As the Rudd government approaches its first anniversary, Encounter explores one of the trickiest, most sensitive and potentially controversial intersections in Australian public affairs - the relationship between religion and politics. Taking as a starting point Kevin Rudd's long essay declaring Dietrich Bonhoeffer his hero, the program tracks the influence of religion on Labor and Coalition policies. Father Frank Brennan, accused by some politicians as being "the meddlesome priest" describes how his first meeting with Kevin Rudd ended in furious argument and how their relationship later developed into friendship. Tom Frame, former bishop to the chaplains of the ADF talks of how he saw John Howard's religious beliefs evolving in office.

Kevin Rudd: The Gospel is both personal and social, and if it's social, it therefore has a political dimension as well.

The message of Christianity in politics is not just about questions of personal, sexual morality; these are in fact questions which go to the heart and soul of our responsibility to our fellow man, through the agency of the State.

Anyone in this business who's honest about it, knows that they are flawed and failed human beings, and I'm one of them. So you won't have some sort of message from me that I'm some sort of Holy Joe, because I'm not.

MUSIC

Nick Franklin: Kevin Rudd speaking before he became Prime Minister, about one of the trickiest, most delicate and sometimes controversial intersections in public life - the relationship between religion and politics.

Hello, I'm Nick Franklin. Welcome to Encounter. This program, exploring Faith in Politics, coincides with the Rudd government approaching its first anniversary in power, consumed by an international financial crisis.

Kevin Rudd: As a government, as a nation, we must respond to the twin evils which are at the root
of this malaise: greed and fear.

**Nick Franklin:** Our program begins two years before Kevin Rudd began preaching on the evils of greed.

For a future Prime Minister, the essay he wrote in October 2006 for *The Monthly* magazine, was unprecedented in Australian politics.

**Reader:** Faith in Politics by Kevin Rudd

Above the Great West Door of Westminster Abbey are arrayed ten statues of the martyrs of the church. Not Peter, Stephen, James or the familiar names of the saints sacrificed during the great Roman persecution before Constantine's conversion. No. These are the martyrs of the twentieth century, when the age of faith was, in the minds of many in the West, already tottering towards collapse.

One of those honoured above the Great West Door is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, pastor and peace activist. Bonhoeffer is without doubt the man I admire most in the history of the twentieth century. He was a man of faith, he was a man of reason. He was a man of letters who was as well read in history and literature as he was in the intensely academic Lutheran theology of the Germany university tradition. He was never a nationalist, always an internationalist.

Above all he was a man of action who wrote prophetically in 1937 that 'when Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.'

**Marion Maddox:** Well the most amazing thing about it I thought was surely this is the first time in living memory that we've had an Australian Prime Ministerial aspirant who could name a 20th century theologian, let alone write an essay about one.

**Tom Frame:** It's almost unprecedented. I mean there have been times when people have written privately and personally about their religious convictions or their doubts or their aspirations of heaven or their fears of Hell, but certainly not in the way in which Kevin Rudd did.

**ABC TV LATELINE THEME**

**Tony Jones:** Labor Frontbencher, Kevin Rudd has broken with the party's secular ranks and called for churches to become more involved in politics. In an essay penned for *The Monthly* magazine, the Labor Foreign Affairs spokesman has called for Australian churches to support the ALP.

**Kevin Rudd:** Well I think the wrong thing about your introduction was somehow I'm stepping outside the Labor mainstream. Anyone familiar with Labor's history as a political party knows that for 115 years we've been this amalgam of Irish Catholics, of English Methodists or Christian Socialists, and as well as Enlightenment humanists.
**Nick Franklin:** In the same interview recorded for ABC-TV two years ago, Kevin Rudd elaborated on his admiration for Bonhoeffer.

**Kevin Rudd:** Bonhoeffer was an extraordinary man. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian, and began work just as the Nazis took over control in Berlin with Hitler's Chancellorship in 1933. Bonhoeffer concluded that the only thing he could do ethically was to oppose the regime. The day after Hitler became Chancellor, he went on the radio and broadcast against the so-called Fuehrer Principle. A couple of weeks after Hitler proclaimed the Aryan race laws, Bonhoeffer produced his own Christian tract on the Jewish question, directly challenging what the State was doing. And when all that failed, Bonhoeffer eventually organised an underground church and then acted for a while as a double-agent, participating in the plot against Hitler. That's why they hanged him only a couple of weeks before the end of the war. A man of extraordinary courage, the key point being, for him Christian ethics was dead, a dead letter, unless it was converted into concrete social action and social justice in the circumstances of the day, and that's why I think he still speaks to Christians in politics in every age.

**Nick Franklin:** The Monthly's editor, Sally Warhaft, told Encounter that Kevin Rudd rang her at midnight on the day before his deadline to let her know he'd just finished the article. She remembers him being proud of what he'd written. At the time neither knew that within a year he'd be entering the Lodge.

Re-read again today, the essay has an added significance, especially this quote from Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

**Reader:** We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the reviled; in short from the perspective of those who suffer.

