

Ferguson Lecture 2006

God and New Zealand Public Life

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Coy admissions of a relationship between the Exclusive Brethren and the National Party lent a breath of intrigue to the otherwise sedate 2005 New Zealand election campaign.

While many people of all political persuasions accept the right—even obligation—of Christians to take part in politics, that episode left many uncomfortable.

For some, the episode might have brought to mind the 2002 election, when newspapers the morning after United Future's surprise success used myriad versions on the 'Trojan Horse' image to suggest that an unacknowledged Christian force had slipped clandestinely into New Zealand's Parliament.

What do such episodes, and their various interpretations in the mass media, tell us about the state of religion in New Zealand? And what are the limits and possibilities of Christian involvement in party politics? The 2006 Ferguson Lecture will explore related international debates and offer some proposals regarding appropriate New Zealand answers.

Ferguson Lecture 2006

It is an extraordinary honour to be invited to deliver the 2006 Ferguson Lecture. When I received the invitation, my husband, Michael, said, 'You'd better get on the internet and try and find out who the Ferguson is, so you can say something appropriate!' Before I'd got to Google, my mother rang from Sydney, with news of old friends: 'Graeme and Mairi are in town, I had lunch with them today, and, guess what, their church has established an annual lecture in public theology!'

So I am here tonight to honour not just a seminal thinker in Australasian contextual theology, but my former next-door neighbours. I grew up literally in the Fergusons' back yard—we all lived on the campus of the theological college of which Graeme was principal. I went to school with their kids. And I can claim another brush with fame: I attended ballet lessons with their son Ian. He went on to an illustrious career as a dancer. As for me—well, I can only say that what ever ballet genes are now presenting themselves in the next generation of my family certainly didn't come from my side.

Mairi my high-school German teacher—and much more. The two years I had her were the year in which my father was diagnosed with a brain-tumour, and the deterioration which followed, up until he died and I sat my final exams—within days of one another. You can imagine what it meant to me to have such a person involved in my education at such a time.

So, you have known Graeme and Mairi in their home country and in a parish setting. I knew them in a different country and in an academic context. One thing I can tell you which won't surprise you at all: as an academic, Graeme's pastoral heart was never out of sight. The time I remember this most clearly was when my father was clearly approaching his death. He still thought he was well enough to teach, and would set out to give lectures, but could only do so with my mother beside him, to remind him where he was up to on the page of notes, remind him when it was time to turn the page, remind him when he'd already made his point and it was time to move on to the next. Graeme came to see us one memorable day. Any other boss would have laid it on the line—you are no longer up to the job, you cannot teach, your lectures are chaotic. I can't remember Graeme's words, but, believe me, I will never forget the sense. Instead of telling a fading talent to give up and accept the inevitable, Graeme drew an academic distinction. Lecturers convey information; but this was a time when that was not the most helpful role description. Instead, he suggested seeing my father's role as that of 'professor'—of professing the faith, both in living and in the process (highly visible to the whole college community, students and staff alike—remember, we all lived on campus) of faithful dying.

In such personal interactions, no less than in his distinguished theological work on the understanding of theology in Australian and New Zealand cultural contexts, Graeme

modeled the holding together of the questions ‘What does the tradition say intellectually?’ and ‘what does it mean to live in the light of the tradition?’

Those are the issues I would like to pursue here.

We have been hearing a lot lately about the place of religion in politics. More specifically, the last two New Zealand elections have, in different ways, raised the question of how Christians who want to have an impact on public policy should comport themselves in their efforts to bring that about. I would like tonight to explore the limits and possibilities of Christian involvement in party politics. I hope that, by exploring some related international debates, to develop some proposals regarding appropriate New Zealand answers.

Christians, politics and parties

Of course, not all Christians do want to have an impact on public policy. For some Christian traditions, this world, including its political arrangements, are of only secondary importance. Such Christians perceive their task as being to withdraw as far as possible from this world and its affairs¹. For others, it is important to have a say on political matters, but not by being directly involved in electoral politics. And some Christians, though they may belong to denominations which take an active part in public affairs, simply are not themselves very interested.

However, those are not the only Christian views about political involvement. From earliest times, many Christians have seen politics as one legitimate arena (though not the only one) through which their commitments should be played out². They have not, of course, always agreed on the goals towards which such action should be directed; but they have seen political involvement, however understood, as one important channel for expressing love towards one’s neighbour.

New Zealand inherited a number of different traditions for such involvement. One important strand was the British Methodist tradition of evangelical faith coupled to commitments to social justice often expressed through the Labour movement. An example of the continuing strength of this tradition is the role in his own political formation which former Prime Minister David Lange attributed to British Methodist socialist Dr Donald Soper³. Lange’s front bench also included Russell Marshall, who had been a Methodist minister before entering Parliament. New Zealand’s proportionately smaller Catholic population means that Irish Catholic Labour influences were not as pronounced here as they were across the Tasman; nevertheless, that remains another important cultural strand. A competing current (sticking inevitably to generalisations) was the more business-oriented, conservative impulses of more establishment-minded Anglicans and Presbyterians. An example of the latter is former National Prime Minister

John Marshall, a committed and active Presbyterian, who served as President of the New Zealand Bible Society and World Vice-President of the United Bible Societies⁴.

Weakening denominational ties and fading of sectarian tensions, among other factors, have meant that such traditional loyalties have diluted over recent decades. But, if we were to conclude from that that religion no longer matters in New Zealand politics, we would be missing some important changes. The last two New Zealand elections have seen a flurry of Christian involvement in national politics, but in ways often seemingly removed from those more established patterns.

To begin with the most recently-topical example, the first thing many people will think of in connection with religion in current New Zealand politics is the initially secret, but eventually very public, actions of the Exclusive Brethren in support of the National Party, led by Dr Don Brash.

As everyone who reads the papers now knows, the Exclusive Brethren are a small and self-contained religious group who, until recently, fitted precisely the Troeltschian characterisation of a 'sect-type'. They are one branch of a family of traditions which trace their origins to the United Kingdom in the 1820s and the inspiration of dissident Church of Ireland clergyman John Nelson Darby. Taking seriously Biblical injunctions to 'be separate' and 'shun' the company of the unsaved, they avoid some forms of contact with non-members. In that respect, the already reclusive group might be said to have become still more classically 'sect-type' since the late 1950s, when separation from the unsaved was extended to include more radical kinds of distance, such as not eating with non-members (even if they were part of the same family). Where once Exclusive Brethren children typically attended government schools, the move towards more stringent separatism has been accompanied by a trend towards homeschooling, and growth of Exclusive Brethren schools.

However, the Exclusive Brethren have lately abandoned at least one important characteristic classically associated with the 'sect-type'. While members do not vote in elections, they have become famously associated with an active campaign to sway those who do. Their contributions to National's 2005 election campaign have been estimated at over a million dollars and credited with contributing substantially to the party's rapid transformation under Brash from poll disaster to near-victor⁵.

The public controversy which erupted once the campaign's backers were revealed centred mainly on what the episode said about the integrity of the campaign's main beneficiaries, the National Party. How much warning did National have about the campaign, how much say did it have in the content, and was this an attempt to use third-party support to circumvent the electoral funding laws? More salaciously, the story quickly became, Did Dr Brash lie about his knowledge of their involvement?

At the same time, though, many other concerns swirled, half-acknowledged, through the public debate. 'Why do we feel so awkward about this unfamiliar group's involvement?' 'Would we feel the same if the secret backers had turned out to be, say, a business

group?’ ‘Is it the secrecy which is so unsettling?’ ‘Doesn’t everyone have a right to participate in democratic politics?’ These questions formed only occasional undercurrents in radio, television and newspaper commentary, but surfaced regularly in informal conversations.

