

Pentecostal Morrison and Australian Democracy

GRAHAM MADDOX

When criticism is made of the connection between Scott Morrison's faith and political approach, it is rarely conveyed that Morrison's form of religion is not strictly tied to biblical theology, because it is largely a teaching of experience. To that extent, Morrison's religious allegiance can explain his apparent freedom from New Testament injunction. In this article, the Pentecostalist underpinning of Morrison's religious allegiance is examined in the context of the crushing defeat of the Liberal-dominated Coalition. Morrison's determination that his religion be regarded as a private matter is analysed through the lens of the democratic insistence on open public debate. In this context, Morrison's refusal to answer questions, establish a federal integrity body, or generally demonstrate respect for accountability was a serious setback to Australian democracy.

KEY WORDS: Scott Morrison; Pentecostalism; open debate; democracy; accountability.

Scott Morrison's comprehensive loss at the 2022 federal elections invites various explorations of the event, not least that conducted by his own Liberal Party. Here we are concerned with any connection there may have been between his religion and the electoral defeat.

Without doubt, Scott Morrison believed his rise through the ranks to the prime ministership of Australia was a calling from God. Even before entering parliament he told his friend, the Pentecostal pastor Joel A'Bell, that God wanted him to become prime minister (Hardaker 2021a). An implicit belief that God controls everything that happens makes Pentecostalism 'the perfect faith for a conviction politician without convictions' (Boyce 2019). The implication was that all measures he might take to achieve his ambitions would be acceptable to God's plan for him. Before the beginning of his parliamentary career, Morrison participated in some questionable manoeuvres. The brutal disposal of rival candidate Michael Towke from candidacy in the federal seat of Cook, who had heavily beaten Morrison in the first round of the ballot, could scarcely be seen as an act worthy of a righteous man. Towke had been subject to a sustained campaign of racist innuendo and lies about his personal character (Sheehan 2009).

Just before Morrison strode into the party room which was about to elect a replacement leader for the deposed Malcolm Turnbull, he paused in his office for a moment of silence. The incident is related in Niki Savva's book with the tantalising oxymoron of a title: *Plots and Prayers*. Morrison was joined in his office by Stuart Robert, a fellow Pentecostal Christian and his closest ally. Together they prayed 'that righteousness would exalt the nation'.

Roberts explained to Savva that 'Righteousness would mean the right person had won' (Savva 2019: 146-147).

This incident was alarming at many levels. First, it implied that God takes sides in party politics, regardless of the many Christians outside of or opposed to the Liberal Party. It is as silly as asking God to let your football team win. Second, Morrison seemed to have believed that he had become God's chosen vessel for running the country. It recollects the old doctrine of the divine right of kings. Morrison as prime minister may have thought that he was answerable to God, more than to the party or the people. Did it empower him with a self-belief and a certainty that he could do no wrong? The people were an inconvenience who voted sometimes and answered opinion polls. The more the prime minister refused to answer questions of journalists, the more he refused to justify his decisions (or non-decisions) to the public, the bigger the doom-laden cloud of suspicion hovered over his seeming assumption of 'divine right'. That Roberts would claim that *righteousness* won the day is astounding. For all the shadows in his rise to power, Morrison was righteous?

Morrison, religion, and democratic politics

With Morrison's eventual defeat, it is apposite to ask whether his religious allegiance is relevant to the outcome. There is a long history associated with religion and the emergence of modern democracy. According to such influential commentators as A. D. Lindsay, the promise of democratic association began with a call for participation in discussion of God's will for the country. The parliamentary side in the English Civil War was rife with calls for open discussion, as manifest over and over again in the Putney Debates among Cromwell's army.

Cromwell himself averred that he entered meetings not knowing what the outcome would be, because discussion could evoke understandings not previously arrived at (Woodhouse 1974: 31-32).