**Tom Frame:** It was almost like he was giving a manifesto of what he would do if he were to win office, and how he would treat the interface between religion and politics. I thought it was bold; I thought on one level it may have been dangerous because there could have been a backlash.

**Nick Franklin:** Professor Tom Frame is Director of the St Mark's National Theological Centre.

**Tom Frame:** I think it was a potential backlash for those who thought that religion was on the back foot and that it would continue to be on the back foot; that atheism, or if you like, a very, very secular, meaning non-religious public sphere, was what we'd achieved in Australia and people didn't want religion back in public places. I mean if you look overseas you see places where religion is in the public square and people say, 'Well inevitably, look at the strife, conflict and division that it breeds.' Here was Kevin Rudd saying that there was an inevitable interface between the two, and he intended to let his religious convictions guide some of the policy prescriptions that he would make if he were to win government. And some people might have said, 'Look, we're going to stay away from Kevin Rudd'.
Nick Franklin: Understanding Kevin Rudd today, it helps to understand where Dietrich Bonhoeffer was coming from in the very different context of Hitler's Germany.

In the early 1930s, Bonhoeffer's problem was that many Christians in his own Lutheran Church had found ways to justify devotion to race and the Fatherland through Martin Luther's doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, which gave specific roles to the church and the king.

John Moses: The Church was there to take care of the spiritual welfare of the subjects; and the King was there with his bureaucracy to rule the world, to maintain law and order, both in domestic politics and then foreign policy.

Nick Franklin: Dr John Moses, author of a new book on Bonhoeffer *The Reluctant Revolutionary*.

John Moses: The Lutheran church had always been educated, if you like, doctrinally, to see the king as God's anointed to look after the secular world. And when Hitler came to power, there was a problem because he was not a hereditary monarch, he wasn't a king by divine right. But the church was very pleased that he took charge of Germany. This was an illusion that they cultivated, that he was going to preserve law and order, and ward off the Communist menace. So they endorsed Hitler as a - what the Germans called an 'Obrigkeit', that is the power-that-be ordained of God, and you normally would have to render obedience, unquestioning, unconditional obedience to that power.

Nick Franklin: Dr John Moses lived in Queensland for many years under the rule of another Lutheran, Sir Joh Bjelke Petersen, who operated under his own version of the Two Kingdoms.

Joh Bjelke-Petersen: But don't you worry about that, I'll tell it all, whatever they ask me tomorrow. Now the News is on and I'm not going to leave this - to see what the News is tonight on TV. Thank you, Monica.

John Moses: There are several biographies on Bjelke; I don't think either of them or any of them understand Bjelke's Lutheran position on the doctrine of the Two Kingdoms, that's very difficult to get their head around.

Nick Franklin: OK, where did they get it wrong, John?

John Moses: People didn't understand that Bjelke could act in a Machiavellian sort of way and still have a clear conscience, because he was acting on behalf of the State. He would have perceived himself as God's anointed in a modest sort of way.

Nick Franklin: Growing up in Queensland, the young Kevin Rudd would have seen a lot of Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen in action.

By choosing Bonhoeffer as his guide, Mr Rudd's taking a very different path.

Marion Maddox: Bonhoeffer's quite an ambiguous figure in some ways, and his theology can be
read in a few different ways, and Rudd really chose a reading from the left, which emphasised Bonhoeffer's interests in social justice and the equal dignity of all people. And I think it had the effect of sharply differentiating Rudd's version of Christian politics from the Howard version of Christian politics, which had been increasingly prominent during the Howard decade.

**Nick Franklin**: Marion Maddox interviewed Kevin Rudd at length while researching books on politics and faith.

**Marion Maddox**: Rudd had been saying for a long time Christianity is not a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Liberal Party. Jesus Christ is not the Liberal member for Nazareth Central, those sort of lines, and I think he was deliberately trying to say, 'Look, if you want to identify with Christian tradition, it doesn't have be just one kind of politics that can identify, there's actually a very strong history of Christian Socialist and Christian Left traditions that interpret Christianity in quite a different way from the traditional family values, free enterprise kind of spin that the Howard decade had given it.

**ARCHIVE**: **Tony Jones**: Are you trying to co-opt Jesus for the ALP?

**Kevin Rudd**: No, this is a Fightback on our part, Tony. For the last decade, Mr Howard, Mr Costello, Mr Downer, Mr Abbott, on various occasions have whacked various Christian leaders for daring to come out and say that they disagreed with various social policies or economic policies of the Howard government. When for example, we had church leaders come out and attack the government's extreme industrial relations laws, Mr Costello laid into them saying they had no qualifications to do so because they weren't economists. Mr Downer's done the same when leading churchmen have come out and attacked the government's policies on the war in Iraq. And I've got to say when I heard Mr Howard say in Parliament the other day there was no such thing as Catholic Social teaching on industrial relations, I nearly choked. There's an entire Papal Encyclical on the question of industrial relations, explicitly in defence of the rights of trade unions.

**Nick Franklin**: Kevin Rudd acknowledged at the time that he was diving into dangerous waters.

**ARCHIVE**: **Geraldine Doogue**: He's leading a movement to reclaim God for the Labor Party. He runs the risk of ridicule and derision.