I suspect that, behind these questions, lie still others. If a Christian group chooses not to participate in the most basic level of the democratic process, by voting, why does there seem to be something disconcerting about their becoming so active on another level? And, if they do decide to become active in that way, why the lack of transparency? Given that some of the apparent efforts to evade detection seem *prima facie* to border on illegality—inaccurate authorisation names and addresses on the brochures, for example—what should we make of the political participation of a group to whom secrecy seems to matter more than the democratic safeguards embodied in the electoral laws? What kind of democratic participation was this?

Some light is cast on these anxieties by considering the Exclusive Brethren’s intervention in an international context. Other countries, too, had experienced Exclusive Brethren election campaigns.

One such occasion was the November 2004 US presidential election. A group called ‘Thanksgiving 2004’ formed in October 2004 to raise and spend a reported sum of over US\$630 000 in support of George Bush’s re-election and the scandal-tainted campaign of Florida Senator Mel Martinez, known for opposing gay marriage and hate crimes legislation, and involvement in the Republican strategy for turning Terry Schiavo’s fifteen-year coma into a ‘great political issue’. Thanksgiving 2004 turned out to be Exclusive Brethren, with the single biggest donation (over half the total) from one member, in London. Electoral law irregularities were implied in the fact that the Committee did not register until after the deadline for such groups to announce pre-election funding.⁶ Neither the source behind Thanksgiving 2004 nor the irregularities were made public until two months after the election⁷, the first time that the Exclusive Brethren had been publicly linked to a national election.

It was not, however, the first time that they had been involved. The Australian federal election held a month before the US Presidential race, saw a remarkably similar campaign. Advertisements supporting Prime Minister John Howard appeared in his electorate of Bennelong. State and local newspapers carried other advertisements, supporting Howard’s (conservative) Liberal Party and criticising the Labor and Green opposition parties. Here, too, inaccurate authorisation names and addresses made the source hard to trace. But Adelaide, where some of the advertisements appeared, is a medium-size city with a small town feel, and two Adelaide researchers, Peter and Bronte Trainor, noting that some of the addresses were in familiar parts of town, began to investigate. With not just local geography but good connections in the evangelical world, gradually worked out who the names belonged to. Peter Trainor contacted me early in 2005, after the publication of my book *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*; but it was not until the Exclusive Brethren’s involvement in

the New Zealand election became public, nearly a year after the Australian election, that the Australian media began to take an interest in his findings.

Canada, Sweden and the Tasmanian and Victorian State elections have also seen Exclusive Brethren campaigning, with many similar characteristics of secrecy and obstacles to tracing the funding trail. Some observers have attributed this flurry of activity to the leadership of Sydney businessman Bruce Hales, who took over as the group's 'Elect Vessel' upon the death of his father, John Hales, in 2002⁸. Some recent investigative journalism has revealed that, in fact, Exclusive Brethren political activism in Australia goes back at least a decade before Bruce Hales assumed the leadership. However, the official stance on such political involvement appears to have been evolving. One ex-member reports having to apologise before his Queensland Exclusive Brethren community for handing out pro-Liberal fliers in the lead-up to the 1993 federal election, even though he had understood the initiative to have come 'from the top'⁹. The impression was not his alone: Exclusive Brethren, including some still holding senior positions in the group, donated money to at least one federal Liberal candidate in New South Wales for the same campaign¹⁰, again on the understanding that such activity was officially condoned. Today's involvement, by contrast, seems less apologetic.

Those conducting the campaigns invariably insist they do so as independent individuals¹¹. Virtually identical, highly produced brochures in different electorates and even in different countries suggest, on the contrary, considerable co-ordination. Moreover, ex-members regularly point out that very centralised control is a hallmark of the group, making it most unlikely that individual members, who to their leaders discretion even over whom they eat with or how where to obtain equipment for their businesses, would be feel the freedom to engage in a spontaneous political campaign.

Despite their historically apolitical stance, the Exclusive Brethren express strong views about the nature of a good society. In a written submission to Members of Parliament about defence, the group argued, 'We sing *God Defend New Zealand* so we need to align ourselves with God-fearing nations, whose prosperity and supremacy globally can only be attributed to divine authority and power'¹². A website which describes itself as 'an open documentary' on Exclusive Brethren 'life and faith', and bears the copyright 'The Exclusive Brethren', states that they 'do not live in countries that do not have a Christian Government'¹³. What that might mean is not immediately apparent, since in practice Christians vote for many different parties in pursuit of many different kinds of government. Moreover, the group's political intervention in New Zealand was to bolster the Prime Ministerial prospects of one self-described agnostic (Don Brash) against another (Helen Clark), while, in Australia, they supported a nominal and occasional churchgoer (John Howard¹⁴) against a personally devout regular attender (Kim Beazley¹⁵).

If the Exclusive Brethren's attitude to Christian leadership looks, in practice, inconsistent, one feature which is consistent is that they act uniformly in support of parties of the right. Rather than trying to sift any theological content in the platforms of parties they support,

to discern what 'Christian government' in this sense might mean, it is instructive to look instead at the positions they advocate.

A common assumption among many commentators is that the straw which would have impelled a normally apolitical sect into political activism is likely to have been the New Zealand Parliament's 2005 Civil Unions legislation, which includes (but is not limited to) same sex couples. Many have, therefore, interpreted the call for 'Christian government' to mean a more conservative stance on matters of sex and family.

It is true that Exclusive Brethren leaders who have spoken on the record have expressed disquiet about the increasing acceptability of homosexual relationships in western societies¹⁶, and the group made a highly critical submission to the parliamentary committee considering the Civil Unions Bill¹⁷. Yet the pamphlets which landed in my letterbox did not mention homosexuality. Instead, they promised, in return for tipping out the Labor government, a luxury lifestyle financed by tax cuts; new roads; an expanded defence force; longer prison terms; and greater reliance on the private health system. Other advertisements, in letterboxes and newspapers five months before the election, demanded that New Zealand revoke its anti-nuclear policy, re-engage with the American alliance and increase defence spending. These were by then longstanding proposals: as early as 2003 an Exclusive Brethren policy paper entitled 'Suggested Initiatives for Prosperity in New Zealand' advocated tax cuts, increasing defence spending by up to five hundred percent, and apologising for New Zealand's refusal to join the Iraq invasion and 'anti-American' attitude. Particularly coming from a historically pacifist group whose members refuse to bear arms, this suggests that much more was going on in the call for 'Christian government' than a concern with what was taking place in the nation's bedrooms.

Such incongruities can alert us to look further for the sources of disquiet which the Exclusive Brethren intervention in the New Zealand election engendered for many people. Because neither the phrase 'Christian government', nor the (at first sight) peculiar list of commitments associated with it is unique to the Exclusive Brethren. We can explore this issue further by examining what 'Christian government' has meant in three recent elections: the Australian federal election of October 2004; the US presidential election of November 2004 and the New Zealand general election of September 2005. While each of these campaigns, as we have seen, included significant contributions from Exclusive Brethren, they were by no means the only ones campaigning under the banner of 'Christian government'.

Australia, October 2004

Christian parties have existed in Australia for a long time, but, due to the robust two-party system, have seldom had much direct electoral influence¹⁸. The Christian Democratic Party (CDP) and its predecessor (Call to Australia) have been represented in the New South Wales upper house since 1981, but enjoyed their sole, fleeting federal presence for a few months in 1998¹⁹.

The big news story of the 2004 federal election was the national launch of Adelaide-based minor party Family First (FFP). With one member already in the South Australian upper house, FFP ran federal candidates all over Australia. Despite a small primary vote, elaborate preference deals meant that the party had one Senator elected, Victorian Steve Fielding. Most of the candidates were members of one denomination, the Assemblies of God. Others, such as Fielding, came from related Pentecostal traditions. A few identified with other traditions, such as Catholic. Despite these connections, the party emphatically portrayed itself as a 'family values' party, rejecting suggestions that it is a 'Christian party'. Party events sometimes resemble church functions, and vice versa²⁰, but the party's website scrupulously avoids religious references, leading even other Christian parties to allege duplicity on FFP's part²¹. The media image of FFP as a Christian party has persisted, despite official denials. For example, on the Sunday morning after the election, when it appeared FFP might have the balance of power in the Senate, veteran television journalist Laurie Oakes proposed that FFP's success marked 'the arrival of the religious right in Australian politics'²².

