

Cardinal George Pell

Pennant Hills Golf Club

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Thankyou Martin for those kind words of introduction; ladies and gentlemen I'm sure I'm able to say with most of you, perhaps all of you...brothers and sisters in Christ.

For my sins for a while I was in charge of a seminary where we trained Catholic priests. And one of the more useful bits of information, or instruction, that I repeated fairly frequently to the trainee priests was "when you're talking publicly for God's sake don't be telling people about your boring personal life – preach Jesus Christ!" Now I'm going to break my rule and give you just a little bit of personal background because it will help to situate what I'm saying.

It's not in every circumstance that it's ideal for me to explain my mixed religious background. Having done that I'll go on to say a few things which will probably seem to you to be completely obvious and natural but one little story I'll tell will demonstrate just how differently these basic realities can be seen otherwise.

My mother from whom I received the faith had a strong Catholic faith and was a keenly practicing Irish Australian Catholic. Her surname was Bourke. My Father was a nominal Anglican; I remember once as a teenager I was filling in this census for him, and said..."what will I put down for you?...No religion"; he says "Hell no, I'm an Anglican". He was a man of strong principles and a wonderful father to me. But he wasn't much interested in religion and obviously the name is English. My first name is the same name as my father, and grandfather. I don't have a second name because in my father's family the tradition was the males would have as their second or third name 'Berkley'. I think my mother felt that she had conceded enough to the Protestant side of the family, having me called George. She balked at 'Berkley' and so I have no second or third Christian names, as we used to call them.

As Archbishop of Melbourne I condescended to see Gerry Adams from the IRA when he was out here. Interestingly enough nearly every advisor had said don't receive him. Anyhow I thought generally it doesn't hurt to talk and so I

did talk with him. Among other of the more useful things I was able to do once we got beyond the palaver on both sides was to tell him that some of the families of people who had been shot by the IRA had come to me and said that they would like to know where the bodies were buried so that they could pay them the proper respect. He took that on board but I don't know if anything ever happened about it.

Incidentally after that the British consul came to me and said "Do you ever go to Ireland?", and I said "Yes I do" and he said "If you went to Ireland would you do the rounds of the Church and political leaders there; just as a small contribution towards peace?" I said "Of course I'd be happy to do that if I could make the slightest contribution to bringing a bit of peace to such an unhappy place...I would be delighted to do so." When I came home from Northern Ireland I refused to say any word publicly about the situation, because the only thing that was absolutely clear in my mind was that I didn't really know what was going on. I didn't really understand what was happening underneath.

But to get to the kernel of this little introductory story, I visited a very senior Protestant church leader there. He was obviously a sophisticated man who'd been out and around in the world. He said to me, "With your name and your background, and the fact that you're a Catholic priest,"..he said.."..how can you survive? Aren't you schizophrenic?" He was absolutely dead serious. I said to him "Well I'm like many people whose people have been in Australia for three or four generations; I've got Irish, Protestant and Catholic, I've got English blood, and I've got one Scottish great grandmother." And I said that this sort of mixture is entirely taken for granted in the great majority of cases in Australia; and that's a great blessing. A great blessing. And people sometimes look at me funnily when I say, "Well, you know, we should thank God that we're not like Northern Ireland." And especially younger people today say "That's absolutely ridiculous...of course we're not like that...we couldn't be." But we owe a lot to those Australians who have gone before us. For their good sense, the fact that they leave space for others and that they have given space to a Catholic minority. And we Catholics are very grateful for that. So for years, while I'd been to Ireland, I'd never been to Northern Ireland. I used to say that with my name pointing in one direction and my profession pointing in another direction I'd have both sides shooting at me. We don't have that here.

I grew up in an Irish-Australian cultural milieu. Nearly all dad's relations were Catholics and we met regularly with them. I was much influenced by the published answers of Dr. Mannix; I grew up in the 50's; it was interesting, my mother's people revered him. In my grandparents' home his portrait was in the main room, the dining room. My father's mother was very frightened of him, he made her nervous.