Puritan congregations of the seventeenth century provided the model for modern forms of political association. According to Lindsay, the formation of voluntary associations under liberty was the foundation of modern democracy. Their diversity was emblematic of the right of people to hold diverse philosophies and beliefs, whereby the state may not be associated with any one of them. Their presence marked the foreshadowing of the doctrine of the separation of church and state – a point emphasised by the fact that the puritan and Independent Churches were refugees from the established Church of England (Lindsay 1943: 119-121).

In America, at the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop followed Luther's 'two-kingdoms' doctrine: '...God operated through popular agencies, not only in designating persons to govern, but in establishing government itself.' But the very polity is founded on the 'consent of a certain company of people, to cohabite together, under one government for their mutual safety and welfare' (in Morgan 1988: 126). The migrating puritan communities left as a church but transformed themselves into a polity. Morrison may have considered himself 'designated', but 'welfare' was hardly high on his agenda. The puritan communities were at odds with the 'fallen world' and embodied a never-ending search for the sources of cruelty and oppression against any of God's creatures (Perry 1944: 245-7). Winthrop, the founder and governor of Massachusetts Bay colonies, was no democrat, but he set out the lines of a Christian understanding of a community of love. Addressing his migrating community in 1630, he adjured his followers to love one another completely:

...we must be knit together as one man (sic). We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as his own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways (Winthrop 1891 [1630]: 306-7).

In human terms, it was an impossible ideal. With time, protestant churches became settled and comfortable institutions, more or less at peace with the world. They had to confront the reality of relativism — humans are capable of great good, but they are also capable of great evil (Niebuhr 1972: 10-15). The churches had to accommodate the necessity that the secular state was entrusted with controlling criminal behaviour, while at the same time holding the state accountable for fostering the good that people can do (Wogaman 1988: 137-8). What the liberal state had fostered was the growth of powerful worldly institutions that accumulated enormous wealth and wielded huge political power, often against the common interest. At the centre of all Christian teaching, however, was the love of fellow beings. Christian love, *agape*, set apart from all other forms of love as based on the nature of God, involves deep respect and concern for the welfare of the other (Tinder 1989: 19). This aspect of teaching put the Christian doctrine at odds with the dominant liberalism of the established democratic orders. As American theologian Stanley Hauerwas argued:

The genius of liberalism was to make what had always been considered a vice, namely unlimited desire, a virtue... Liberalism is a political philosophy committed to the proposition that a social order and corresponding mode of government can be formed on self-interest and consent ... Liberalism thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; a social order that is designed to work on the presumption that people are self-interested tends to produce that kind of people (in Thiemann 1996: 99).

In so much of Scott Morrison's career as minister and as prime minister, his policy stance was on the side of the powerful interests. At this point, however, we are concerned with his refusal to foster open public debate on the issues before the government. In a 'polity of discussion', as a democracy is well characterised, it is expected that the participants share a certain openness and candour in their exchanges. Excepting matters of vital national security, democrats have a right to openness on the part of their chosen leaders. As prime minister, Scott Morrison accumulated a catalogue of disingenuities. 'What he minds is answering the questions' (Murphy 2020: 61). When asked questions by journalists he adopted strategies of evasion. He would dismiss uncomfortable questions with phrases like 'that's just gossip', or 'that's not even debatable', or 'that's just Canberra bubble talk'. Morrison gladly inherited a ruse from John Howard to avoid answering: 'I don't accept the premise of your question'. What he was doing was not accepting the part of the question about which the public had a right, and a citizen's duty, to know and reflect on. He also developed a gift for running down the clock with rambling chatter that circumvented an answer completely (Moore 2020).

As Don Watson reflected: 'Forget what he's said at other times, what stunts he's pulled, ignore the fudges, ask not where consistency, truth and substance lie: he will drown out his doubters in a storm of platitudes and shameless demotic saws. What he says may be off the point, beside the point or have no point at all, but sooner or later it becomes the point' (Watson 2020).