However, despite the huge media fascination it generated, FFP was only ever a sideshow in Australian religious right politics. Far more significant was the positioning of the Liberal Party increasingly towards the religious right, which, as I document in detail in my book *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*²³, had been underway since the formation of the federal Liberal Party's socially conservative, ambiguously-Christian Lyons Forum pressure group in the early 1990s. Religious priming (known journalistically as the 'dog-whistle' strategy) reached its peak in the lead-up to the 2004 campaign.

Here, too, the Assemblies of God featured prominently. While Adelaide's Paradise Church was the launching pad for FFP, its Sydney counterpart, Hillsong, became associated with the Liberal Party. Not only did John Howard, his Liberal deputy Peter Costello and other senior Liberals address the church, but Hillsong has claimed Liberal Member for Mitchell Alan Cadman, Young Liberals president Alex Hawke and former NSW Liberal Party director Scott Morrison as members. After the election, it could boast a second federal MP, Louise Markus, previously employed by the church's welfare arm, Hillsong Emerge.

Hillsong was often the public face of the government's courting of socially-conservative Pentecostal and evangelical churches. But there were numerous other interactions, from a campaign launch at Perth Christian Life Centre where the local candidate welcomed Howard as offering just the kind of strong Christian leadership the country needed to federal Treasurer Peter Costello telling successive church charity launches that welfare is best delivered by those who can impart values in addition to money, and seeking the solution to Australia's social problems in a return to the Ten Commandments as opposed to government action.

In fact, this was just one prong of a strategy designed to neutralise the historic tendency of church political activism in Australia, which has often been more to the left than the right (or, as Howard put it, 'particularly damaging to our side of politics'). So, mainline

church criticism of Liberal policies—especially on Aboriginal landrights, industrial relations and the proposed Goods and Services Tax—was credited with contributing to then Liberal leader John Hewson’s surprise loss of the supposedly ‘unlosable’ 1993 federal election. On Howard’s 1995 return to the leadership, he began instead cultivating an alternative Christian public voice, associated with the capitalism-friendly ‘prosperity gospel’ and an emphasis on personal holiness rather than social justice. The second prong of the strategy was for Howard and his senior ministers to repeatedly berate mainline church leaders who criticised government policy. They were said to be, among other things, out of their depth on complex issues (Costello), ‘partisan’ (Howard) and publicity-hungry show-offs ‘hogging the limelight’ (Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer). The third prong was formally silencing church welfare agencies who had often been the voice of the voiceless in critiquing of government policy. This was done by progressively tying church agencies into government welfare delivery, and making ‘no criticism’ clauses part of the contracts by which church agencies received government funding to deliver services which had, in many cases, previously been delivered by government agencies.

United States, November 2004

Even more than in Australia, the United States’ robust two-party system means that explicitly Christian parties have very limited scope. Consequently, like Australia, the big story in religion-politics interactions in the USA concerns Christian presence in a major party. Numerous commentators have argued that the present White House is the most explicitly religious for many years. This manifests itself on many levels. In practical terms, an important departure is the preference for ‘faith based’ welfare delivery (in practice, almost all grants issued under the scheme have gone to Christian organisations, as opposed to any other faith). By contrast, some legislative moves have seemed more symbolic than important for their actual results. Examples include the prohibition on so-called ‘partial birth abortion’, which in practice affects only a small proportion of pregnancy terminations (though its effects are certainly real enough in the small number of cases concerned). Some pieces of proposed legislation, such as the *Pledge Protection Act* and *Constitution Restoration Act*, are designed explicitly to shrink America’s famous ‘wall of separation between church and state’, in the sense that their effect would be to restrict the scope of the courts to hear cases to do with religious discrimination or in which complainants allege the government has improperly tried to impose a religious view.

The fact that, right from the moment they were introduced, neither of these acts was considered likely to actually pass into law points to another feature of the religion-politics nexus in America. Much of the utility of such acts comes from their symbolic rather than actual force. Lacking compulsory voter registration and with candidates constantly having to overcome low voter turnout, mobilising potential voters to actually get to the polling booth becomes an important feature of any campaign (it is no use having most of the country behind you if they do not go the polling booth and register their opinion!) With some forty per cent of Americans claiming to be evangelical, Pentecostal or born again, and those people splitting roughly eighty-twenty in favour of the Republican party, getting the conservative Christian vote out has proved a crucial consideration for recent

Republican candidates. In her 2006 book *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism*, salon.com journalist Michelle Goldberg recounts her experience in some states during the 2004 presidential race in which Democrats actively campaigned for their supporters to turn out and vote, while any Republican get-out-the-vote campaign was almost invisible. Only after the election did the devastated Democrats discover that the Republican campaign had not been non-existent after all—it had merely been conducted within the walls of the megachurches which are the fast-growing face of conservative Protestantism in America.²⁴

This is certainly not a new phenomenon. The best-known instance of religious grass-roots organisation is the Christian Coalition, formed in 1992 in the wake of Pat Robertson's failed presidential bid. It aimed to achieve conservative Christian presence in government by: training grassroots activists (getting people elected first to school boards, then, once they'd gained a little experience, to local government, then state government, then federal government); developing the so-called 'stealth campaign' in which candidates play down their conservative religious affiliations until after they have been elected (as co-founder Ralph Reed famously described it, 'I do guerrilla warfare. I paint my face & travel by night. You don't know what's hit you till you're in a body bag; you don't know till election night'); providing a visible power block at Republican party conventions; and campaigning not only on the obvious 'Christian right' issues such as abortion, euthanasia and abstinence-only sex education, but also advocating traditionally secular causes such as tax cuts and privatisation.

However, the religious 'stealth campaign' has given way over recent years to much more overt language of 'Christian government'. With a President promising, in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, to 'rid the world of evil-doers' and identifying American democracy as 'the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it', it might be tempting to see such rhetorical invocations as a matter of personal idiosyncrasy, the natural vocabulary of a man grounded in the evangelical community. In fact, however, these moves are far more strategic than such an analysis would have them. Probably the clearest indication of this is the account by Bush speechwriter Michael Gerson of his role of inserting biblical references and lines from evangelical hymnody into the president's speeches in order to appeal to those hearers attuned to them—that alluring forty percent of potential voters who identify as evangelical, Pentecostal or born-again²⁵.

As Michelle Goldenberg documents, these developments have gone hand-in-hand with an increasing rapprochement between more conventional evangelicals and the small but growing group known as 'Christian Reconstructionists', who advocate an unusually literal version of 'Christian government'. Convinced that Jesus cannot return until Christians have taken over the reigns of government, Reconstructionists (also called theonomists) imagine a future in which the Mosaic law is reinstated in all its rigour, including the death penalty for such crimes as blasphemy, adultery, homosexuality, abortion, unchastity before marriage (if you are a woman) and filial disobedience. With this goes (oddly enough, given the Old Testament's stringent views about economic exploitation) a commitment to radical pro-capitalist initiatives including the privatisation

of nearly everything (notably schools—this is, after all, homeschooling heartland), with government responsible for little beyond defence. While such views remain on the fringes of religious right discourse, the increasing acceptability of Reconstructionists in evangelical forums, including, on several occasions, sharing a podium with Members of Congress, marks a shift of this peculiarly retributionist, but economically *laissez-faire*, understanding of ‘Christian government’ toward the mainstream²⁶.

