view in an otherwise broad debate. Yet despite the extremism of views presented or sanctioned by the WCF, the National Marriage Coalition continues to draw its guest speakers from such company and at the same time, continues to attract politicians from across the political spectrum,⁹³ including Senator Corey Bernardi.⁹⁴ Feder and Baskerville typify the fundamental flaw at the centre of the Christian Right case for marriage and family values – family breakdown is viewed as the primary cause of social and psychological dysfunction.⁹⁵ While this may be true in cases, establishing a causal relationship is nigh on impossible yet the Christian Right insist all reputable social science research puts this relationship beyond doubt. Therefore, any policy recommendation stemming from the families values framework is fundamentally flawed.

92 Baskerville Stephen, *The Real Danger of Same-sex Marriage The Family in America*, May/June 2006, <http://www.profam.org/pub/fia/fia.2005.6.htm> (accessed 1.9.2012). Mary Louise Fowler's comments are helpful to understand Baskerville's pessimism. She argues that restoring the 'natural family' is the secret to every good, from 'well governed community associations... [to] world peace' and that if even one family is not perfect then society is distorted. See Fowler Mary Louise, Introduction to Plenary Session – Strengthening the Family, World Congress of Families VI, Madrid, 25-27 May 2012.

93 For example see the list of politicians addressing the 2012 National Marriage Day Rally <http://www.marriageday.org.au/> (accessed September 20 2012).

94 Senator Cory Bernardi was recently involved in political controversy over a speech in Federal Parliament against the Marriage Amendment Bill (no. 2) 2012. For a transcript see Bernardi Cory, Bills: Marriage Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2012 *Senate Hansard* http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansards%2Fd1b86af2-b8ee-4367-ad53-c5359a072920%2F0198;orderBy=_fragment_number;doc_date_rev;page=0;query=Dataset%3Ahansards,hansards80%20Date%3A18%2F9%2F2012;rec=0;resCount=Default (accessed 21.9.2012). Those familiar with the discourse of family values signalled by the reference to traditional marriage would not be surprised. Indeed, Chuck Colson argued that in order to stop the 'homosexual juggernaut' we need 'to once again establish that we are not lower than the animal species'. See Colson Chuck, *The Love That Won't Keep Quiet Christian Worldview Journal* 23 July 2012 <http://www.breakpoint.org/the-center/columns/colson-files/18177-the-love-that-wont-keep-quiet> (accessed 13.9. 2012).

95 Hardisty Jean, *Pushed to the Altar. The Right-Wing Roots of Marriage Promotion Public Eye Magazine*, Spring 2008 www.publiceye.org/pushedtothealtar/index.html (accessed 23.8.2012).

Conclusion

It may be that certain religious (and perhaps non) faiths are sympathetic to the definition of marriage and the role it has in stabilising family relationships as envisioned by the Christian Right. Such sympathy may remain despite the absence of empirical research providing support for the claims made by the speakers mentioned above and the Christian Right broadly. This is not to suggest that families subscribing to the values framework of the Christian Right do poorly in comparison to others, but that the evidence suggests they do no better in coping with the trials and tribulations of modern life – at least in Australia.⁹⁶ The problem is that the Christian Right has, through strategic lobbying, careful planning and from within the federal parliament itself, imposed their particular definition of marriage and family on the rest of society, very few of whom share their beliefs. Such a definition enshrined in public policy is based on the demonization of particular sexualities as predatory pathologies and ‘lifestyles’ as harbingers of civilisational destruction. It is based on or at least is informed by a very narrow understanding of the judeo-christian tradition, yet is justified on the basis of, at best, highly dubious social science. It elevates a very particular family formation as virtuous, while condemning the rest as more likely to create dysfunction and generate social bads. It is also incredibly reductionistic. The Christian Right’s defense of marriage and family values is undertaken on the basis that the institution of marriage is in decline and no longer valued in the way it once was. The reason is a succession of public policy reforms that have weakened the bond of marriage and allowed other family arrangements to multiply. For the Christian Right, the weakening of the institution of marriage is the cause of social breakdown, economic decline, moral deviance and on a grander scale, a gentrifying population, the Global Financial Crisis and the touted rise of neopaganisms such as global warming. To insist on a strengthening of family values and a reinvestment in marriage as defined by the Christian Right as *the* solution to so many problems is an incredible act of faith, one that should have little appeal to policy makers. On this basis alone there is little justification for the attendance of so many political leaders in any official capacity at gatherings organised by the Christian Right.

The intersection of religion and politics as either contested or complementary discourses is the identifiable problem. Political action based on values of compassion, tolerance and pluralism is the key, whether those values derive from religious belief or secular humanism is not of critical interest. Many values that we have addressed in this paper are shared by both discursive communities, yet there are clearly defined groups determined to shape public policy through political strategies under the guise of the common good or public interest. Our concern is how specific groups manipulate and generate normative frames for

96 Smith Marcus and Peter Marden, 2012. ‘Capturing the Religious Spirit: A Challenge for the Secular State’ *Journal of Church and State* Waco 2012, doi: 10.1093/jcs/css053, first published online June 29 2012.

policy based on the assumption that there exists widespread public support. In the paper we have shown how campaigns undertaken by certain organisations are both designed to, and in turn, draw on the appearance of broad-based community support. The politics of public interest is nowhere more clearly on display. Closer examination reveals a small network of prominent figures running these organisations through which they appear to wield considerable and largely unaccountable influence. In a democracy supposedly based on enlightened secular humanist ideals and values, the prospect of such a politics is profoundly disturbing.

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**ПОЛИТИКА, ПОЛИТИКЕ И ВЕРА.
ХРИШЋАНСКА ДЕСНИЦА У АУСТРАЛИЈИ**

Резиме

У овом раду ми нудимо критичку оцену политике хришћанске деснице и питамо се до којег степена су религиозне вредности хришћанске деснице компатабилне са демократском политичком културом. Ако су религиозне вредности једнаке политичким онда је раздвајање религиозних вредности од политичке акције лоша пракса, и број питања расте. Политичка акција инспирисана са религиозним уверењима неће спречити критичко опхођење према основним вредностима, или што је још битније, њихов утицај на јавну дебату или јавне политике. Ако су религиозне вредности стварно политичке вредности, да ли онда слобода вероисповести привилегује верски засноване форме политике у односу на секуларне? И ако да, са којим циљем? Ми сматрамо да је једна нијансинирана анализа укрштања религије и политике потребна да би се осигурало да јавне политике не буду третиране како посебне форме религиозног активизма који показује тоталитарне тенденције. На крају, пажња мора бити усмерена на посебне политике и њене представнике као и агенду према којој теже са мало одговорности и транспарентности, упркос тврдњама да представљају јавни интерес. Ово ће бити допринос овог рада.

Кључне речи: хришћанска десница, јавне политике, демократија, политичке вредности

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