**Kevin Rudd**: We will not, for one moment, stand idly by while either the Liberals, the Nationals or Family First assert that God has somehow become some wholly-owned subsidiary of the political conservatism in this country.

**Nick Franklin**: The risk of ridicule was certainly real. In Britain, the satirical magazine, *Private Eye* had years of fun targeting the overtly Christian Prime Minister Tony Blair in a fortnightly piece called:

**Reader**: St Albion Parish News by the Reverend A.R.P. Blair.
I'm sure we've all got things that happened in the past that we have no need to be sorry for - and which actually, hey, we're perfectly entitled to be proud of! In my own case, I'm thinking of my decision to join together with the Reverend Dubya of the Church of Latter-Day Morons in his great crusade to free the world from the Evil One. I'm hardly going to be saying sorry for that am I? I mean, you don't say sorry for bringing new hope to the lives of all those millions of Iraqis who are lucky enough not to have been blown up!

**Tom Frame:** There's nothing people enjoy more than ridiculing those of religious sentiment, the pious and the humbug, all of those kind of things are just fun. And sometimes it is the case because religion is about serious matters that people need to lighten it up with satire.

**Marion Maddox:** There's a good reason why Australian leaders have historically tended to keep their faith, or lack of it, out of being a topic of public discussion, and I think Australians have often thought that's a positive difference between us and, say, the United States, where presidential aspirants have to be very upfront with both their personal faith and taking part in America's civil religion, you might say.

**ARCHIVE ACTUALITY: LORD's PRAYER AT START OF PARLIAMENT**

**Nick Franklin:** There's no doubt that Kevin Rudd set out to change Christians' voting habits, although he usually conducted his argument with carefully chosen words.

**Marion Maddox:** Back at the time of Federation, Australia's founders were acutely alert to the kind of nuances of religion in public life, what might be meant by having a prayer at the opening of parliament. When they debated including the recognition clause 'humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God' in the Preamble to the Constitution, some people wanted it because they thought it would make the Constitution more popular. Some people wanted it because they thought that a new nation ought to be announcing its reliance on God, and some people, including many Christians, absolutely didn't want it and campaigned vehemently against it. Because they feared that putting a Christian recognition in the constitution might lead to the State thinking that it could tell churches what to do.

**Nick Franklin:** Marion Maddox author of *God Under Howard*.

Archive: **John Howard:** I am of the Christian tradition myself, and respect it in a very traditional way, and regard the Judaeo-Christian influence on Australia as the single greatest influence for good in the Australian community.

**Nick Franklin:** John Howard said little about his faith in public. This interview he gave to Geraldine Doogue on ABC Television's *Compass* program was a rare exception.

**John Howard:** I come from the Methodist tradition of the Christian church, although when I do go to church now, which is more often than Christmas and Easter, but certainly not once a week, I tend
to go to an Anglican church, I don't really care what denomination it is.

**Geraldine Doogue:** Your old school motto from Canterbury Boys' High was 'Truth and Honour'. Do you reflect on whether you've lived up to that in your public and private life?

**John Howard:** Oh yes, I do. I try to. I'm not perfect. I'm very wary of people who too frequently parade virtue, but I try and live according to those principles, and try to transmit them to my own children.

**Geraldine Doogue:** What do you mean you're wary of people who publicly parade virtue?

**John Howard:** Oh, I just think that - I don't like people who talk too often about how virtuous they are. I'm just a little suspicious of that.

**Marion Maddox:** At one point I did a Google search for 'John Howard, Methodist', and 'John Howard, Anglican', which is what he ended up being, and once you'd sifted through all the ones like 'John Howard is buried in the third plot from the left in the Methodist graveyard in Connecticut', those kind of ones, and found the ones that were actually about our John Howard, John Howard and Methodist produced many, many more hits than John Howard and Anglican. It stayed a very important part of his political persona. Well I think one reason why that worked so well for him actually is because by the time he was Prime Minister, the Methodist church in Australia hadn't actually existed for 20 years or so.

**Nick Franklin:** But people knew what it meant.

**Marion Maddox:** That's right, but it spoke to them of a kind of industrious, hard-working, honest, thrifty Protestantism. Of course the Methodist church in the era when John Howard grew up actually was quite different to the sort of picture that was associated with it when we say those words 'John Howard' and 'Methodist'. The Methodist church in the 1950s in Australia campaigned quite actively for nuclear disarmament, the Methodist newspaper had articles campaigning for no-fault divorce, back in the 1950s, whereas members of John Howard's government actually argued from time to time for getting rid of no-fault divorce, or at least giving people the option to opt out of it for a higher standard of marriage. So that wasn't at all the kind of conservative organisation that we associate with those days. But then when I talked to people who'd been involved in the Howard family's congregation and also to John Howard's brother, Bob, they pointed out that they weren't actually a Methodist family by heritage, they just started going to that church because it happened to be across the road, and there were some aspects of Methodist tradition from which they did hold themselves quite aloof, like they just were not particularly interested in the social justice strand of Methodism and would be quite critical around the family dinner table of the Ban the Bomb kind of Methodism associated with Alan Walker, who was the major figure from that time. Conversations would, according to Bob Howard, would be less about the content of, say, the theology, than about how - did you think the Anzac Day service was adequately done, or do you think there was appropriate recognition of national commemorations, that sort of thing.
Tom Frame: I was Anglican bishop to the Australian Defence Force and in that capacity I had dealings with John Howard on a number of fronts, to do with public worship, to do with national commemorations and also to do with some ethical questions. And I found across that period that John Howard's religious beliefs were evolving. How he understood more and more about what the Anglican church believed or didn't believe. I think over the years, he understood much more about the place of faith and religion in public life. And personally, I think it was quite interesting talking to him about hymns and prayers and things like that, that different things meant different things to him as the years went by.