New Zealand, 2005

One big difference between New Zealand and the other examples we have just considered is MMP. Where strong two-party systems encourage those who want to have an influence on policy to hitch their wagon to a major party, MMP fosters the formation of niche parties. The challenge is to find the right balance between being sufficiently specific in focus to keep one’s message undiluted, while retaining sufficiently broad appeal to prevent one’s support falling below the magic five per cent.

This situation has meant that New Zealand’s political system holds out considerable incentive for the formation of overtly religious minor parties. The catch is that, in New Zealand no less than anywhere else, not all Christians think the same way on political issues, so calculating a party’s likely appeal on the basis of the proportion of self-described Christians in the country inevitably leads to drastic overestimates. The various incarnations of Future New Zealand, Christian Heritage and the Christian Coalition all represented different approaches to resolving these problems. By the 2005 election, however, Christian Heritage had been effectively sunk by its former leader’s conviction on child rape charges, and has since deregistered.

Future New Zealand, meanwhile, had been absorbed into the ambiguously Christian United Future New Zealand (UFNZ). UFNZ presents a conundrum similar in some ways to Australia’s FFP. On one hand, UFNZ leader Peter Dunne categorically states that his party is not in any sense a Christian party²⁷. But the party has found its religious image, no doubt born partly out of the history with Future New Zealand, hard to shake. Its surprise success in the 2002 general election, resulting in Peter Dunne being joined by another six MPs (all but one of whom had prominent conservative Christian credentials), suggested parallels with the American Christian Coalition’s ‘stealth campaign’ strategy. Moreover, against Dunne’s denials, we should consider the analysis of those who have worked with UFNZ over time. When Marc Alexander, the sole non-Christian from the class of 2002, lost his seat, he reflected that leaving the UFNZ party room would be, in some respects a relief: he had never felt quite at home, he confessed, among colleagues who ‘had almost like a club and I wasn’t a part of it. Religion kept them quite tight and I was always the outsider’. Party colleagues, he said, regularly tried to convert him, and elevator conversations were likely to canvas ‘what heaven was like’ and ‘what they could expect there’²⁸. Facing flagging support, UFNZ entered the 2005 campaign in partnership with Outdoor Recreation New Zealand; but the relationship fell apart after the election, with Outdoor Recreation announcing it found ‘the Christian element in United Future’ too difficult to work with²⁹. UFNZ’s former president, Mark Blumsky, who ran in the 2005 election for National, suggested in a 2005 online interview that the ‘Christian element’ was even stronger in the broader party organisation:

Some of them are very fanatical in how they see religion and politics tied up ... I get scriptures or [bible] quotes sent through, and [they thought that] these should be driving, divining reasons for me to be doing things, because it was quoted in this Book of Jeremiah or whatever. When I travelled the country with United Future, I realised just how many of these people were involved in the party. And they weren't slow in letting me know their feelings. ... So [my resignation] was ... all to do with how they saw their religion in helping decide how they live their life.³⁰

We can also note that Dunne's denials could be interpreted as selective. I have personally experienced Peter Dunne's chagrin at media comments in which I compared UFNZ's ambiguously-religious identity to the 'stealth campaign' tactic used by some religiously-based political groups overseas. UFNZ, he emphatically told me, in writing and in person, is a secular party. Yet, when Heather Roy described UFNZ in the House of Representatives as 'a Christian party', Peter Dunne responded to the question without demurring from the description³¹.

What ever one might think of Destiny Party, one thing no one could accuse it of is mounting a stealth campaign. On the contrary, Destiny Church founder Brian Tamaki came right out in 2003 and prophesied that New Zealand would be a theocracy within five years. The fact that Destiny only polled only 0.62 percent of the vote might be taken as suggesting that slightly less candour might have been strategic. Destiny was not necessarily without impact, however. In particular, its highly publicised 'Enough is Enough' rally against the *Civil Union Act* gave a visible face to the opposition to that bill. As a number of commentators on the American Christian Right have pointed out, More moderate right parties can actually benefit from more extreme expressions enjoying publicity. As more extreme positions emerge on the far right, those only slightly closer to the centre can portray themselves as moderate by comparison³².

New Zealand saw relatively little of the religious 'dog-whistling' which so characterised the Australian and US elections. Neither leader, for example, laced their speeches with lines from hymns or the Bible (like Bush), or made prominent church appearances (like Howard). On the other hand, indications that National had noticed what worked elsewhere can be found in then leader Don Brash's attempt to cast Prime Minister Helen Clark's position as 'atheism' and 'indifference to the institution of marriage'³³, and perhaps in the emphasis given by his authorised biographer to Brash's intensively church-focused childhood.³⁴ However, the secret to successful 'dog-whistling' is plausible deniability³⁵, so once Brash was exposed as having accepted assistance from the Exclusive Brethren, apparently in return for certain policy backflips, such associations arguably became more of a liability than an asset.

'Christian government'

This retrospective examination of three elections has shown a vast array of different groups appealing to a generalised interest in 'Christian government'. The list is far from exhaustive—for example, it does not include the many private lobby groups and

thinktanks which promote a similar mix of conservative social policy and radical small-government economic policy, also expressed through the language of 'Christian government'. Also absent is the burgeoning National Prayer Breakfast movement, whose American founders are on the record as describing democracy as 'a manifestation of ungodly pride'³⁶. Yet the quick survey possible here has allowed some contours to emerge.

Associations between church and government are of course not new, and we can easily think of examples from any part of the Christian era. But the phrase 'Christian government' as it is used by the different groups considered here implies a very particular set of associations.

On the social policy front, it encompasses: a preference for private, especially church-based, over government services (for example, health, education and welfare); opposition to same-sex and de facto heterosexual couples; a preference for male headship over equality between marriage partners; opposition to abortion and euthanasia; a preference for abstinence-only sex education; a punitive view of law and order. Economically, it encompasses lower taxes (promoted as both a benefit of and pretext for reducing government services); minimal regulation of business; maximal regulation of trade unions. With respect to international affairs, it includes aggressive foreign policy and scepticism with regard to such matters as international conventions on environmental and human rights protection. It also is inclined to tie an understanding of actual, current international events to dispensationalist expectations about the timing of the end of the world. These commitments hold good, whether the proponents are the isolationist Exclusive Brethren, the determinedly political American Christian Coalition or the more obliquely religious internal party groupings which contribute to policy within secular conservative parties such as the Republican party in America or the Liberal Party of Australia.

For much of the twentieth century, these causes were not prominently associated, on the political front, with conservative Christianity. From the 1920s until the Cold War, the theologically conservative were most likely to avoid politics, concentrating instead on saving souls. The mobilisation of conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants in the anti-communist effort heralded some return to politics, but remained something of a boutique preoccupation among people who remained primarily focused on converting the lost. Some of the reason was sociological: observers of the American Christian right often attribute this period of political quietism to the lingering humiliations of the so-called 'Scopes Monkey Trial' in 1924, in which Christian fundamentalists in Tennessee spectacularly failed to stop the teaching of evolution³⁷. One consequence, according to William Martin's *With God on Our Side*, is that biblical literalism became associated with 'a kind of backwoods yahooism'.

But another important part of the reason was theological. One particular eschatological orientation became dominant among conservative Protestants during the first half of the Twentieth Century: premillennialist dispensationalism. This is the view that history is divided into seven 'dispensations', with God acting in different ways in each. As with

most multi-stage theories of history, we are in the second-last. The final stage, according to premillennial dispensationalism, will be the reign of God, heralded by the 'rapture' of all true Christians out of this world and then a period of tribulation during which those who remain are given their final opportunity to repent. Prominent among its progenitors is John Nelson Darby, founder of the perfectionist movement which became the Exclusive Brethren. His eschatology achieved far wider acceptance than his ecclesiology, with premillennialist dispensationalism being further developed and popularised in the Twentieth Century through such vehicles as the *Scofield Reference Bible*. The schema carries a sense of apocalyptic urgency, enhanced by the conviction that historical events provide a clue to cosmic timing. Thus, though no one knows 'the day or the hour' of Jesus' return, world events, starting with the foundation of the modern state of Israel and continuing with escalating 'wars and rumours of wars' in the region, give many premillennialists confidence that they can at least take a good guess at the decade. In such circumstances, political action has often seemed irrelevant, the more pressing task being to prepare oneself and others spiritually for the impending crisis. And, if Jesus is in any case about to come back and take charge, then whatever affect we can have on this world is likely to prove irrelevant.