We were a family who were interested in politics. I was a teenager at the time of the Labor Party split, and it was a time when the Cold War and the struggle against communism was at its height; and so for teenagers who were interested in things Catholic and political there were a whole range of great

Catholic archbishops and cardinals in Central and Eastern Europe who were very brave and outspoken in their opposition to communism. Minzenty in Hungary, Vizensky in Poland, Slipye in the Ukraine, Baran in Czechoslovakia. And so I grew up hearing about men who were prepared to point out that Christianity has consequences for daily life outside worship, and Christianity has consequences for public life.

So Mannix would speak against saccharistic priests, priests who were only interested in worship. I'm very interested in worship - it's the centre of what we should be doing. He also pointed out that at least the Catholic Church had been very slow to grasp the opportunities that are offered to Christians in a democracy. If you can remember one or two of the things that I say tonight; this is a very rudimentary thing but it is sometimes challenged by people with no religious background who might be aggressively secularist. Whether we are Christians or Callithumpians we have as much right as anyone else in society to present our views for majority acceptance. If people don't like it, they can say they don't like it, they can vote against it, they can reject it. But we should never accept as the status quo the suggestion that you can only speak publicly if you eliminate all religious perspective, or all religious truths. We Christians in a democracy have as much right as anyone else to present our point of view. And we've got to present it rationally, and we've got to present it in a way that we hope will be attractive to majority opinion.

Now I emphasize that as Catholic Archbishop I'm a religious leader, not a political leader. And I say that very seriously. Especially on the eve of an election. When the press would continually like me to say something political and I'm resolutely refusing to do that. In the Catholic Church I work for unity on essential points of faith and morals. I make no apology for that; I think as a Catholic bishop that's part of what I'm supposed to do. But I recognise that in political life there is pluralism, a legitimate diversity of views. And it might mean that while we agree on the end point, we might disagree simply on the ways and means to that end point. But there are a host of distinct approaches and a host of different ways in which we might value different truths and different good aspects of society.

I can give you just a couple of examples where people might differ. Theoretically you might drop the minimum wage so much that unemployment would be radically reduced. People might disagree amongst themselves as to just where the minimum wage should be, and just what sort of priority should be given to reducing the number of unemployed by paying lower wages. In conformity with Catholic tradition in some of the recent changes I was worried that the minimum wage could be pushed too low. I don't like the fact that there is a great distance between the very rich and the very poor; we've probably got to put up with that, but what we don't want is the poor getting poorer. And you can get all sorts of other examples in which there can be and are legitimate differences.

I think coming from a Catholic tradition there is a very useful distinction between clergy and laity. And generally the clergy should stay out of politics. Everyone has got the right to speak about the moral rights and wrongs of

public issues. But in terms of regular participation of holding political office, I think at least from a Catholic perspective that's much better done by lay people than by religious.

There are two new elements in comparison with the past that I might touch on again as we move along a little bit; and that is the rise of unbelief and the rise of secularism. Our situation is significantly different now than earlier in the 20th century and in the 19th century. And many of the writers in the *commentariat*, many journalists write from an explicitly secular point of view. So often, they will work from the premise that all religions are the same; they might all be equally dangerous, all equally useless, but they're all the same. And that is not true at all. There are enormous differences between the great religions. You think of the social stratification of the Hindus. You think of the attitude to violence, war, the position of women in Islam. You think of the different Christian traditions: even within Protestantism, Catholicism, Orthodoxy, the position of women is different. There is an enormous difference between the peace loving Quakers and the military orders like the Knights of Malta, the Teutonic Knights, or the Knights of the Templar in the middle ages. And I might return to this briefly, but of course life has been changed enormously by September the 11th; and by the now ongoing reality of minority Islamist terrorism. Even here in Sydney we have a significant number of Muslims - the overwhelming majority are of course very fine Australian citizens and working for peace as we are.

