

CHAPTER 2 The Cardinal Steps Out

The election of delegates to the Federal Convention, in the colonies in which delegates were to be popularly elected, was to be held on 5 March 1897. Each colony was to send ten delegates. In New South Wales, one of the candidates was 'Moran, Patrick Francis; of Manly; occupation: Cardinal Archbishop of Sydney'. Naturally there was a religious side to his platform: 'I would wish to see inserted in the preamble to the Constitution', he said in his 'Address to Electors', 'some such clause' as the following:

Religion is the basis of our Australian Commonwealth and of its laws; and in accordance with the spirit of religion, genuine liberty of conscience is the birthright of every Australian citizen, and full and free exercise of religious worship, so far as may be consistent with public order and public morality, shall be accorded to all.¹

This proposal, whose meaning and scope was not completely clear, apparently involved extending Inglis Clark's 'free exercise' provision to the Commonwealth legislature, widening it to include some sort of guarantee of 'genuine liberty of conscience', but subordinating this guarantee to a 'consistency with public order and public morality' requirement. Perhaps, in adding this rider, and also in requiring that 'liberty of conscience' be 'genuine', Moran was seeking to square his proposal with Leo XIII's 1888 directive that

It is quite unlawful to demand, to defend, or to grant unconditional freedom of thought, of speech, of writing, or of worship, as if they were so many rights given by nature to man.²

However the intention of his proposal, taken as a whole, clearly was to secure for religion, and perhaps also for its spokesmen, some sort of fundamental status in the Commonwealth.

Moran's proposal accorded closely with the standpoint taken by the ecclesiastical united front at Bathurst. Probably he was hoping that the elevated ecumenical experience at Bathurst, and the general Protestant and Anglican approval of the patriotic and ecumenical tenor of his address, would induce the leaders of the non-Catholic churches to accept him as a *Christian*, rather than simply Catholic, spokesman at the coming Federal Convention. The composition of the delegation to Moran which requested him to stand, containing as it did a sprinkling of prominent lay Protestants, and bearing a warm message from a local rabbi, A. B. Davis,³ conveyed to the public – as one can expect it was meant to – the impression that Moran represented the broadly theistic, rather than the specifically Catholic viewpoint. 'It is time', said the *Catholic Press* on 13 February,

that a Christian community should rise and assert its principles and cast [confusion] and despair among the handful of arrogant atheists who sneer at what nine tenths of the populace hold most sacred... His Eminence will be a representative not only of the Catholic Church, but of Christianity; and every man who detests infidelity and wishes to see the Constitution of the Commonwealth founded on religion and liberty will not fail to... cast a vote for Cardinal Moran.

With hindsight, one can suggest that over and above its implications for Catholic-Protestant relations, and for the place of religion in the coming Commonwealth, Moran's candidature was one of the most ambitious political initiatives taken by a Catholic prelate in Australia during the nineteenth or indeed this present century. P.J. O'Farrell, in a thoughtful study of Moran's candidature, has suggested that Moran was hoping that the 'Australian electors would demonstrate their acceptance of him as a symbol of their willingness to banish the past and welcome Catholics into the central area of national endeavour.'⁴ One might go a little further and propose that Moran was seeking nothing less than to gain a central and reputable place in Australian political life.⁵ So far, the participation of Catholic prelates in Australian politics had never been *both* central and respectable. But Moran now wanted both.

Behind Moran, deriving mainly from his church's organizational and ideological center in Rome, lay distrust of many features of liberal and democratic institutions, and an imperative

command to convert these institutions from within to conformity to Catholic social and political principles. In 1885, Leo XIII had directed that

it is the duty of all Catholics... to make use of popular institutions, so far as can honestly done, for the advancement of truth and righteousness; to strive that liberty of action shall not transgress the bounds marked out by nature and the law of God; to endeavour to bring back all civil society to the pattern and form of [Catholic] Christianity.⁶

The trenchancy of this command should not be misunderstood. Its implications for political action were less drastic than might at first appear. One can also accept, as not inconsistent with Pope Leo's directive and as offered in good faith, the declaration of Monsignor D. O'Haran, Moran's spokesman, that 'We give allegiance to the powers that be for conscience sake...'⁷ Convention civic loyalty was not inconsistent with or a repudiation of an ultimately subversive or revolutionary intention. For the 'Leo XIII' Catholic, there simply were self-imposed ethical limitations ('so far as can honestly be done') as to the means that legitimately could be employed to advance 'the pattern and form' of Catholic Christianity.

Moran was, from the viewpoint of his masters in Rome, seeking the active assistance of heretics, in order to strengthen the Catholic social position and Catholic political standing in a liberal, democratic and largely non-Catholic country. The surprising thing is that in the circumstances he thought he had any chance of success, even taking into account his personal triumph at Bathurst. He failed to realize that one swallow does not make a summer. Possibly his judgement was adversely affected by the heady prospect of personally, and as a Catholic leader, achieving honour and fame as one of the founding fathers of a new nation. O'Farrell's study has made it clear that there is no reason to doubt either the strength of Moran's vanity, or the sincerity of his patriotic and pious commitment to federation.⁸ It is likely that he was impelled to disaster by powerful although mixed motives.