Consequently, for much of the Twentieth Century, what push there was for Christian politics came from the much smaller and more fringe family of postmillennialist traditions. This view interprets biblical prophecies as meaning that Jesus will return and rule the world after, not before, the millennium. The millennium, in their view, is a period (perhaps a literal thousand years, but perhaps not) of near-universal Christianity, achieved mainly by success on the mission field. One important strand of postmillennialism is theonomy, which I described earlier, involving the restoration of Mosaic law.³⁸

So what are we to make of the increasing language of 'Christian government', a typically postmillennialist concept, among those previously more inclined the apolitical stance likely to be implied in premillennialism? And how to explain the increasing political alliance, described by Michelle Goldberg among others, between actual holders of these two apparently mutually contradictory views? As she noted in early 2006,

Christian Reconstructionists used to be politically radioactive, but a new generation of religious right leaders ... have embraced them, and some members of today's GOP [such as embattled former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay and Senator Sam Brownback] apparently see no problem associating with them. This does not mean that America is on the verge of theocracy, but it signals an important shift. The language of religious authoritarianism has become at least somewhat politically acceptable.³⁹

While the two camps have not reconciled their differences theologically, many of their members have been able to find common cause in the campaign for 'Christian government'. For premillennialists, government is not a path to Jesus' return, but it is now nevertheless widely regarded as an important arena of Christian calling.

Much of the groundwork for this rapprochement came from the work of the late evangelical theologian Francis Schaeffer. While Schaeffer rejected theocracy, and the founders of Christian Reconstructionism were highly critical of him in return, he has been credited by scholars such as Sara Diamond, the pre-eminent analyst of the US Christian right, with creating the space within which pre- and postmillennialists would eventually find common ground.⁴⁰ Schaeffer's widely quoted 1982 book *A Christian Manifesto* called for Christians to 'take back the culture', arguing that 'Jesus is Lord of all of life'—including politics, the media and entertainment. But these areas had been taken over by the false religion of 'secular humanism', which, he argued, resulted in nothing less than 'tyranny'. From his Swiss base of L'Abri community, he exhorted 'Bible-believing Christians' to 'be salt and light' in the secular world—by opposing abortion and homosexuality, for example.⁴¹

Followers of Schaeffer developed their understanding of this calling into the idea that Christians should 'take dominion over the earth'—claiming the status earth lost by Adam but restored, they say, by Christ to his church. Here is where a broad coalition of evangelicals, Pentecostals and even the Reconstructionist fringe were able to find political common cause, even while theological differences remained profound. With dominion as a long-term vision, local political organisation was a manageable step. As Diamond puts it, referring to the audiences attracted to one of David Barton, Vice-Chairman of the Texas Republican Party and one of the most articulate enunciators of 'dominion theology':

They may not be able to take dominion over the whole earth or even agree about when Jesus will return, but they sure can go home and back a godly candidate for city council, or run themselves. Barton tells his audiences that they personally have an important role to play in history, and that is what makes his dominion theology popular.⁴²

What possibilities for 'Christian politics'?

I hope that this overview gives us a basis now to return to the question I posed at the beginning of this lecture. 'Christian government' has become a short-hand for a very particular set of commitments, ones not shared by many Christians (including me). Yet, many Christians (including me), while appalled at the policy implications of the so-called 'Christian government' push, find it difficult to dissent from the conviction that we are, indeed, called to live out our faith in the political, as much as any other, arena.

That, I would like to suggest, is one reason why the Exclusive Brethren intervention in the last New Zealand election proved so unsettling, at least among those with a commitment, if not to 'Christian government', at least to the hope that there might be such a thing as 'Christian politics'. Can there be a 'Christian politics' that does not turn out to be special pleading, yet again, for 'my' kind of Christianity, with the implications of a slide toward undemocratic dominionism, albeit in another form?

Of course, there are other reasons for the disquiet many felt about the Exclusive Brethren intervention, and some go without saying. Surely, a Christian politics which can claim the name owes a little allegiance to basic democratic principles of transparency. Misleading addresses and disguised identities bespeak a contempt for democratic process and a

conviction that the end justifies the means. One basic commitment of a Christian politics worth the name surely has to be to respecting basic democratic safeguards.

Some commentary paints them as small-town traditionalists, worried that the nation's children were about to fall prey to a rampant homosexual agenda; and some comments by Exclusive Brethren suggest that may indeed have been a motivation. But then, why the seemingly even stronger interest in economic questions—support for tax cuts, opposition to trade unions, commitment to small government and privatisation?

Some commentators have suggested we do better to understand the group as driven less by theological considerations than by economic ones. Perhaps it is their identity as small-to-medium business people and farmers which really lies behind their activism. Again, this analysis carries a certain plausibility. According to one of the leaflets dropped in my letterbox, the group thought taxes contributing to the nation's '\$7 billion dollar surplus' would be better returned as tax cuts, enabling me to 'fly to Aussie for every game', 'buy a new car', 'dine out twice a week', 'shout yourself some new clothes' or 'new appliances', take a 'Caribbean cruise' or 'maybe donate to a charity' (the only 'maybe' on the list). But these are things that Exclusive Brethren themselves do not do⁴³. Their wishing them on the rest of us suggests either a view that we are so irretrievably sunk into sin that our behaviour is not worth worrying about (in which case, one might ask why the group bothers with trying to reform worldly politics at all) or that the advertisements' stated goal is disingenuous.

Moreover, this explanation still leaves aspects of their agenda unaccounted for. Why, in that case, the interest in international affairs? People with an eye to the economic main game would surely be hankering for engagement with the Asian 'tiger economies', rather than worrying that New Zealand should ally itself only with other 'god-fearing' nations. And why the call to recant on New Zealand's opposition to the Iraq war—a war, after all, whose economic implications have hardly been beneficial⁴⁴?

This aspect of Exclusive Brethren policy sounds much more in keeping with the views of other members of the premillennialist dispensationalist family. According to many current interpretations of that tradition, real events, especially in the Middle East, can be read as markers of cosmic events, leading up to the climax of history in the Rapture, the Great Tribulation, the Battle of Armageddon and then Jesus' return to earth⁴⁵. A wide spectrum of groups, including Christian Zionists, see turbulence in the Middle East not as a problem but as an encouraging sign of history's approaching denouement. Moreover, the tradition often expects the antichrist in the form of someone who holding out (inevitably hollow) promise of peace; so Middle Eastern peace talks look, from that point of view, like something dangerous to be opposed rather than like a glimmer of hope. Iraq is particularly important to this view, being identified with the biblical Babylon, prophesied base of the antichrist. This collection of views removes the apparent incongruities of a historically pacifist group seeming to advocate war. Other wars might be out, but this one is part of God's plan⁴⁶.

Apocalypticism is certainly a curious import into New Zealand's usually religiously-cool political environment. And a group that apparently engages in deliberate deception in an attempt to pass its otherwise potentially destabilising intervention 'under the radar' is easy to criticise. But I have dwelt on it tonight because it poses a more general problem that amounts to more, I think, than just the obvious issues about transparency, honesty and accountability.

Because, if you really believe that the eternal destiny of the world and everyone in it hangs in the balance, a little duplicity seems a small compromise for the greater good. Does the end justify the means? Hell, yes. And if deeply-held beliefs on the part of the Exclusive Brethren prove so unsettling to the rest of us when they enter politics, what about other kinds of deeply-held beliefs? What about yours, what about mine?

