

## CHAPTER 15 Retrospect

From about the mid-nineties it became clear to many churchmen, who often were quite as sensitive as journalists and politicians to currents of feeling in the community, that federation was becoming a genuinely popular cause. The coming Commonwealth would be more than a political and economic fact; increasingly it would tend to become a *social* entity – an organic community. Responding to that perception, many church leaders hoped to become, and be recognised as, the moral and spiritual conscience of the New Commonwealth.

A central aim of the churches' campaign was the achievement of public status – in the sense of public recognition of a distinctive role and rank – within the emerging Commonwealth. At the People's Convention Gosman and Moran clearly regarded themselves, and hoped others would see them, as trustworthy guides to the moral and spiritual side of federation. Moran's Convention candidature was partly, and perhaps largely, motivated by the hope that, once elected, he could lay claim to the status of Christian spokesman in the Convention and the federation movement. When, during the 'recognition' campaign, Protestant clerics forcefully dilated on the perils of federating 'without God', they both assumed and invited public acceptance of the validity of their prophetic role. When Protestant leaders, and later Moran, campaigned for electoral acceptance of the Federation Bill, they tended to assume, and to wish the electorate to accept, that they were specially expert interpreters of God's will for the outcome with each other over who should offer the first prayer at the Commonwealth Inauguration ceremony, their conflict (possibly worldly vanities aside) essentially was over which would be, and publicly would be recognised as, the infant Commonwealth's principal interceder before the Throne of Grace. However the most compelling, if also the least dignified, demonstration of the strength of clerical status-ambition was the prolonged quarrel over ecclesiastical precedence at official Commonwealth ceremonies.

The churches achieved success in some small matters, but not in larger ones. Although the sovereignty of God finally was 'recognised' in the preamble to the Constitution, the federal parliament was totally prohibited by Section 116 from passing laws to help or hinder religion. Although in June 1901 the upper and lower houses of federal parliament agreed to open their daily sessions with prayer, that prayer was theistic merely, and not distinctively Christian. Moreover it was in each case to be read by a layman. Finally, under the Commonwealth, no clerical leader enjoyed, by right, any kind of official entitlement to place or precedence.

Resistance to the churches' hopes was not prompted by irreligion. The Adventist *church* had been the organisational pivot of the anti-'recognition' campaign. Of the seventeen Convention delegates who voted against Glynn's 'recognition' proposal, nine were religiously fairly serious, five were unclear, and only three (Barton, Wise and Kingston) could be called religiously indifferent.<sup>1</sup>

Nor irreligion but fear was the key to separationist resistance. The Adventists, resolutely committed to working on Sundays, feared Protestant legal persecution. Federation supporters of secular outlook feared the destructive potential, in the federal domain, of sectarian conflict.

So ironically, or perhaps typically, out of fear came light.