During the bushfire crisis, Morrison claimed to have had a conversation with a pregnant woman in Cobargo, yet the video evidence revealed that there had been no communication at all. In a speech to the national press club in January 2020, 'Morrison devoted a substantial part of his speech to the lies that Australia's emissions abatement targets are sufficient...' provoking Bernard Keane to call him 'the most hollow prime minister in living memory'. When dealing with the political opposition, Morrison persistently deployed half-truths and not-truths. Keane was blunt: 'It takes real effort to stand out as a liar in Australian politics, but Scott Morrison yesterday lied so egregiously and offensively it was a triumph of political bullshittery' (Keane 2020).

In another address to the national press club, Morrison denounced alleged fiscal failings of the opposition leader, Bill Shorten: '...this guy doesn't get it. He doesn't understand how to legislate financial services reform. Now, there's a good reason — he's never done it! They didn't do it when they were in government last time. They had Storm Financial, they had all of those — nothing, zip, zero.' Morrison was pulled up by *The Conversation's* Michelle Grattan, who pointed out that Shorten had steered through parliament — against fierce opposition from Morrison himself — a serious financial services reform package, the 'future of financial advice'. Morrison's disingenuous reply was to say that he must have found Shorten's work 'underwhelming'. There could be no hint of correction, retraction, or apology. 'I'll let others, you know, correct the record as they see fit.' But he had thrown the mud and hoped it would stick (Hutchens 2019). At his first outing early in April in the 2019 election campaign, Morrison claimed that federal Treasury had costed several of Labor's policies, declaring that Labor would be the highest taxing Australian government on record. The Treasury immediately made a public statement that this was not true. It was Morrison's fiction, but more mud might stick.

Michael Pascoe of the *New Daily* was as exasperated with Morrison's prevarication as Keane, being moved to repeat in May what he had written in February: 'With what may be another crisis unfolding, it would be helpful to have faith in the nation's leadership, reassuring to have confidence that a capable, open and honest government is doing the right and best thing. Instead... [people have to

ask if what they heard is true]. That is what it has come to under a steadily mounting case load of fibs and lies, spin and evasion' (Pascoe 2020). It took a certain amount of hubris to fit the boot to the leader of the opposition's foot. On 25 April 2019 the *ABC news* reported: 'Bill Shorten lies,' the PM said. 'He lies, he lies, all the time'.

If Morrison's passionate religion had directed him more to the gospel teachings in the New Testament, he would have found ample direction about truth-telling. One example of many is 1 John 3. 18 (NIV): 'Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth'. Surely all Christians were taught that 'the truth will set you free' (John 8. 32).

Pentecost and Pentecostalism

The question remains whether Morrison's approach to religion had a significant connection with his politics. Without doubt, many other Christians, who are rooted in the teachings of the New Testament, would be deeply shocked at Morrison's mendacity, but there is no necessary affinity between his faith and his political approach on that score. On the other hand, Pentecostalism may explain his apparent freedom from New Testament injunction. Morrison's form of religion is not so strictly tied to biblical theology, because it is largely a teaching of experience. Pentecostalism arose from emotional Wesleyanism but departed radically from the 'connexion' of the church.¹ Modern Pentecostalism emerged when an American Methodist pastor, Charles Parham, began to preach that Wesley's two phases of 'sanctification' were incomplete without the manifestation in Acts 2: *glossolalia*, speaking in tongues. This teaching was taken up by his student, William Seymour, who in about 1906 preached the 'blessing' of tongues.

Pentecostals typically glean from the Bible a sense of Jesus' sacrifice for human salvation, and of the experience of the disciples at Pentecost. In the account given in the second chapter of Acts, after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples were visited by the holy spirit in the form of a rushing wind, tongues of flame alighting upon them each, and a breakout of all speaking in tongues — in foreign languages (Acts 2). The people visiting Jerusalem from afar for the festival of Pentecost, the 'Feast of Fifty Days' (after Passover), heard the disciples speaking *in their own languages*. The symbolism of this event is that the disciples were being guided to go and teach all nations in their own languages; but with modern Pentecostals it often results in a lapse into undecipherable blather. No one can describe or evaluate the inner experience of ecstasy that a devout person might feel, but to Pentecostals *glossolalia* is taken as a sign that the spirit has wrought their sanctification. Speaking in tongues becomes a necessary mark of salvation (Kay 2011: 23).