Now Martin when he introduced me quoted from something I said about the persistence of religion. And this persistence is irritating people. You've only got to think of people like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens who are very, very angry about it. They're like Jonah in the Old Testament; they're angry enough to die. Jonah was angry because God relented and didn't smite Nineveh. Atheist anger is a condition of its own and there might be several reasons for that. But there's a disproportion about this anger which makes one wary. Why be angry at an absence? And really, that's what they are. It leaves me to wonder if some atheists are angry with God precisely because he doesn't exist. You know how some children are angry with their father because he's always away, or he disregards them, or he treats them badly? If God is not there to give meaning, purpose and direction to our lives, where are we? And that's a serious and not just a rhetorical question.

John Paul Sartre, the atheist existentialist was one of the greatest French writers of the 20th century. He was unremittingly honest at least in some things; and he said for a person who is an atheist, the life of a solitary drunkard and the life of a great statesman are equally worthless.

I just had a rather cross letter from somebody because I pointed out that the two alternatives are blind chance or a creator God. Some fellow wrote to me very crossly, and said, "They're not the alternatives, the alternative is Darwinian evolution, survival of the fittest." But underneath Darwinian evolution, the same option remains. Is it directed? Or is purposeless and directionless?

And religion here in Australia, we're slipping, but not grossly. We're slipping in comparison to what we would like in terms of percentage of people who are Christian is down to 64%. It was 68% 5 years ago. The percentage at least of Catholics who practice regularly is declining, but we would have two and a half, occasionally three times as many people who would worship at Christmas, especially at Christmas but also at Easter, as we have during the week. We shouldn't underestimate our continuing religious strengths. And I think there's a real chance for revival and for growth.

Now what consequences does that have for secular democracy? I don't think our presence as Christians, and we're a majority, provokes any great problems with most Australians at all. But there is a change. Previously the tension was you might say between English and Irish Protestants and Catholics. Earlier Jim Barr was talking about his predecessor Tom Ruth at the Baptist Church in Collins St. in Melbourne; how on Sunday during the 1st World War he would preach for God and King and Empire and the value of conscription and Dan Mannix on the Friday night before would have been preaching quite a different tune. He said that they were good friends and they would occasionally get together socially to chat. Legend has it that when Mannix put stamps on an envelope as a little sign of protest he would always put the stamp on its side. And I've actually seen an envelope with his handwriting where that takes place.

Now those ages are gone. And the significant tension in our society is between those who espouse a Judaeo-Christian point of view, and there are significant differences amongst us but none the less we have a lot in common, and that increasing minority of people with an explicitly secular point of view. And they have got I think....will have consequences....concepts of social justice, consequences for the concepts of marriage, sexuality and family, consequences on life issues - abortion, and increasingly the challenge will be euthanasia. In a society that is absolutely radically dominated by secular monetarists, by secular economic drives; it's going to be much cheaper to euthanase people than to keep us oldies in the style to which we have become accustomed. So these different sorts of views will have practical consequences.

Speaking from a Catholic perspective, there were never centuries of persecution of Catholics here in this country and neither of course was there persecution of the Protestant majority as there has been in some countries overseas. No mob in Australian history has ever burnt a Catholic church. That can't be said in the United States where over the hundreds of years quite a few Catholic churches have been burnt.

There was a very colourful Catholic Archbishop - I'm not sure if he was the first Archbishop of New York - I think his name was Hughes. Somebody suggested that before he became a Catholic priest he ran a slave plantation or managed it ...I don't know whether he did or not, it sounds too good to be true, but he certainly had a very forthright approach to things that happened in the early 1800s when Catholic Churches were being burnt in different parts of the States. And he said that if a Catholic Church in New York was touched,

New York would be a second Moscow. The Russians had just burnt Moscow to the ground so that Napoleon couldn't come in and use it. So he brought 3000 or 5000 Irish American armed men and put them around the old St Patrick's Cathedral and a couple more thousand boys there just in case things got really bad. There's nothing in our history approaching that. Nothing, and we should be grateful for that.