Some have addressed this problem by proposing that Christians should stand always at one remove from politics. Not only hard-line liberal secularists argue this (an argument I addressed in my lecture the other night), but also many Christians maintain this line. And you don't have to be a sectarian quietist to be suspicious about too direct a Christian politics. There are also some who, though very committed to expressing their faith in the political arena, are nevertheless deeply sceptical of too close an alignment with government. Take the government's shilling today, however virtuous the cause, their argument goes, and tomorrow you'll find it harder to speak out against the government. And a Christian commitment to justice means that you must always be ready to speak out.

One proponent of this kind of position is Jonathan Bartley, author of *Faith and Politics After Christendom: The Church as a Movement for Anarchy*⁴⁷. No one could accuse Bartley of being politically disengaged or quietist. He is director of Ekklesia, the British thinktank that, according to its website, 'promotes transformative theological ideas in public life'. As such, his working life is devoted to building peace and attacking poverty, promoting restorative justice over retribution in the criminal justice system and campaigning for open national borders, all grounded in a theological conception of social justice. Even Ekklesia's Christology is irreducibly political, with its conviction that 'the central message of Jesus ministry was of a new kingdom, and that his death was politically motivated'.⁴⁸ The Christianity fostered by Ekklesia is certainly not apolitical.

Yet Bartley's preferred stance for the church is as a perpetual loyal opposition, or, as he puts it, 'a force for anarchy'. Bartley comes out of the Anabaptist tradition, suspicious of every system of government (including democracy). I find much of Bartley's analysis and argument compelling. Yes, too close an association with government does produce inevitable compromises. No one can point to a real perfect government (for that matter, who can point to a perfect church?) I fully agree that a degree of pessimism is essential to avoid too enthusiastically throwing one's faith behind those who are bound, eventually, to betray it. But I'm not prepared to go as far as Bartley's all-round negativity about government. For better and worse, it's what we've got. As one of the great sociologists of religion, Emile Durkheim, has pointed out, some political theorists might imagine a world before politics, in which everyone lives in a state of nature, but no one has ever

seen a society like that. As far as we know, humans have always organised themselves into some kind of governmental arrangements. Inevitability is not, of course, a justification in itself. But I'd like to suggest that we can rescue a slightly more optimistic image of government than the anarchist vision suggests.

At its best, government has the potential for embodying community: 'we're all in this together'. The anarchist alternative seems rather to imply, 'let's all get out of this' (indeed, Bartley proposes refusal to vote as one form of Christian witness⁴⁹). Saying that Christian politics can be good but government is always at least potentially bad seems very close to saying we can campaign for what we believe, but we must be careful not to succeed. I want to hold onto the hope that government is at least partly redeemable; that, flawed though it is, it can offer an appropriate arena for the living out of Christian vocation. I would like to think that the great theological traditions which have nurtured Christian commitments to social justice—the evangelical understanding of all people as equally and unalterably made in the image of God and of infinite worth; the Catholic understanding of community as what makes us who we are; the liberationist traditions of bias towards the poor and marginalised—can contribute in the centre of power and not only by agitating at the edges. Otherwise, the real-life prospects for serious change seem slim.

But how can we work towards that, without slipping into special pleading, underhanded 'stealth campaign' or, eventually, into one or other form of totalising 'dominionism'? We can find help on this quest from many sources; but I would particularly like to draw attention to the work of one systematic theologian and one political philosopher. Belgian Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx is probably best known for his Christological trilogy. *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*⁵⁰ was followed by *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*⁵¹. The final volume, *Church: The Human Story of God*⁵², brings an important corrective to much thinking about the relationship between politics and theology. Schillebeeckx takes issue with the common assumption that people's theology dictates their politics (an assumption shared, if anything, even more by political scientists pursuing a 'religious factor' in voting behaviour as it is by the church people who are Schillebeeckx's focus).

Schillebeeckx directly challenges the idea that people passively derive their moral, social and political commitments from religious doctrine. Rather, those views are constantly shaped by one's life experience. We not only encounter God through our life experience, but, when that experience challenges our received assumptions, we reformulate new conceptions of God in response. And, at least in cosmopolitan, secular, urban societies, life experience crucially includes encounters with other ways of life. Meeting and engaging regularly with others who live according to conceptions of the divine that we do not share and moral prescriptions we cannot endorse, we conclude, inevitably, that ours is not the only 'right' way. The revisions which we find ourselves making to our moral, social and political views engender, for the religiously-committed, a related set of theological revisions:

It is often forgotten that a change in ethical view also brings about changes in one's image of God. Those who cling on to old pictures of God then find themselves involved in all kinds of clashes with new ethical values, so that in the long run the abandonment of the 'old morality' also affects belief in God ... Legitimate changes in ethical appreciation must therefore go hand in hand with new conceptions of God if in the long run people are not to experience some dichotomy or schizophrenia.⁵³

The idea that there is truth also in other ways of life becomes a fundamental part of our mindset. And so we can no longer find plausible a God who sets down one and only one right way, condemning all others. Following Schillebeeckx, we might conclude that the kinds of religion-politics interactions so worrying to some commentators are in fact a fundamental aspect of theological formation.

This is not just an important empirical point about the way theological commitments are formed, however. It is also an important reminder for the present discussion, because it warns against any attempt to paint ourselves into a Christian ghetto in which my answers are the right ones and there is nothing to learn from anyone else. It also warns that the 'others' from whom we can learn the most are not necessarily even those within the church with whom we disagree—we need to be open to the voice of God, wherever it comes from.

The political theorist I have in mind is Benjamin Barber. He is best-known for his bestselling *Jihad Vs McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism are Reshaping the World*⁵⁴, but I want to go back to one of his earlier and more theoretical books, *The Conquest of Politics: Liberal Philosophy in Democratic Times*⁵⁵. There, he addresses a series of classics of the liberal philosophical canon, including John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*⁵⁶. Barber argues that many political theorists, including Rawls, try to apply the abstractions of philosophy to political realities, a process Rawls sums up in his phrase 'reflective equilibrium'. All very well, says Barber, but what if the real world won't play along? In fact, it almost never does, because, by nature, politics is made up of competing interests, shifting alliances, more-or-less hidden agendas. People do not always act in ways consistent with their principles—or, for that matter, in ways consistent with their self-interest or established allegiances. Barber thinks we can take a better cue from the mid-Nineteenth Century French political observer Alexis de Tocqueville:

In contrast to the moral and philosophical worlds, where everything is classified, systematized, foreseen, and decided beforehand, he observed that in the political world everything is agitated, disputed, and uncertain. In such a world, we require not a sturdy foundation to prevent politics from moving, but a seaworthy vessel to ensure that philosophy moves. Reflective equilibrium may suit philosophers, but for the tumultuous realm of politics, where life means constant motion and change is the only certainty, what is required is reflective disequilibrium.⁵⁷

The principle of reflective disequilibrium reminds us that, if we seem to have a seamless, conflict-free solution, that is a good reason to be suspicious. The only political programs

that can achieve this are totalitarian, because, otherwise, politics inevitably involves dissent. I find this a particularly important consideration when thinking about Christian politics, because so much Christian discourse is deeply imbued with the idea (Bartley would call it a hang-over from Christendom, the era when the church was so closely allied with the state that it really could set and enforce its agenda) that there must be a Right Answer, and that when we find it, all right-thinking people will naturally agree, while those who don't agree thereby reveal themselves as unworthy of the kingdom we are about to inaugurate. Barber's observation that the real political arena is one of constant turbulence for which we need not a blanket solution but a 'seaworthy vessel' is a helpful reminder not to be afraid of conflict and disagreement, but to accept that living with them is part of living in a democratic environment.