That the Pentecostal event related by Luke was historical is open to serious doubt. The followers of Jesus were scattered and humiliated after the crucifixion, but small, isolated churches began to emerge and to record their own recollections of events decades afterwards. Much of the recorded scripture surrounding the resurrection of Jesus is based on ancient Jewish prophecy, poetry, or folklore. Many stories in the gospels are '*prophecy historicized* and not *history memorized*' (Crossan 1994: 152, emphasis in original).

The gathering of the faithful at Pentecost may indeed be a projection of prophecies in Isaiah, Joel and Jude. There are also echoes of the heavenly sound at the giving of the law at Mt Sinai in Exodus 19. 16-19 (R. Maddox 1982: 138-139). In any case, the scriptural account of Pentecost explicitly states that when the apostles spoke in tongues, foreigners from many parts of the world heard their own languages being spoken. The whole account is symbolic of the commission to bring good news to all peoples (Acts 2. 6-12). It in no sense instructs people to signify their faith by talking gibberish which only a select 'interpreter' can understand.

Experience of the spirit loosens the Pentecostal's connection to scriptural theology, raising 'experience as a norm, sometimes even above the Bible...' (Witherington, 2004: 3). It offers a 'unique perspective on the Christian experience in which God is so intimately present to the saved and sanctified that he can be felt, talked to and heard at any time' (Boyce 2019). This was evident in the 'fruits' by which Morrison was known. He regularly affirmed that his faith was in a category different from his politics, and that his faith was a private matter.

As Guy Rundle cheekily but tellingly puts it, 'The various forms of Hillsongism spreading throughout the Libs offer a personal religiosity geared not to a cosmic order but to a more individualised one, in which Jesus acts as a sort of career booster, life coach and spiritual Prozac' (Rundle 2019). Salvation is 'more of a self-help program rather than a radical rescue mission' (Boyce 2019). In the 'mainstream' Christian tradition salvation leads to an outward concern for others, as expressed in the Catholic Church by the nun's vow of poverty and the foundation of mendicant orders, and in Protestantism by injunctions such as John Wesley's to give away all you can to the poor (Wesley 1998: 123).

Prosperity

There is nevertheless a sense in which Morrison's attachment to policies that favour the wealthy and punish the poor — as in the legislation of lavish tax-cuts for the rich and punitive schemes against the poor such as 'Robodebt' — is affected by a particular branch of

Pentecostalism arising from America.² The so-called 'prosperity gospel' is a direct attack on the teaching of Jesus, who never asked his followers to be rich. He famously said one cannot serve two masters: 'You cannot serve God and mammon' (Matthew 6. 24). Mammon means both money and wealth. The parable of Lazarus and Dives (Luke 16.19-31) promises a stinging rebuke (and eternal torment) to a rich man in his mansion who spurns the beggar lying at his gate. Yet Pentecostal and some 'evangelical' preachers regularly promote the prosperity gospel. If you serve God faithfully, then riches will be your reward, and will be a sign of God's favour. Preachers adopting 'mammon' as the guide of their own lives could well be shy of announcing God's good news to the poor.

Many of the famous televangelists in the United States have accumulated great wealth to themselves. Jimmy Swaggart, Franklin Graham and Joyce Myers are multi-millionaires, happily flaunting, in some cases, their private jets and luxury homes. Franklin's father, the legendary Billy Graham, died at age 99 with a reported net worth of 25 million dollars. Benny Hinn reportedly has 60 million, while Joel Osteen, the pastor of Lakewood Church in Houston, the largest protestant church in America with an auditorium seating 16,800 people, has an estimated worth of 100 million. Pat Robertson founded the Christian Broadcasting Network which airs in 180 countries. He is highly political and ran for US president in 1988. His Christian Coalition supports right-wing candidates for political office, and he is a champion of Israel over Islamic Arab states. Robertson's worth is also estimated at 100 million dollars. Kenneth Copeland tops the poll at 300 million (Bennet 2021).³ The other side of the coin is a contempt for people on welfare, with the sinister suggestion that their poverty is a sign of God's disapproval of them.

