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Liberal 'Broad Church' Is Now An Inter-faith Dialogue

**Publish Date:**

May 2022

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**Robert Menzies didn't start the Liberal Party to fight for the forgotten people living in harbour mansions.**

In a speech he made when he was prime minister, John Howard famously described the Liberal Party as a "broad church", accommodating the political traditions of both classical liberalism and conservatism.

Subject to some minor qualifications Howard's analysis was accurate. But that was a description of the Liberals as they were nearly 20 years ago.

A church, regardless of whether it is broad or narrow, can only exist if the congregation all believe in approximately the same God. A Christian, Jew and Muslim in a room together is not a church, it's an inter-faith dialogue. Which is what the Liberal Party resembles these days.

Other than a liking for being in government and a dislike of "the unions", it's not obvious what a "moderate" Liberal, a "conservative" Liberal and run-of-the-mill "Liberal" Liberal now have in common. They all call themselves "Liberals" but that's about it.

What the Liberals are in 2022 under Scott Morrison is difficult to know. Whatever might be classically liberal about them is well hidden and there's not a lot that is conservative about the party anymore.

The modern-day Liberals' fondness for legislation and government spending to fix the problems of the world is neither liberal nor conservative. Morrison likes to label his government as merely "pragmatic".

Leaving aside the nature of the Liberals' political philosophy, or indeed if they still have one, is the issue of the party as a "broad church", which is an existential question going beyond whatever happen to be the inclinations of the party's leader.

**Views of the community**





Certainly, ultimately political parties must represent in some way the views of the community. But that doesn't automatically translate into the entire philosophical centre-of-gravity of a party gyrating one way or the other to accommodate the changing policy preferences of a handful of voters in a handful of seats the party happens to hold.

Which is what is happening to the Liberals. Somewhere along the line principles matter. Very few Liberal MPs (and even fewer Liberal branch members) believe "net zero" is good policy. The Liberals' commitment to it is political, not principled – and Liberal MPs know it and voters know it.

While moderate Liberals crow about their policy victories and plead with voters to keep the moderates in their seats and so stop "the [lurch to the right](#)" of the Liberal Party, conservative Liberals ask themselves what they get out of the relationship. They certainly haven't got lower taxes or smaller government.

If any conservative Liberal MP in the midst of their busy campaign schedule took 10 minutes to read the most recent draft of the new National Curriculum endorsed by the Morrison government and released this week, which requires Australian school students to be taught to develop their "eco-identity", they'll feel entitled to ask themselves what's been the point of the past nine years of a federal Coalition government.

Too many Liberals believe that once an electorate is held by a Liberal MP it must be held by Liberals in perpetuity and losing it represents some kind of moral failure.

The truth is, though, that Wentworth or Kooyong are no more special than any of the other 149 seats in the House of Representatives. Robert Menzies didn't start the Liberal Party to fight for the forgotten people in harbour mansions.

Electorates such as Wentworth and [Kooyong](#) are Liberal because the privileged rich once voted Liberal. Now they vote Labor or Green or teal. Of the four Victorian state seats in Kooyong, three are already held by the ALP.

Regardless of how the so-called teal independents perform, the 2022 federal election has highlighted a trend that is not going to be reversed.

Inevitably Australia will end up like the United States where the 10 wealthiest congressional districts are represented by Democrats.

New York's 12th congressional district covering the east of Manhattan has one of the highest per capita incomes of any district in the US. In the 1950s, it was represented by a Republican. But the district has changed. At the 2020 election it voted 82 per cent Democrat and 16 per cent Republican.

Eventually, Wentworth and Kooyong won't even be marginal. Eventually, Liberal attempts to woo the voters of Vaucluse and Hawthorn could be as futile as the Republicans trying to win back Manhattan.

**Original Link:**



<https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/liberal-broad-church-is-now-an-inter-faith-dialogue-20220511-p5ak9r>

**Originally published in:**  
The Australian Financial Review