Some of that disagreement may come from those who have decided that democracy itself is incompatible with their understanding of faith, and who are seeking instead a universal answer which, by definition, implies being imposed on others. They try, in other words, to turn the tumultuous political sea into a safely-bounded swimming pool, with room and banana lounges only for the righteous, and a strong fence to keep everyone else out.

Barber and Schillebeeckx help us to see how we can maintain a necessarily provisional attitude to our own grasp of the truth ('I believe in good conscience that I'm as right as I can be, but I accept I may be mistaken') while still maintaining a position amid the hurly-burly ('There are some positions which I must, in conscience, oppose').

So, what are the features of the 'sea-worthy vessel' which might carry Christians who want to traverse the political waters while resisting the temptation to replace it with a Christians-only (indeed, a my-kind-of-Christians-only) swimming pool? Here are some suggestions:

'Christian politics' of the kind I hope to defend works best when it self-consciously sets out to build coalitions—we believe these things for reasons of faith, but we actively seek out those who believe similar things on the basis of other faiths, or no religious faith, and build as broad a coalition as possible. And the coalition is the point. It is not about an eventual takeover, even an idealistically imagined one. Taking seriously Schillebeeckx's observation about truth in other positions being a fundamental aspect of modern ways of being means remaining always ready also to learn from (not just listen politely to) positions other than our own.

Fortunately, Christians have some outstanding resources for building our seaworthy vessel. One feature of the more dominionist versions of Christian politics (which I have been arguing we need to avoid) is that it says remarkably little about the real, living, human Jesus. Scour dominionist tracts and you might find an allusion to the odd parable, and more about the dead Jesus hanging on the cross. The most prolifically-discussed Jesus is a vengeful, sword-wielding figure, who will return to wreak lingeringly-described, blood-soaked mayhem on those unfortunate enough to still be on the wrong side by the Battle of Armageddon. But the warm, breathing, living Jesus of the Gospels rates barely a mention.

A vengeful figure on a horse might be easy to deal with—we just need to know the plot outline, and we can imagine in the blood to our hearts' content. But the living Jesus of the Gospels comes with a wealth of detail. He ate with all comers and loved people wherever he found them, over and over again, in different locations and with different kinds of 'outsiders'. And, Mark hints to us, even Jesus had things to learn—and he learned them. He was able to let an exceptionally-determined Syrophenician woman ('a Gentile', the story impresses upon us) persist past his dismissal and argue him into a more inclusive understanding of his own mission⁵⁸. There is no suggestion he tries to convert her. She arrives a Gentile, argues with him, persuades him, and leaves a Gentile. If that kind of listening was good enough for Jesus, it had better be good enough for us.

When Christian churches resist the dominionist path, and remember not the ghostly Jesus but the bodily one, it offers a wealth of ways of holding out against the dominant values of the day. It offers a community to hold us to account. And it gives us a tradition of ways of thinking that tell us a lot about power, that enable us to deal with power and to take it on in the cause of justice—but where power is never the goal.

¹ The classic delineation of this distinction is Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* 1912

² It is worth noting that even behaviours which look, on the outside, like classic 'sect-type' withdrawal (in Troeltsch's terms) often have a political subtext. For example, historian Peter Brown in his sweeping study of early Christian attitudes to sex and sexuality, points out that the adoption of eremitic or cloistered celibacy, while it might have appeared a world-denying practice, also carried a profound undercurrent of civil disobedience in a world in which reproducing healthy citizens was the primary civic duty of loyal subjects of the Emperor. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society* Columbia University Press 1988

³ See David Lange, *My Life* (2nd ed.) Auckland: Penguin 2006, pp 80, 272

⁴ John Marshall, *Memoirs 1912-1960* Auckland: Collins 1983

⁵ The assessment of the Exclusive Brethren campaign's contribution to National's dramatic improvement is disputed by some, including some within the National Party, who see it instead as having cost National the election. However, the election-night shock was not that National lost, but that it so nearly won. The result showed a dramatic improvement from its earlier, continually-lagging, opinion polls. While this is of course attributable to many factors, it seems more logical to regard the Brethren campaign, which, even at the height of the publicity surround it, still managed to carry its message 'beneath the radar' of many voters, as a contributor to the party's new-found success. In other words, the polls from earlier in the electoral cycle suggest that what needed explaining was not National's ultimate loss, but the fact that it was so narrow. As one indication of how successfully the Exclusive Brethren campaign slipped beneath much of the electorate's radar, I offer an anecdote from my own teaching experience. At the time of the election, I was teaching a large first year course called 'Religion, Law and Politics in the World Today'. While brochures appeared in letterboxes across the country urging a change of government, and then were revealed as coming from a particular Christian group, I was delivering weekly lectures on the place of religion in New Zealand and international politics. While news of the Brethren campaign was making regular front-page headlines and leading many news broadcasts, I was encouraging my students to monitor coverage of religion in the election campaign, and setting assignments which required alertness to contemporary developments. I therefore had reason to suppose that the hundred and fifty young voters in my class would be among those voters most alert to the Exclusive Brethren campaign. I therefore decided to address this very current issue in a lecture. I took along copies of the 'Green Delusion' and other brochures and began discussing the story which was dominating that day's headlines. To my surprise, although most of the class knew of were aware of the news story, and many had, like me, received copies of the brochures in their letterboxes, very few had actually made the connection that the brochures they had received were the ones

which were the subject of all the fuss. That even people in the process of being specifically taught to discern religious currents in contemporary politics had missed the connection suggests that the media's eventual 'outing' of the campaign's Exclusive Brethren backers may not have done much at all to distract from the brochures' actual message. Apparently, many of my students, knowing full well that a highly controversial and religiously-motivated campaign was in full swing, still found brochures in their letterbox making negative allegations against the Greens and Labour, and simply accepted them at face value. This experience leads me to conclude that the many less politically and religiously attuned voters who received the brochures would have been receptive to their anti-Labour, anti-Green message, undeterred by reservations about the source, even if they were aware of the furore. The general controversy about undeclared funding and lack of openness may have damaged such people's view of National; but the content of the pamphlets, read at face value and not associated in their minds with the targeted parties' rebuttals (not realising that these were the brochures concerned) might mean that their opinion of Labour and the Green Party also dropped. This was the Green Party's post-election assessment—see Kevin Taylor, 'Brethren Leaflets May Have Cost Greens a Seat', *New Zealand Herald* 23 September 2005

⁶ The figure comes from the Washington-based Centre for Responsive Politics, which tracks election expenditure. See <http://www.opensecrets.org/527s/527indus.asp?code=Q01&cycle=2004&format=>, accessed 6 December 2006

⁷ Lucy Morgan, 'Veiled Sect Hails Bush, Martinez', *St Petersburg Times*, 18 January 2005

⁸ See for example Patrick Gower, 'Behind the Brotherhood: The Elect Vessel, Bruce Hales', *New Zealand Herald*, 14 October 2006; Nicky Hager, *The Hollow Men: A Study in the Politics of Deception* Nelson: Craig Potton 2006, p 21

⁹ Glenis Green, 'Brethren Exposed', *Courier Mail*, 6 October 2006

¹⁰ 'Elusive Exclusive Brethren', *Background Briefing*, ABC Radio, 30 April 2006

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Submission received by Otaki MP Darren Hughes (Labour), quoted in Kay Blundell, 'Brethren Want NZ "Prepared for War"', *Dominion Post*, 10 September 2005 A2

¹³ See www.theexclusivebrethren.com, accessed 7 September 2005

¹⁴ One of Howard's rare references to any adult churchgoing is in an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's religious affairs program *Compass*, ABC TV, 20 September 1998

¹⁵ Beazley's faith is discussed in the same *Compass* program, and also in his biography: Peter FitzSimons, *Beazley: A Biography* Sydney: Harper-Collins 1998.