Pentecostal evangelists preach an American way that is fiercely individualist and conservative. The message is exactly in line with the individualist political ideology of the American entrenched right-wing. There are overtones of anti-Semitism, anti-Islam and white supremacy in the ideology. The attitude permeates wider circles than their own. Exemplifying a deep-seated aversion to anything smacking of 'socialism' was a mainstream or 'conventional' preacher expounding on the justice of Jesus Christ. He found it necessary to interpolate — 'this is personal justice, not social justice'. Televangelist John Hagee was once preaching on the love of God. He announced that it extended to everybody 'except the man on welfare who is not worth the price of the gunpowder it would take to shoot him' [verbatim].⁴ There is no room here for reflecting on the legitimate reasons for welfare, let alone a flicker of concern for Jesus's good news for the poor. And the cult of violence penetrates the pulpit.

There is no suggestion here that all Australian Pentecostal Churches fall in line with American televangelism, but undoubtedly there are some, and there is good reason to believe that Morrison's personal convictions were indeed aligned to them. In his inaugural address to Parliament in 2008, Morrison acknowledged the founder of the mammoth Hillsong Church, Brian Houston, as one of his mentors. He remained close to Houston till he seemed to cool after Houston's fall from grace in his own church. Pastor Houston was well integrated into the American brand of the 'prosperity gospel' (Hardy 2020). He once wrote a book, in which he denounces a Christian 'poverty mentality', proclaiming *You Need More Money* (1999); the Amazon blurb promises that God's blessing will turn you into 'a money magnet'. The Hillsong empire grew to be a world-wide organisation. In Sydney he told his shining congregation, 'God did not create us to live mediocre, settle-for-less lives'. He tells his enthusiastic followers 'You are awesome!' (Snow 2015). There is an unmistakable resemblance between the Hillsong approach and that of the American televangelist millionaires mentioned above.

At least three things are wrong with the expectation of temporal reward through faith, obedience, or being 'saved': first, 'mainstream' Christianity always puts loving God as the first part of being Christian, regardless of any prospect of reward. Second, feel-good preaching directly traverses Christ's teaching of good news for the poor, and his injunction to serve the poor. Third, it negates Christ's teaching on self-denial: 'Anyone who wants to be a follower of mine must renounce self; he must take up his cross and follow me' (Mark 8.34). Whether the prosperity gospel had a direct influence on Morrison's *policies* remains a moot point. Certainly, the atmosphere in which he breathed and moved was saturated with the sweet smell of prosperity. Yet there were problems when the respected economist of the *Sydney Morning Herald* Ross Gittins exclaimed: 'how can an out-and-proud Pentecostalist such as Scott Morrison be leading the most un-Christian government I can remember?' (Gittins 2020). Gittins clearly found the policies of the government repugnant, and in no measure following the Gospel. Yet neither could a democratic government be called 'Christian', since a democracy must be secular to be an impartial ruler to citizens of all creeds, racial backgrounds and life-situations. What is more at stake here are the personal convictions of the prime minister himself.

Good news to the poor

God's preference for the poor is a central teaching of the Bible, both in its ancient Jewish volumes and in the New Testament focus on the prophetic mission of Jesus Christ. Ross Gittins laid this on the line: '...one message that you get is rarely emphasised by his modern-day generally better-off followers. Jesus was always on about

the plight of the poor, and was surprisingly tough on the rich' (Gittins 2020).