Nick Franklin: I gather one of the things you had a little argument with him about once was The Lord's Prayer; how did that happen?

Tom Frame: Yes, we were talking, I think it was about 2003 and it was the version of The Lord's Prayer that ought to be used in a national commemoration. And his preference was the old version of 'Our Father, which art in heaven'; the version that you find in the Book of Common Prayer and was used in most churches for most of the 20th century. But I pointed out to him that there were new versions of the Lord's Prayer, as an Anglican I said, 'Look, we've had a new version in 1978 in the Prayer Book, and another new Prayer Book in 1995 gave us another new version.' I said, 'Look, I think we ought to update it'. And he said, 'Well people won't know it'. And I said, 'Well they won't know it if we don't use it.' And I did suggest to him that those who were churchgoers knew at least the 1978 version which god rid of the Elizabethan idiom and that we should give that a try. And he challenged me on how effective that would be or how useful that was. I put a case and said, 'All right, if that's what you think, that's what we'll do.' And after that it was agreed that at these national commemorations and similar such events, we'd have a newer version of the Lord's Prayer because I said to him that religion does evolve, that customs evolve, worship evolves, and we need I think to be cognisant of it when we do things as a nation.

Nick Franklin: While John Howard generally kept quiet about his personal faith, he was very publicly involving Church organisations in the delivery of Government welfare-to-work services.

Marion Maddox: Contracting out of previously government welfare services and job placement services to church agencies was a huge social policy shift under Howard. And one of the consequences of it was that it actually made it much harder for church agencies to criticise government, because they had no criticism clauses written into their contracts often, for delivering the services. And eventually we saw some organisations like the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul, saying 'Well, enough's enough; we're just not going to take on those contracts because the requirements are too onerous, we can't actually do justice to what we see as a just stance towards our clients.' And also he had to confront the fact that a lot of the most stringent criticism of his side of politics was coming from churches in the mid-1990s when he came to power. So if you think back to the debates over the Wik 10-point plan in 1998, who were the kind of prominent voices criticising the government position? Well as well as Aboriginal advocates themselves and political opponents, there were senior religious figures like Father Frank Brennan, there were regular statements by
Bishop George Browning the Anglican bishop who was very active in land rights and native title questions; Peter Carnley from Western Australia. There was that sense in the mid-1990s, a typical religion and politics story in the newspaper was 'Another Bishop demands more social justice' and you'd have someone in a purple shirt photographed under a stained glass window saying, 'The government should be less aggressive in the waterfront disputes', or 'More accommodating of native title'.

Frank Brennan: And definitely during the latter part of the Howard years, particularly on issues like refugees, it was very difficult because I remember at one stage in that debate, I had one of the Deep Throats in the government saying to me, 'Look, spare us the moral outrage, we're sick of moral outrage from the churches.'

Nick Franklin: Father Frank Brennan is a Professor of Law at the Australian Catholic University.

Frank Brennan: Well moral outrage is not something to be simulated, but when as I was seeing, children being held in detention in place like Woomera through to 2002, and there were dreadful things happening, there is a place for moral outrage. And for politicians simply to say, 'Look, it's popular so forget about moral outrage', I think is to overlook the role of the churches within the political process.

Nick Franklin: The Howard government, recognising the flack they were getting from some church leaders, sought out new friends.

Marion Maddox, author of God Under Howard.

Marion Maddox: And really, that was a serious problem for Howard. He remembered how the church's campaign against the GST had been one of the nails in the coffin of John Hewson, and so he set out on the one hand to deliver a series of speeches both himself and his senior ministers, telling church leaders that they should get back in their box and stick to spiritual matters and not try to meddle in politics, to quiet churches by tying them more in to government policy through the delivery of what had previously been government services. And to cultivate an alternative Christian constituency. So we didn't see John Howard associating so much with the Anglican Bishops or Uniting Church Moderators or Catholic spokespeople who'd been critical of him. We saw him instead opening the Hillsong Convention Centre in 2002 in the week after the Bali bombing. We saw Peter Costello and other members of the front bench turning up to the Hillsong conference. We saw Catch the Fire Ministry's Danny Nalliah prophesying over Peter Costello that he was going to take the mantle from John Howard at the 2007 election.

Nick Franklin: Meanwhile, Father Frank Brennan was being targeted as a 'meddlesome priest'. It was a tag he'd first been given by a different Prime Minister in a different decade.