¹⁶ eg David Marr, 'Hidden Prophets', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 July 2006

¹⁷ Quoted at <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0509/S00237.htm>, accessed 6 December 2006

¹⁸ The most prominent exception is the Catholic-based Democratic Labor Party (DLP), formed in 1955 as a result of the 1955 split in the Australian Labor Party (ALP). While it never approached holding power, the DLP effectively divided the ALP vote, directing preferences to the conservative parties and thus contributing to the ALP's inability to regain office until 1972. Though enjoying substantial support from disaffected ALP Catholics, the extent to which the DLP can properly be called a Christian party is a matter of debate—see John Warhurst, 'Was the DLP a "Church" Party?' in Brian Costar, Peter Love and Paul Strangio eds, *The Great Labor Schism: A Retrospective* Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2005

¹⁹ When John Bradford, Member for the federal Queensland seat of Macpherson, resigned from the Liberal Party and joined the CDP while he retained his seat. The 1998 early federal election meant that he served only a few months in that capacity. Facing certain defeat in Macpherson, he ran instead on a CDP ticket for the Senate, but was unsuccessful.

²⁰ Ewin Hannan and Malcolm Schmidtke, 'Family First', *Age*, 16 October 2004

²¹ Malcolm Brown, 'So God Said: Go to NSW and Create Poll Mayhem', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 September 2004

²² 'Interview: The Numbers Men', *Sunday*, Channel 9 (Australia) / Prime (NZ), 10 October 2004

²³ Sydney: Allen & Unwin 2005

²⁴ Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* New York: W. W. Norton 2006, pp 52-3

²⁵ See Michael Gerson, 'The Danger for America is Not Theocracy', Address to the Ethics and Public Policy Council, December 2004. Available at http://www.beliefnet.com/story/159/story_15943_1.html, accessed 7 December 2006. For discussion, see David S. Gutterman, 'Presidential Testimony: Listening to the Heart of George W. Bush', *Theory and Event*, 5(2) 2001; Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking About*

Religion After September 11, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2003; Deborah Caldwell, 'George Bush's Theology: Does the President Believe he has Divine Mandate?' Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 12 February 2003, available at <http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=1994>, accessed 7 December 2003

²⁶ See Goldberg op. cit., pp 57-70

²⁷ Eg Peter Dunne, Address to the National Press Club, 21 January 2005

²⁸ Anna Claridge, 'Escaping the Christians', *Press*, 8 October 2005 D3

²⁹ 'Outdoor Recreation Splits from United Future', Radio New Zealand News, 26 March 2006

³⁰ Keith Ng, interview with Mark Blumsky, posted 12 September 2005 at

<http://www.publicaddress.net/default.poll dancer.6.sm>, accessed 8 December 2006

³¹ Questions for Oral Answer, *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, Wednesday 6 April 2005, p 19632

³² See eg Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge*

Durham: Duke University Press 2002, pp 146-149; Cynthia Burack, 'Getting What 'We' Deserve: Terrorism, Tolerance, Sexuality and the Christian Right', *New Political Science* 25(3) 2003, pp 343-346. This technique has been effectively used in Australia by John Howard, with Pauline Hanson's overt racism enabling Howard to adopt a line which would once have been beyond the pale of Australian public discourse but which, post-Hanson, looked moderate by comparison.

³³ Audrey Young, 'Insults Get Personal Between Clark and Brash', *New Zealand Herald*, 16 March 2004

³⁴ Paul Goldmith, *Brash: A Biography* Auckland: Penguin 2005

³⁵ See Burlein op. cit., Burack op. cit.

³⁶ Jeffrey Sharlet, 'Jesus Plus Nothing', *Harpers*, March 2003 (available online at

<http://www.harpers.org/JesusPlusNothing.html?pg=1>, accessed 7 December 2006)

³⁷ For this analysis of the Scopes trial's impact, see William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* New York: Broadway 1997, p 149

³⁸ For a useful overview of these traditions, see Darrell L. Bock (ed), *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond* Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1999

³⁹ Michelle Goldberg, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry GOP', 29 March 2006,

<http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2006/03/29/waronchristians/>, accessed 8 December 2006

⁴⁰ See Sara Diamond, 'Dominion Theology: The Truth About the Christian Right's Bid for Power', *Z Magazine* February 1995 (available online http://www.publiceye.org/diamond/sd_domin.html, accessed 8 December 2006)

⁴¹ Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* Wheaton: Crossway 1982

⁴² Op. cit.

⁴³ Ex-members are emphatic that they do not donate to charity, only to the group's leaders. See 'Separate Lives', ABC TV *Four Corners*, 25 September 2006

⁴⁴ See eg Linda Bilmes and Joseph Stiglitz, 'The Economic Costs of the Iraq War: An Appraisal Three Years After the Beginning of the Conflict' Paper presented at the annual conference of the Allied Social Science Associations, Boston, January 2006. Available online at

http://www2.gsb.columbia.edu/faculty/jstiglitz/cost_of_war_in_iraq.pdf; Delinda Hanley, 'The Terrible Costs of Bush's Reckless "War on Terror"', *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 25(8) 2006, pp 20-21

⁴⁵ The most famous popularisation of this schema is Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins's series of novels with the collective title *Left Behind*. Novel sales in the tens of millions have been supplemented by numerous spin-offs including a computer game, movies, chat rooms, related book series (*Left Behind: The Kids; Left Behind: The Political Series*) and prophecies sent daily to your cellphone. Despite their extraordinary reach, the detail of view of the end-times presented in the series is not universally shared by premillennialists.

⁴⁶ The main difference between the Exclusive Brethren's version of this theory and that of some other inheritors of the dispensationalist outlook is that, where many dispensationalists cheerfully anticipate the end of the world and are looking forward to the Rapture, the Exclusive Brethren appear to want to delay it. Thus, world leader Bruce Hales is often quoted (for example, by ex-member John Wallis on *Background Briefing* op. cit.) as having called for a prayer mobilisation before the 2004 US and Australian elections, saying that, if Bush and Howard were not re-elected, 'then the Rapture is very near'. For example, on 11

November 2006, Massey University historian Peter Lineham told television current affairs show *Dateline*, of Australian network SBS, that:

it looks as though the Exclusive Brethren in some sense believe that the government of Bush and Howard and the like can appropriately protect their interests and the interests of Christendom, and only after that will there be the turmoil that will lead to the Rapture and the end of the world.

REPORTER: And alternately they'd see Labour and especially the Greens as perhaps accelerating the end of the world?

PETER LINEHAM: Yes, very much so.

Some observers, such as Dean of Hartford Theological Seminary Ian Markham, who himself comes from an Exclusive Brethren background, concurs that the Exclusive Brethren's move into politics 'was almost certainly provoked by their apocalyptic world view', and attributes the group's desire to postpone the end to its attempt, inaugurated in 2003, to reconnect with ex-members and invite them to rejoin. See Mark Coulton, 'Power Wielded From the Fringes', *Age*, 23 September 2006. This, however, does not fully explain the decade of political involvement which preceded the 2003 decision. The most plausible interpretation, on the data available, would seem to be that the expectation of an imminent Rapture spurred the leap into politics, but that the urgency intensified with the appeal to ex-members. The broad approach of understanding this-worldly political events in the light of the dispensationalist interpretation of biblical prophecies is consistent with the approach which has moved from the fringes to a relatively recognised position among the international Christian right over a similar period.

⁴⁷ Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press 2006

⁴⁸ <http://www.ekklelesia.co.uk/content/about/aimsandvalues.shtml>, accessed 8 December 2006

⁴⁹ Op. cit., pp 226-7

⁵⁰ New York: Crossroad 1987

⁵¹ New York: Crossroad 1988

⁵² New York: Crossroad 1990

⁵³ Ibid., p 61

⁵⁴ New York: Ballantine 1996

⁵⁵ Princeton University Press 1988

⁵⁶ Harvard University Press 1971

⁵⁷ Barber 1988 op. cit., pp 19-20

⁵⁸ Mark 7:24-30