Gittins relates the central announcement Jesus made at the beginning of his ministry: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has sent me to proclaim good news to the poor' (Luke 4.18). Quoting from the prophet Isaiah, Jesus deliberately aligned himself with ancient Jewish teaching against poverty (Isaiah 61.1). Both the law and the prophets of the Old Testament made care of the poor a paramount service. The 'poor law' commands: 'You shall open your hand to your brother, to the needy and the poor of the land' (Deuteronomy 15. 7-11). The legislated Sabbatical Year, decreeing the cancellation of debts and the manumission of slaves, was an all-out official onslaught on poverty, 'so that there will be no poor among you' (Deuteronomy 15.4). The great prophets, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah thundered against the exploitation of the poor. The Christian New Testament sits squarely in that tradition (Cf. Pilgrim 1981: 19-28). Gittins refers to the famous Sermon on the Plain:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be satisfied...

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort (Luke 6. 20-49)

Taking Dominion

In the wash-up of the 2022 May election, it becomes increasingly evident that the Morrison government left a myriad of pressing matters unattended. Even where it claimed strong achievements as in the roll-out of mass vaccination against COVID-19, its initiatives were substantially delayed. For a prime minister who seemingly believed that the whole world was in God's hands, to be managed by him on a day-to day basis, there was little to be achieved by human government. Resistance to action against global heating was a frightful case in point. If God was truly in charge of all that happens on the earth and beyond, to complain about the effects of global heating would be to challenge God's management. Surely to criticise God's manifestation of himself in the realm of nature would be a blasphemy.

Speaking at Margaret Court's Pentecostal church in Perth on Sunday 17 July 2022, Morrison told his listeners not to trust in governments as earthly institutions, or in The United Nations Organization. At first blush, this may have sounded like sour grapes on the part of one who had recently suffered a severe election loss. Yet there is a strong Augustinian teaching behind such a statement that feeds directly into our conception of democracy. Our institutions provide for regular elections precisely because

human government cannot be accorded unlimited trust. Our own recent politics themselves provide sufficient evidence that power corrupts. That is why the Albanese federal government is pressed to establish an anti-corruption commission. Besides requiring governments to face the electorate periodically, a healthy democracy also requires a strong opposition party to keep a government under daily scrutiny.

Evidently, none of these sound provisions caused Morrison much reflection; he cared little for democracy. He repeatedly refused to deal honestly with the public, he blatantly favoured powerful interests with financial bounties, and acted unconstitutionally by secretly 'swearing himself in' to numerous portfolios — an act of contempt for the Parliament and for the Australian public. Morrison gladly supported Pentecostal churches with huge amounts of public moneys under various disbursement schemes, such as the Safer Communities fund (Pini 2022).

Given the preference to leave things in God's hands, it is somewhat surprising that some Pentecostal Churches are determined to exercise rule in the secular world. It goes beyond merely seeing that their own sect is protected or favoured. They call this 'taking dominion'. The injunction at the beginning of the Bible (Genesis 1. 26-28) for human beings to 'have dominion' over living things is hardly a political pronouncement, and certainly not a mandate to Christians or Jews. Yet branches of Pentecostalism seek to traverse the boundary between church and state to control secular politics. In Texas the 'Taking Dominion Ministries Training Center' glories in its 'vision': 'Training for Reigning'. In their case, dominion means complete mastery over life. Their coat of arms contains many symbols of power, including the *Fleur de lis*, 'which is legend in itself — a lasting emblem of royalty, power, grandeur, faith and unity' (Taking Dominion Ministries 2020).

Separation of Church and State

Ross Gittins denounced the Morrison government as 'unchristian', but this was not to imply that a government should be 'Christian'. A democracy embraces all within it, of whatever faith they may hold, or no faith. At the same time, religious people may expect that the ethos of love and concern for 'neighbour', unremittently taught by biblical theology, should be a measure of public justice.

It would be absurd to suggest that secular government means that no one should express religious ideals in the public square. Independent researcher Stephen Chavura has helpfully explicated the problem. Does the separation of church and religion mean that politicians and judges are never informed by their religious views in office?