Frank Brennan: Oh, Paul Keating did that during the so-called Wik debate back in 1998.
Nick Franklin: But he's not been the only one. Both sides of politics have -

Frank Brennan: Oh, they have, I mean I've upset both sides, and I think if you're in my sort of position, it's usually a pretty good indicator if you're upsetting both sides in that if you're going to be taking stands on moral issues, particularly about protection of the rights of minorities, particularly despised minority groups, then you can't expect in a democracy that those major political parties who are playing to the popular sentiment, are going to think, 'Oh yes, isn't it wonderful that Father Brennan's speaking out again'.

Nick Franklin: Do you ever think your critics might have a point?

Frank Brennan: Oh, I'm sure they do. I mean I'm not a Pope, I don't claim to be infallible on anything, but -

Nick Franklin: Are you interested in retrospect, have you sometimes thought, 'Oh, I wish I hadn't said that'?

Frank Brennan: I'd say most of the time, no, it's not a question of I wish I hadn't said that. Sometimes I might have looked back and thought I wish I'd spoken sooner on some of those sorts of issues.

Nick Franklin: When would that have been?

Frank Brennan: Well for example, on the death penalty issue during the election campaign I didn't say too much publicly, and I think probably I should have said more. But I did take some private steps, and there are times I think when in season and out of season you should be seen to take a stand.

Nick Franklin: Besides the often very public stoushes between church and state, there are also private conversations.

Tom Frame, how often did Prime Minister Howard seek spiritual advice from you?

Tom Frame: There were only a few occasions in which he asked my opinions about ethical matters, and I gave that ethical advice privately.

Nick Franklin: What sort of matters were they?

Tom Frame: Well he was concerned about the attitude say of the Anglican church to the use of armed force abroad. He was also concerned to know what the Anglican church's views were of issues like stem cell research, surrogacy and other such questions, because as he was trying to discern the mood of the church of which he was a part, he found it very, very difficult to detect a consistent voice. So because he sent our troops to Afghanistan and Iraq, we talked about what the church's view was, or what the range of views were within the church, and also with things like
therapeutic cloning and stem cells and other questions like that. He wanted to try and get the median view of the church and where did most people sit. And he also asked me my view which I shared with him.

**Nick Franklin:** But wasn't the problem that a lot of people in the church were against that invasion of Iraq?

**Tom Frame:** Yes, they were, certainly in relation to Iraq. I think I was the only bishop who said publicly that he supported the case as John Howard put it, for the war.

**Nick Franklin:** So he was right out of step with his own church in that matter wasn't he?

**Tom Frame:** John Howard was out of step with the leaders of the Anglican church; those who were speaking in public were not speaking in favour of the war. I spoke in favour of the war because I was concerned about those who were going and because I had separately sought to get some information, some details about why it was that we needed to do this and whether or not it satisfied ethical principles and just war notions. Now I do think that John Howard paid a price for the war in Iraq and when 'Kanimbla' arrived back in Australia, he said to me something like, 'Do people think that I lied?' And I said to him, 'I don't think people thought that you lied', well certainly I didn't think that he'd lied -

**Nick Franklin:** I think some did, Tom. That was reported at the time, wasn't it?

**Tom Frame:** Well I took the view that he had gained information that wasn't sufficiently strong, compelling or complete to justify the kind of action in which we had been involved, and I said that to him. I said that I had understood that when the war was over, when the hot phase if you like was complete, that there would all the evidence be that this kind of action was necessary and necessary at that time. And he said to me, 'Well you don't think I lied, do you?' I said, 'No, but I don't know that as you depicted what you knew to the Australian people, that we now understand there were gaps, there were surmises and there were predictions.' I said that I think if you're going to commit people to an act of war, if you're going to do the kind of thing that we did, you need to be absolutely certain of the moral and ethical basis for what you're doing. And I wasn't convinced that that was the case. And then I said so, just as publicly.

**Nick Franklin:** During these years, Father Frank Brennan was also having private meetings with senior members of the Howard government.

**Frank Brennan:** For example, on the refugee issue, I used to meet every two months with Phillip Ruddock when he was Minister for Immigration, and we had a very hefty file of correspondence between each other. Now we had very acute differences and I remember the first time I ever met with him, he said to me, 'Well I know why you're here, you're opposed to detention.' I said, 'Well I am. There's no point me, an unelected Jesuit priest coming to try and convince you about detention when you've just been re-elected on a policy which is popular which says keep these kids in
detention.' I said, 'But where there's common ground between us is if there are going to be people held in detention in remote places like Woomera, we would agree that we wouldn't want to see any gross violation of human rights occurring for people in those places, and therefore if there can be some credible citizen of which I would include myself as one, who can have access, who can report faithfully what we see, and hear, then presumably that can be something which can be of mutual assistance.' And yes, I used constantly be perplexed by those in the public forum who would say to me, 'Oh, you know, tut, tut, what are you doing talking to Phillip Ruddock?' Well hang on, he is a key decision maker, and he was someone who according to his own conscience was trying to get an appropriate balance between what he regarded as border security and the protection of rights of individuals. Now I think he got the balance wrong, and I think the new government has got the balance more right. But it's only by engaging in respectful dialogue that you'll be able to move that sort of debate forward.

