

### **100 year ago the Bathurst branch of the Australasian Federation League held a People's Convention.**

Amongst the League's Vice Presidents were the Anglican and Catholic Bishops of Bathurst. The local Wesleyan minister was the Convention's Secretary. The Convention was preceded on the 15th of November by the observation of Federation Sunday, with special church services conducted. At the Congregational Church Rev Professor Gosman declared, "in the civil realm only a Federation based on principles of righteousness would prosper and that civil government should not be manipulated by those who were without faith in God".

At St Stanislaus College Church leaders met and agreed to commence a campaign to have Christian recognition in the proposed Federal Constitution. On the closing day of the convention, the day following, Cardinal Moran's plea for Catholic people to "Go hand in hand with their Protestant fellow citizens.", the Convention resolved "acknowledging the Government of the World by Divine Providence commends the cause of Federation to all who desire, not only the material but also the moral and social advancement of the people of Australia. " Within months the "recognition of God campaign" had gained momentum.

The New South Wales Council of Churches embarked upon a campaign to obtain signatures for the following petition at the next Federal Convention.

1. "That in the preamble of the Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth it be recognised that God is the Supreme Ruler of the world and the ultimate source of all law and authority in nations".

2. " That there also be embodied in the said Constitution, or in the standing orders of the Federal Parliament, a provision that each daily session of the Upper and Lower Houses of the Federal Parliament be opened with a prayer by the President and Speaker or by a chaplain." These were successful. However, the desire for a third fulfilment was not successful; "That the" Governor-General be empowered to appoint days of national thanksgiving and repentance."

Letters were sent out by the heads of various denominations and in the other colonies similar campaigns began. N.S.W. and S.A. petitioners desired that the Federal Constitution have the words inserted "acknowledging Almighty God as the Supreme, ruler of the universe." The Victorian petitioners wanted, "in reliance on the blessing of Almighty God". And the Tasmanian petitioners requested, "duly acknowledging Almighty God as the Supreme Ruler of the universe and the source of all true Government."

Sir Henry Parkes, "Father of Federation", whose well known call for Australians to be one people, one destiny, stated, "as we are British people ... are pre-eminently a Christian People as our laws, our whole system of jurisprudence, our Constitution... are based upon and interwoven with our Christian belief...". Alfred Deakin, the Seconder of Sir Henry Parkes' motion for the Federation of the Australian States, was the person mainly responsible for its passage through the English Parliament. He believed that Federation, "may be the means of creating and fostering throughout all Australia a Christlike citizenship."

Sir John Downer, at the third Australasian Constitution Convention in Melbourne during 1898, in summing up the debate on the recognition of God in the Constitution stated "that the Christian religion is a portion of the English Constitution... is part of the law of England... that the Commonwealth will be from its first stage a Christian Commonwealth: Thus, the preamble to the constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act states: "whereas the people of N.S.W., Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Tasmania humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God have agreed to unite in one indissoluble Federal Commonwealth under the Crown".

And may we well ask? What will the Church be saying as we move towards the year 2000 as the Federal Constitution approaches its Centenary? Will the Church continue to support a Christian Constitutional Monarchy where Christ's sovereignty and the Bible as the rule of law is declared in the Coronation Service?

["Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the Law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book (the Bible), the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God, Receive this Orb set under the Cross, and remember that the whole world is subject to the Power and Empire of Christ our Redeemer."]

The events in our lives are often peripheral to the big issues that will affect generations to come. We need to be challenged NOW by these important issues. One of the ways Christians can influence Australia's direction as a nation over the next decade would be through the establishment of a public policy "ministry", "embassy" or centre based in Canberra to act as a Christian shadow government on policies coming out of both our Federal and State governments, even local Government for that matter.

Already the S.A. Festival of Light provides excellent resource papers on issues affecting Christians. So too, does the Western Australian "Life Ministries". In Victoria Bill Muehlenberg is active as the public policy co-ordinator for Australia's "Focus on the Family", along with Endeavour Forum, the Australian Family Association and the Salt Shakers. In New South Wales we have the Call to Australia Party and Foundation Genesis. And now Queensland has given birth to the Australian Christian Coalition. There is little doubt that whenever Christians network together we can greatly impact our nation. It is essential that we all unite and work together to ensure that Almighty God remains the foundation stone of our Federation and Australian Constitution for 2000AD, and beyond.