Are citizens never informed by religious or philosophical views when casting their votes? Chavura suggests that these propositions are impossible, 'unless we were to (unrealistically) grant public offices and citizenship only to people with no religious views and incapable of being swayed by arguments which, although non-religious, spring from religious motives'. In any case, the political and social milieu is in part formed by 'what we know about the history of ideas such as democracy, rights, toleration, sovereignty, consent, and equality' (Chavura 2010). In a democracy, religious ideals may be aired and debated in the public arena, and promoted strongly by their adherents, but they may not become law until and unless they pass through the secular grinder of parliamentary procedures, where it is intended that the welfare and aspirations of all citizens and residents, regardless of their affiliations, are given full consideration.

Democracy is open to all views that are not subversive of the system itself. The wheels of representative politics are designed to produce outcomes that are broadly acceptable to the great majority of the population, and policies based solely on religious or any other dogma — without considering their impact on the wider community — are unacceptable. These views may be proposed, but they must also be sifted through the mill of democratic procedures.

Morrison and democracy

Morrison himself did not overly parade his election to party leader as an answer to prayer, but he did announce his victory in the 2019 federal elections as a 'miracle' — an in-group signal to his religious followers and admirers that he ascribed his victory to God's intervention. This appeals to the many 'evangelical' Christians, who hold an obsolete Calvinistic view that God micromanages the world. Some such adopt the abhorrent view that God would choose those who would die of COVID-19 and who would be saved; or with Franklin Graham that God sends natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina to destroy 'evil' cities. If management of the affairs of the world are in God's hands, then what place does human government have? Again, there is perhaps here an explanation of the Coalition's denial of global heating, and indeed of its deep reluctance to take remedies to address the climate question.

Any claim to rule in 'righteousness' in the name of Pentecostal religion, or any other creed, is no help to democracy. In a series of articles for *Crikey*, David Hardaker signalled Morrison's term as prime minister as a 'paradigm shift' in Australian politics: 'After eight years in government — three in the top job — Morrison's record shows *that he is the most anti-democratic prime minister we have known*' (emphasis added). His refusal to engage

in open discussion, which we have taken here to be the hallmark of democracy, and his addiction to secrecy, as in his 'on-water matters' used to conceal the nature of official treatment of asylum seekers, show a contempt for the democratic ideal.

I have here also proposed that the regular electoral and legislative processes of parliamentarism are a filter for making policies generally acceptable, but as Hardaker declares, 'Morrison detests independent processes ... from stacking independent authorities with political friends, to a disdain for the Australian National Audit Office, to placing his trusted department head Phil Gaetjens in charge of ministerial inquiries' (Hardaker 2021b).

Morrison never went quite to the extent of Donald Trump in denouncing anything uncongenial to himself as 'fake news', but his constant refusal to treat journalists seriously engendered a similar atmosphere of distrust with much of the Australian public. A democracy — government of the people, for the people, *by the people* — must engage the people as serious participants in the dialogue. Like his predecessor bar one, Tony Abbott, who incurred the wrath of much of the community for his blatant misogyny, Morrison's term undermined the standing of government in the eyes of many constituents, not least in his failure to attend to the concerns of women, both in the parliament and in the community. It is true that democracy is constituted to hold concentrated power under suspicion, but the populace is inclined to do so when it holds the *idea* of democratic government in respect. Morrison's theocratic comments at Margaret Court's Pentecostal Church in July 2022 declared his own mistrust in government. The episode of Morrison's term in office was a serious — and to be hoped temporary — setback to Australian democracy.

References

- Boyce, J. 2019 'The Devil and Scott Morrison', *The Monthly*, February.
- Chavura, S. 2010 'The separation of religion and state: context and meaning', *Nebula* vol. 7, no. 4.
- Crossan, J. 1994 *Jesus. A revolutionary biography*, Harper Collins, San Francisco.
- Gittins, R. 2020 'Pandemic softens PM's dole control', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April.
- Hardaker, D. 2021a 'The Lord wants me to be prime minister', *Crikey*, 3 September.
- Hardaker, D. 2021b 'It's time to call it out: Scott Morrison doesn't care about secular processes' *Crikey*, 12 October.
- Hardy, E. 2020 'The House that Brian Built: Inside the Global Empire that is Hillsong', *GQ*, 18 March.
- Hutchens, G. 2019 'PM Scott Morrison "caught out lying about Labor again"', *West Australian*, 12 April.
- Kay, W. 2011 *Pentecostalism. A very short introduction*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 23.
- Keane, B. 2020 'Give 'em nothing, take 'em nowhere: bereft Morrison cannot lead', *Crikey Inq*, 30 January.
- Kenneth Copeland Ministries 55: <https://blog.kcm.org/what-dominion-really-means/> (viewed 2020).
- Lindsay, A. D. 1943 *The Modern Democratic State*, Oxford University Press, London.