**Nick Franklin:** Does that go on a lot, to your knowledge, with other people in the major churches and politicians?

**Frank Brennan:** Oh yes. And it's an irreplaceable part of living in the polity that it's not just what you get in the public forum, and let's face it, with decreased access particularly to the broadsheet newspapers nowadays, then a lot of the dialogue has to go on in other forms.

**Nick Franklin:** So with the new government, are you seeing members of that? Are you seeing Mr Rudd or anyone else in the - ?

**Frank Brennan:** Oh there are members of the government who I see from time to time and have discussions with.

**Nick Franklin:** Since gaining office, Kevin Rudd's been much quieter about his faith, although close observers have seen its influence, particularly in one early act of his Prime Ministership.

APPLAUSE

Archive: **Announcer:** On ABC Radio across the nation, live from the Great Hall at Parliament House, this is the apology to the stolen generation of Australia. The Prime Minister is about to speak.

**Kevin Rudd:** The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page. A new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past, and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise ...

**Marion Maddox:** Well it was sort of a moment of national catharsis in a way, wasn't it? It was - I had just moved back to Australia after living overseas for some years, and it was extraordinary how it was part of everybody's conversation on the street. The way that Rudd did his apology was without actually mentioning religion explicitly, although he did just drop in one allusion to the New Testament book *The Letters to the Corinthians*. But without announcing it, he just dropped it in 'and
the sound and gong were a clanging symbol cymbal' He had a very liturgical form. Well I quipped to somebody afterwards, 'If you want a good apology, ask a High Church Anglican'.

Kevin Rudd: For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendents and for their families left behind, we say Sorry. To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say Sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted in a proud people, and a proud culture, we say Sorry.

Marion Maddox: Those threefold 'I am sorrys' echoes very strongly the kind of 'Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy' the threefold sorries are a big feature of Christian worship.

Elsie Heiss: All the family were there to have some closure on my mother being taken away until she was 18 or 19 years of age, from the age of 5 from her Mum. So she had a pretty horrific time, being taken away in the stolen generation. So we came to closure. It was a beautiful day, lots of people there that were supporting us, non-Aboriginal, lots of Aboriginal people, lots of crying, lots of hugging. I think it was a really wonderful time.

Nick Franklin: And what did you make of the way the Prime Minister said what he said?

Elsie Heiss: Well I thought it was pretty well done. I think he did it from the heart.

Nick Franklin: Elsie Heiss co-ordinates the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Sydney. She also chairs the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council of Australia.

Elsie Heiss: I'm sure he meant every word that he said; following the Prime Minister's apology, we went down to the Tent Embassy and there were some people there really angry about some of the stuff that he didn't say, but a step at a time, I think that it's a step in the right direction. The apology's been done, which has never been done before. And he would have taken some flak about that as well. And it was good. Brendan Nelson got up and said a few things, and fumbled us through a few things as well, but you know, I think that he tried, but I think John Howard as we know, he actually said No, he was never going to say sorry, never. And he was so adamant about that.

Tom Frame: I think Kevin Rudd's decision to say Sorry was fundamental, I think, to people's view of the new mood that was pervading Australian political life. I do think it was a Christian impulse which led him to say Sorry and to say Sorry in the way in which he did.

Nick Franklin: Tom Frame, Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre.

Since it came to power the Rudd government's finding other promises are taking longer to deliver in full. During the election campaign a galvanised union movement prodded Labor to say it would tear up a raft of IR laws that came together under the name of WorkChoices during the Howard years.

Tim Volmer: I think WorkChoices was absolutely the defining issue of the last election, and there was a great deal of fear about the implications if this legislation survived for a long period of time.
Nick Franklin: In the run-up to the election, Tim Volmer worked actively against WorkChoices in his job as an officer of the CFMEU. He saw his campaigning as a natural part of his faith, and life with his young family; they live in the key Western Sydney seat of Lindsay, then held by a Howard favourite, Jackie Kelly.

Tim Volmer: For me, a fundamental element of Christian belief is about looking after the downtrodden, ensuring that there is justice in the world, ensuring that people who have been mistreated are protected, and I think WorkChoices was a very clear example where the people who would be most at risk were the people who were already at the bottom of the heap, and as a Christian, it's essential that you stand up for those people and speak up for those who can't speak for themselves, protect those who can't protect themselves.

Nick Franklin: Did you see this being discussed? Did it come out in your local Anglican church as well?

Tim Volmer: Yes definitely was being discussed. In fact when people know that you are a union official, they want to talk to you about it. So I've got a brother-in-law who's an Anglican minister and I remember when the laws first came through, just at a family dinner, he wanted to pin me down and 'What do these mean? I'm concerned about this', and there were a lot of people within all the different churches who were concerned about the implications of these laws and felt that there was a lack of protection for the vulnerable in society.

