

Christians help hold the centre

KEVIN DONNELLY

- MAY 23, 2019
- THE AUSTRALIAN

Scott Morrison's re-election illustrates how God moves in mysterious ways, and proves the fallibility of pollsters and the ABC and the former Fairfax, now Nine, commissariat, which is divorced from the practicalities and concerns experienced by the quiet Australians.

While the ALP's failure to cost its climate change policy, its massive increase in taxation, and its threat to the living standards of older Australians were significant issues explaining last weekend's result, freedom of religion and freedom of expression also played important parts.

Although not directly related to the election campaign, Israel Folau's unjust and shameful treatment for having the courage to defend his faith and to put his commitment to God above personal gain signalled religious freedom as a vital issue.

It can hardly surprise that, when a survey carried out by The Australian asked: "Should Rugby Australia sack Israel Folau over his social media posts?", out of 21,700 respondents 89 per cent stated the player should not have his contract terminated.

For the more than 12 million Christians across Australia, Folau being victimised demonstrated that religious freedom was threatened as things stood; under any Labor-Greens coalition those freedoms would cease to exist.

The ALP, while stating it was opposed to appointing a religious freedom commissioner to the Australian Human Rights Commission, signalled that once in government it would appoint an LGBTIQ commissioner.

The thoroughly rejected Bill Shorten team also intended to increase funding to the AHRC and to further undermine freedom of speech by strengthening section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act.

Add the ALP's acknowledgment that legislating for same-sex marriage "wasn't the end of the road" and that an ALP government would implement an even more radical gender and sexuality agenda, and it is clear why so many Christian churches and organisations successfully urged a return of the Morrison government.

The Greens' plan to scrap the commonwealth's National School Chaplaincy Program and replace it with the radical, neo-Marxist-inspired Safe Schools program telling children gender is fluid and limitless further damaged Shorten's hopes.

Then there was the deep concern about Labor's intention to remove the exemptions religious schools and educational bodies have in relation to who they enrol and who they employ.

The ALP policy A Fair Go for LGBTIQ Australians, taken to last weekend's election, stated: "A Shorten government will amend the Sex Discrimination Act to remove the exemptions that permit religious schools to discriminate against students and staff on the basis of their sexuality or gender identity."

Faith-based groups such as Christian Schools Australia campaigned hard on the issue, explaining to school communities across the country that the policies of the ALP and Greens would deny the existing freedom schools enjoyed.

Look at those Queensland electorates north of Brisbane now in Coalition hands; voters there knew that a left-of-centre secular government would deny the right of Christians and faith-based schools and organisations to remain true to their beliefs. It helps explain the election outcome.

Of course, the ALP's failure to support the Adani coalmine was a factor, but given the high number of evangelical Christians living in Queensland it is very clear that religious freedom and the fact Scott Morrison lives a strong and committed Christian faith influenced votes.

Only the Coalition guaranteed religious freedom. In a letter to the head of Christian Schools Australia, the Prime Minister wrote: "I believe there is no more fundamental right than the right to decide what you believe, or do not believe."

While hardly as significant as John Hewson's inability to quantify the impact of the GST on a cake, or Mark Latham's handshake with John Howard, Shorten's crude criticism of Morrison for not denying Folau's belief that homosexuals would go to hell made clear the fact religion and Christianity were election issues.

Not all Australians are religious but there is still a strong sense that it is wrong to attack someone personally because of their beliefs — and Shorten's actions reinforced doubts many already had about his character and judgment.

Similar to the Brexit result in Britain and Donald Trump's success in the US, the re-election of the centre-right Morrison government signals an important shift in the culture wars.

While there's no doubt that the cultural Left's political correctness movement is still a force, so it is clear that middle Australia has reasserted itself.

That so many ALP voters in traditional Labor seats deserted the party suggests that if the Left is ever to be a political force again it needs to moderate extremists more concerned with identity politics, victimhood and the politics of envy.



Kevin Donnelly is a senior research fellow at the Australian Catholic University and author of *How Political Correctness is Destroying Australia*.

<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/christians-help-hold-the-centre/news-story/a650ca0c43e7de85ae2accd46b11c15e>