- Maddox, G. (ed) 1998 *Political Writings of John Wesley*, Thoemmes Press/Bloomsbury, London, p. 123.
- Maddox, G. (2016). *Stepping Up to the Plate. America, and Australian Politic*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.
- Maddox, R. 1982 *The Purpose of Luke-Acts*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Moore, T. 2020 'Why do politicians sound so fake?', *Crikey*, 7 February.
- Morgan, E. S. 1988 *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America*, Norton, New York.
- Murphy, K. 2020 'End of Certainty', *Quarterly Essay*, no. 80.
- Niebuhr, R. 1972 *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, Scribner's, New York.
- Pascoe, M. 2020 'We're paying the price for the government's deceit', *New Daily*, 3 May.
- Perry, R. B. 1944 *Puritanism and Democracy*, Vanguard, New York.
- Pilgrim, W. 1981 *Good News to the Poor*, Augsburg Publishing House Minneapolis, pp. 19-28.
- Pini, M. 2022 'Morrison courts Pentecostal world domination', *Independent Australia*, 21 July.
- Rundle, G. 2021 'Watch out, Labor – Libs' cultural warriors can change tack on sexual harassment', *Crikey*, 18 March.
- Savva, N. 2019 *Plots and Prayers. Malcolm Turnbull's demise and Scott Morrison's ascension*, *Scribe Brunswick*, pp. 146-147.
- Sheehan, P. 2009 'Nasty saga you nearly missed', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 October.
- Snow, D. 2015 'Inside the Hillsong Church's money-making machine', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 November.
- Taking Dominion Ministries, <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.151961101558529&type=3>
- Thiemann, R. F. 1996 *Religion in Public Life. A Dilemma for Democracy*, Georgetown University Press, Washington.
- Tinder, G. 1989 *The Political Meaning of Christianity*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge.
- Watson, D. 2020 'John Cain, Scott Morrison and our curious inability to elect good people', *The Monthly*, February.
- Wesley, J. 1998 'Sermon on the Use of Money', as in G. Maddox (ed.) *Political Writings of Wesley*.
- Winthrop, J. 1891 'A Model of Christian Charity [1630]', in E. C. Stedman and E. M. Hutchinson (eds.) *A Library of American Literature, 11 vols, vol. 1.*, Charles Webster, New York.
- Witherington III, B. 2004 *The Problem with Evangelical Theology*, Baker, Waco.
- Wogaman, J. P. 1988 *Christian Perspectives on Politics*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Woodhouse, A. S. P. 1974 *Puritanism and Liberty*, Dent, London.

End Notes

1. 'Connexion' was a term used by the Methodist Church to denote that members were united in a body run by central conferences, which supported, but could override, local bodies.
2. This suggestion is followed up in detail in G. Maddox, 2016.
3. These estimates of net worth appear in Karen Bennett, 'The Shocking Net Worth of the Ten Richest US Pastors will Blow Your Mind', *People*, 13 January 2021. In 2021 Copeland's worth is now estimated at \$900 million. See David Hardaker, *Crikey*, 27 April 2021.
4. Heard by the author in a television broadcast.

Author

Graham Maddox is professor emeritus of politics at the University of New England. He is the author of several books and articles including *Religion and the Rise of Democracy*, 1996 and *Stepping Up to the Plate. America, and Australian Democracy*, 2016.