Frank Brennan: Well let's face it, this was about the rights of the most marginalised or the most vulnerable workers. Now there are very esteemed church traditions that have always said that you do stick up for the little people. There'd also been very significant tensions between the Howard government and church leaders, particularly on refugee policy. So I think it was out of that context that you then see this sort of robust statement coming from Rudd which yes, was very welcomed by a lot of church people.

Nick Franklin: How good a job do you think in recent times, let's say during the Howard years and the new Rudd years, has the church done in that role of speaking for the marginalised, the oppressed?

Frank Brennan: Oh, I think we've got a patchy record. I think one of the big difficulties of course has been that in an age when there's been a lot of focus on sexual abuse within the churches, then the whole idea of the credibility and the moral standing of the churches in an increasingly secularised society, I think that's been a very big issue. Also there's been a notion about whether or not church leaders, when they speak out, whether they actually know what they're talking about sufficiently in drawing distinctions between law, morality and public policy. But having said that, I would say that there have been exemplary stands that have been taken.

Nick Franklin: If the Your Rights At Work campaign was crucial to delivering the ALP into government, many believe that Kevin Rudd's own stand on faith in politics played a part.
Tom Frame: And I do think that that drew a number of people to his side. There is quite a left-wing constituency in the Australian churches, I think (Kevin Rudd) didn't want to see them go to the Democrats, or to the Greens. He wanted to say There is a home for you here in the Labor party. We are pursuing a policy agenda that is consistent with social gospel imperatives, about bringing the Kingdom of God nearer.

Marion Maddox: I don't think there is a Christian vote as such in Australia. The reason I don't think that is because only about 9% of Australians claim to go to church weekly or more, and in the low teens or mid teens for monthly or more. And those people don't vote as a block say the way that the evangelical Republican bloc in America does. The way I think Christian politics works in Australia is more the message that it sends to the vast majority of Australians who aren't regular churchgoers, who might tick some Christian box on their census form, but don't really think about it from one year's end to the next, but who just have a vague sense that religion is somehow a good thing in our leaders, because perhaps it suggests that they're not just the self-seeking cynics that we otherwise suppose them to be, or that they're motivated by something other than hard-headed opportunism.

Frank Brennan: One of the things I must say I like about Rudd is that he's one of the few politicians that I got to know first having an almighty fight with him.

Nick Franklin: What about?

Frank Brennan: Well it was about land rights in Queensland. He was heading Wayne Goss' Cabinet office, in fact in terms of the context of this, it's interesting to this interview, because we had a major discussion with Archbishop Rush, who was the Catholic Archbishop of Queensland, who was a very wily old character in Queensland he was one of my real mentors in all of this business. And Kevin Rudd came to meet with us to talk about what was being proposed with land rights, not just in terms of substance but also in terms of process. Now we said to him, that we thought that basically the government was getting it wrong. That caused considerable upset, and of course it wasn't helped later when Aborigines knocked down the gates of Parliament House and we said, 'Well, we told you so'. And so things were very tense between us for some time but after that, we got talking again, and so we went through something of a crucible of fire, and I got to admire him as someone who I think is a strong and principled politician, and I was privileged to get to know his family over time, and I like what I see.

Nick Franklin: Does that present you a problem though because you're friend, and now he is in the top - he's the man.

Frank Brennan: It hasn't yet created any problem for me, but I think he would know that I will be critical of his government, just as I would be critical of the Howard government or any other government on issues of principle, and there's no ad hominem hurt which is intended in any of that. I mean as he said in the speech launching my book, 'We have our allocated tasks to perform, and we've got to perform them with integrity, that hopefully by maintaining a relationship it may be
possible to effect greater change than if there is hostility.'

**Nick Franklin:** Father Frank Brennan, Professor of Law at Australia's Catholic University, who's about to move his office to Canberra in recognition of the importance of the relationship between faith and politics.

**Frank Brennan:** It's important in the sense of not bringing some big Catholic wheelbarrow of concerns, but rather saying that we live in a free, pluralistic, democratic society. Those of us who are Catholic for example, see that there is benefit in the Catholic tradition, and bringing something of that Catholic tradition to bear on the great public policy debates of the day, can only be of assistance, not just to us who are of that church community, but to the general society, particularly in getting the balance right.

**Nick Franklin:** As the Rudd government completes its first year in office, Father Brennan won't be the only one keeping an eye on its performance.

It's still relatively early days in the life of the government, but for Tim Volmer, the former union official, Labor still has a long way to go in replacing WorkChoices.

**Tim Volmer:** I don't think there's been enough progress, and certainly not quick enough. I was overwhelmed on election day and election night. I knew by lunch time that Rudd was going to be elected, I could just see in the booth I was on, there was a massive swing happening, and I think it was either 15% when the counting finally happened, but you could just tell as people were coming in, they were fed up with Howard, they were changing their votes and WorkChoices was the issue for them. And so that day was phenomenal for me, it was exciting. I thought 'This is it, we've got rid of these laws, we're going to be able to see a fairer system and actually maybe even a real debate about improving it beyond what we had before WorkChoices.' The reality of nearly a year of Rudd's not being quite as exciting. He is an economic conservative, he's very nervous about upsetting the business community and the rollback of WorkChoices is not as thorough or as complete as I would have liked to see.