Most Australians don't have high theories of democracy and I think we value democracy because it works. We're deadly serious about the right of every adult to vote for those who will govern us, and I think overwhelmingly we insist on the right to have our say. To the amusement of some people in the Catholic Church in Rome they receive a disproportionate amount of mail from Australia from Australian Catholics complaining about us Christians. Now the reason for that I think is not that our situation is worse here, in many ways it's better than in many places; but Australians are used to having their say; they feel there's something wrong, they will say so. And if they can't get satisfaction here they will say it somewhere else and that's basically a very, very good thing.

So in terms of the secular versus religious debate, I'm wary about introducing the much more developed anti-religious tendencies in the United States. The United States is a much more religious country than we are, and it's much more anti-religious too. I urged earlier that Christians whatever our colour have as much right to speak as anyone else. In Britain just at the moment the Christian view is almost totally ignored. The rule of thumb seems to be that Christian perspectives are systematically ignored.

So the separation of Church and State is something we very much adhere to, which doesn't mean to say we can't co-operate. Some secularist writers think that is absolutely necessary because Catholic archbishops are a danger to the democracy. Now I think any such idea is grossly exaggerated, but the separation of Church and State provides great protection for us churches. Governments can't impose their way upon us and insist what we might say and what we might not say.

It's interesting here in Australia that people generally appeal to the separation of Church and State when they object to something that a Church leader, either a head of an agency, or head of a Church has said. But when such a Church leader says something with which they agree they are very silent on the advocacy of the separation of Church and State.

Neither is there much anti clericalism in Australian public life. Anti clericalism was very strong in Catholic countries like Spain; you've only got to think of the Civil War and even Sapatero's government which is presently ruling in Spain and in Italy.

I think one of the important functions of religion, especially for Christianity, is for us to contribute to the maintenance of the development of what we might call social capital. The Australian concept of a 'Fair Go' for everyone I believe is very difficult to imagine without a Christian background.

There have been many great societies in history where it would never enter their head to say that everyone should have a 'Fair Go'. In the Roman Empire about 40% of the Roman population were slaves, who had no civic rights whatsoever. In India you have the caste system which people take very, very seriously indeed. There's the 'untouchables.' A fellow I studied with, an Indian, was a 'tribal', so he's even lower than the 'untouchables', and he's now a Cardinal. He's quite a novelty in India. Not just because there are only three or four Cardinals in India but that a man who comes from the lowest of the low in Indian society could be one of the leaders in the Catholic Church is something that's counter-cultural there.

And of course in many parts of the world in the last century it was particularly the Christians who stood up and objected to tyranny. I mentioned the Catholic Archbishops because I happen to know of them who were in opposition to communism, but during the 2nd World War whatever the rights, and whatever the church, the team leaders should have said more or less, overwhelmingly it was Christian people who took the Jews in. In the place where I stay when I go to Rome they had two or three hundred Jews in their cellars during the 2nd World War.

There is an atheist philosopher with a head full of mistaken ideas. I attended a banquet for Jonathon Glover; I attended a course of his lectures on ethics at Oxford years ago. He has said if Christianity in the west declines radically, who will there be to oppose the tyrants? Because it's generally been the Christians with the depth of principles who are prepared to go out on a limb and take these stands on principle.

Christianity has made a great contribution towards producing strong individuals. And the other great source of that is strong family life. Individuals who are community people in our sort of society overwhelmingly have a Christian background, or did have a Christian background and did come from strong families. And so it's no coincidence that the totalitarian movements that we saw in the 20th Century: Nazism and communism, were both movements that were decisively against religion, especially communism, and also against the family.

I feel that I've spoken nearly long enough; we're going to face all sorts of challenges to marriage and family life and sexuality. But I think with persistence, and regular advocacy, I think we're well placed on at least quite a number of these issues to obtain majority support here in Australia. Somebody was just saying to me people never really hear what you say unless you say it 6 or 7 times. Now I'm not going to follow that principle tonight, but there's something in it. We need to keep explaining what we're doing, appealing to reason. It no longer cuts much ice with most Australians to say 'We're espousing this because Christ taught it'. But if we're able to say, 'Well yes certainly we're espousing Christian teachings, but we're espousing them because they are good and reasonable, they are conducive to human flourishing'. They'll probably say, 'Yes'. There's no such thing as common sense itself. There are a whole variety of common senses; different in Indonesia, different in India, different in Australia. Our common sense in

many, many ways has been shaped by Christianity; and we should realise that and be grateful for it.

I'll just conclude with a word or two about Islam. A few weeks ago at the end of Ramadan 138 Muslim scholars from around the world put out a letter to all the Christian leaders. It was the most Christian sounding Muslim letter I'd ever read. They came from many, many countries. They were men of senior position and it was a real sign of hope. They pointed out the monotheism that we share. They claimed that together Christians and Muslims constituted about 55% of the population. I'm not sure that's true. It's probably closer to 40 or 45% but there's still a lot. And one of the things they said was that I we're not at peace; if Muslims and Christians aren't at peace, then it would be very difficult or the world to be at peace.

Occasionally people, good people in the Catholic Church will suggest that Muslims are just like us, they're exactly the same as us, very similar to us. They're not. They share many, many things with us. In many cases their religious practices are deeper and stronger, but their sole set of approaches to much of reality is somewhat different. For example in a classical Muslim state there is no such thing as a separation of Church and state. The concept of religious leadership is very, very fluid. They really don't even have a clergy, in a technical sense. Certainly not like the Catholic Church does or like the Churches of the Reform. And so therefore it's very important for us to be able to distinguish between those who are genuinely our friends and working for peace and tolerance and those few who might be quite different. And I sometimes say to Catholic audiences: 'Now we're a minority in Australia'. I gave a talk to a Muslim group and I spoke about the history of Catholics in Australia. And there's some parallel between the way the majority of Australians look on the Muslims today, and the way the majority of Australians used to look on Catholics 100 years ago, or 150 years ago. And at least this Muslim audience took some heart from that. I went out to the Lakemba mosque for the end of Ramadan. And there were hundreds if not thousands of tough, self confident, young Muslim fellows about, and I remember just thinking almost subconsciously ... "um! Abit scary!" And I thought that might have been the way the Protestant majority in Australia used to look on the Catholics when we got together to celebrate Christ the King. I don't know whether it was. But at least it's a possibility. But I say to Catholics, 'We've been a minority, we are a minority, it's part of our job I think that other minorities like the Muslims get a fair run'. I think giving them a fair run is the best thing we can do to prevent the young males getting hostile and radicalised. If we're unjust to them it will breed that hostility.

If you'll excuse me I will finish by telling a vulgar story. It is an absolutely true story and I think there's a real point to it. I was out at Lakemba speaking to the year 12s there. And there's quite a few Lebanese Christians, great friends of mine, I've got enormous admiration for the Maronite Christians. And one of the year 12 boys said to me: "Now look- what are you getting out of all this talking with the Muslims? What's in it for us? What's the point of it? Isn't it just a waste of time?" He knew that I had spent some time in dialogue with them.

I said to this year 12 class and I lapsed again I told this same vulgar story, I said, 'Look I was in Northern Ireland in Belfast, and I went down, I think it's Falls Rd, it's where the Brits put up a big high iron fence to separate the Protestants and the Catholics. And now of course you can go through it, but in one spot at least they'd left it there as a memento, and it is now covered with beautiful sayings; many of them are Christian, many of them are beautiful, some of them are quite sentimental. But there are two lines there that I am sure are written by an Australian. They are unsigned, and I actually told this story in Northern Ireland and the people laughed a bit, but not as much as I think you would laugh. And those two lines read as such: "Stop the shit, have a beer!"

Now I told this to the year 12 class out at Lakemba where a lot of them are Maronite, Lebanese Maronite, and you know they gave me a round of applause because they knew exactly what I was saying. And I think it's probably a good note on which to finish in case I tell another vulgar story.

END

QUESTION RESPONSES