**Nick Franklin:** Many of the old certainties about religion in politics have gone, including assumptions that Catholic voters are mostly Labor and Anglicans mostly Liberal.

Kevin Rudd has been on his own spiritual journey, switching from his childhood Catholicism to worshipping at an Anglican church.

Encounter invited Mr Rudd to be part of this program on several occasions. His office told us that unfortunately he was unavailable. And there's maybe another reason why he's now saying a lot less about his faith.

**Marion Maddox:** Well when I interviewed Rudd in 1999, I asked him, 'What do you think of people who bring their religious views into political discussion, or try to make political points on religious
grounds?' and he said, 'It makes me vomit, would you like me to be any more explicit?' So I think his personal inclination is actually not to be very upfront about his faith. I do think that the monthly articles and the Australian Christian lobby webcast, those things, were in a way a response to the moment.

**Nick Franklin:** In another interview for ABC Radio's Sunday Profile program, again recorded before Kevin Rudd became P.M., he spoke about the dangers of politicians getting too big for their boots.

**Kevin Rudd:** Whatever I am doing now may seem to be exceptionally important, but in the total scheme of things, may not be all that important at all. And it's important to simply bring you down to basics. Secondly, in politics, there's a great temptation a great opportunity, and the culture encourages this too, that causes you to think that you're more important than you are and I think a sober reading of the Gospels actually has the reverse principle confronting you every chapter. You know, 'The first shall be last, the last shall be first', people who sit at the front rather than the back of the synagogue. So I think for me it's pretty grounding. And also at a deeper sort of I suppose philosophical level, it's a deep personal wonderment of eternity, which everyone thinks about and not many people talk about.

**Nick Franklin:** Religion in politics goes back a long way in this country. So the last word in our program goes to Elsie Heiss whose tiny Catholic church in Sydney's La Perouse, stands close to the beach where one of the first white men set foot in Australia.

**Elsie Heiss:** We're very lucky to be here, where it probably all began over 200 years ago when the Frenchman arrived here. A Frenchman's landed here, Captain Cook didn't land here.

**Nick Franklin:** That gets forgotten, doesn't it?

**Elsie Heiss:** Captain Cook landed across the bay at Kurnell, but the Frenchman landed here and he's buried out here, and the first priest that said mass out here at La Perouse is buried also near the French museum.

**Nick Franklin:** What about the first politician?

Elsie Heiss: The first politician, goodness knows. He probably was on that boat, he was probably French or he was over there with Cook. So I mean they would have been politicians, it was political from the start, as we know from the time they landed and said this was No Man's Land, no-one lived here, Terra Nullius.

**Nick Franklin:** It was political from the start.

**Elsie Heiss:** It was political from the start.

**Nick Franklin:** Because words were being used, the politicians always use words.
Elsie Heiss: From the moment they hit this soil, those words came out.

Nick Franklin: On ABC Radio National, this has been Encounter.

Thanks to Dr John Moses, whose book, *The Reluctant Revolutionary* is with publishers in New York;

Marion Maddox, who wrote *God Under Howard*;

Frank Brennan, Tom Frame, Elsie Heiss, Tim Volmer and Jim Middleton.

Archives research by Sabrina Lipovic;

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The program was produced and narrated by me, Nick Franklin.

MUSIC

**Guests**

**Father Frank Brennan SJ**
is Professor of Law, Australian Catholic University

**Professor Tom Frame**
is Director, St. Mark's National Theological Centre

**Elsie Heiss**
is Chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council of Australia and co-coordinator of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Sydney

**Dr Marion Maddox**
is Director, Centre for Research on Social Inclusion, Macquarie University

**Tim Volmer**
is a journalist & former official of the CFMEU

**Dr. John Moses**
is Professorial Associate at St. Mark's National Theological Centre

**Further Information**

**A Cautious Embrace - A Christian-Jewish conference**
'A Cautious Embrace' - A Christian-Jewish conference reflecting on the discipleship and legacy of
Dietrich Bonhoeffer to be held at St Joseph's Spirituality & Education Centre, Kincumber, NSW 28-29 November 2008 - for further info email gresfordparish@bigpond.com

**Publications**

Title: *Letters and Papers from Prison*
Author: Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Title: *Acting on Conscience*
Author: Fr Frank Brennan

Title: *God Under Howard*
Author: Marion Maddox

Title: *For God and Country - Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics*
Author: Marion Maddox

Title: *The Reluctant Revolutionary - Dietrich Bonhoeffer - His Collision with Prusso-German History*
Author: John Moses
Publisher: Berghahn Books, New York
Due to be published by Berghahn Books, New York early 2009

Title: *Faith in Politics*
Author: Kevin Rudd
Publisher: The Monthly Essays October 2006

**Music**

CD title: *Vivaldi Dixit Dominus*
Track title: Dixit
Composer: Vivaldi
CD details: Archiv Produktion
URL: [www.deutschegrammophon.com.vivaldi-dixitdominus](http://www.deutschegrammophon.com.vivaldi-dixitdominus)

**Producer**

Nick Franklin

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