Although Moran, who attended the People's Convention only for a short time, may not himself have realized it, there were rifts even in the ecumenical lute at Bathurst. Webb's attendance at the *conversazione* at St Stanislaus's College, in order to greet Moran, had caused grave concern to some of his Methodist brethren: 'The Romish Delilah in Bathurst', warned on, 'is plainly trying her fascinations on the Protestant Samson.'⁹ A number of the non-Catholic churchmen who were associated with the Convention, noting the great prominence accorded to Moran's visit, came to suspect that at least some of the Roman Catholics among the organizers deliberately had been using the Convention to achieve precisely that result. Whether or not these suspicions were justified is not, here, the central point, although it may be noted that one of the vice-presidents of the Convention, Camidge, gave them some credence.¹⁰ The crucial point is the fact that such suspicions existed at all. If Moran's motives even at Bathurst were a little suspect, what chance was there that his credibility as a Christian rather than Catholic spokesman at the coming Federal Convention would pass muster?

And what a storm there was! Protestant reaction was prompt and determined. By mid-February a large number of clerics had come together under the aegis of the United Protestant Meeting, an ad hoc organization formed for the specific purpose of defeating Moran. The core of its strategy was to canvass vigorously for the election of ten strong candidates *other* than Moran, and to stimulate in the community the latent fear of Romish aggression. In an attempt to ward off the allegation that they were moved by a 'sectarian' spirit, they included one Roman Catholic, R. E. O'Connor, in their 'bunch'.¹¹ They extensively circularized electors, organized protest meetings and called for special prayers in the churches.¹² Letters of protest were written to whatever sections of the press would accept them. Both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, while not supporting the Protestants as such, were sufficiently opposed to Moran to give extensive coverage to material emanating from the UPM.

Moran's counter-strategy was dictated by the nature of one of his main objectives in standing. Because his hope was to attend the Federal Convention as an informally acknowledged representative of all the churches, he had to accept two consequences.

First, he could not afford to conduct an energetic *personal* campaign. Not only would this be a possibly damaging admission that he might *not* be elected; but it could readily produce situations in which his dignity would be jeopardized, and he would be hard put to convince the electorate that he represented more than simply the Roman Catholic church. Even a suggestion from some of Moran's campaign organizers that a public meeting be held at this time in connection with his coming episcopal silver jubilee was ruled out as 'sure to be misrepresented'.¹³ Second, he *did* need to convince the electors that the UPM was an 'extremist' or 'fringe' organization, that it did not represent 'true' Protestant thought at all.

In his development of this latter strategy Moran was unsuccessful. He, or rather his supporters, employed two methods. One was a version of the unity ticket. The Anglican primate, William Saumarez Smith, was approached to stand for election. The Presbyterian moderator, and a number of other church leaders were also invited to stand. Naturally Smith, who by policy and disposition was friendly the Protestants, declined. So did the moderator and the others.¹⁴ The whole proposal was then quickly dropped. It was quite unrealistic. As a correspondent to the *Worker* pointed out, the implication was that these clerical leaders should be candidates because of their position as ecclesiastics rather than their qualification as citizens.¹⁵ In the circumstances, that was political dynamite. Furthermore, in the unlikely event of any other clerical candidates being elected, this clearly would only have been by favour of the (to them) distasteful electoral patronage of Moran.

Even some of Moran's supporters saw the idea as ludicrous. The *Australian Star*, a Sydney daily with Catholic leanings, initially supported the clerical ticket proposal. Its argument was that, while churchmen should not descend to the arena of 'common politics', the making of United Australia was not politics in the ordinary sense. However, by 16 February the editor, who revealed *inter alia* that he had some separationist sympathies, could not constrain himself from observing that if the primate, or the moderator, or the president of the Wesleyan Conference, or even the grand master of the Loyal Orange lodge, had offered himself for election, 'there would have been no protest or objection', but a 'ripple of amusement might have been universal'.

The other method might perhaps be called the 'divide-and-neutralize strategem'. In an interview with a *Daily Telegraph* reporter, Moran, commenting on a press report of a recent meeting of the UPM, remarked disparagingly that 'In the long list of gentlemen present at the meeting I see very few respectable names...'¹⁶ The point presumably, as with most denials of 'respectability', was to draw an unstated but understood distinction between the acceptable and the unacceptable on a certain criterion, without actually saying what that criterion was. In this case, Moran clearly was indicating, without spelling out what he himself thought 'true' Protestantism was, that from the Protestant viewpoint there was something defective and undesirable about the Protestantism of the UPM.

That certainly was how E. T. Dunstan, the fiery Welsh chairman of the Congregational Union and a prominent member of the UPM, interpreted Moran's aspersive comment. In a near riposte, he represented Moran as meddling in Protestant affairs:

The cardinal would scarcely be recognised by Protestants generally as a judge of respectability of those who took part in the meeting... Certainly, for my own part, I have no wish to seek a testimonial from his Eminence as to my own respectability.¹⁷

Moran gave the UPM another useful stick to stir up latent anti-Catholic feeling when he expressed the hope that his candidature would 'crush... anti-Catholic bigotry'.¹⁸ Probably all he meant was that he hoped a sufficiently large number of non-Catholics would support him to discourage those Protestants who might wish to criticize him simply because he was Catholic. Yet his words lent themselves easily to a more sinister interpretation.

In fact the non-Catholic churches were divided in their response to Moran's candidature, although Moran received little benefit from this. The non-Anglican Protestant churches (Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, Salvationist, etc.) – perhaps Moran's most vital target – were with few exceptions solidly opposed to him. Indeed, so overwhelming was their solidarity, that when a Presbyterian minister, George Hay, called for

a combined Protestant-Catholic campaign to ensure that the federal Constitution be based on religion, he suddenly became a hero to the *Catholic Press* and the *Freeman's Journal*.¹⁹ The Church of England, under Bishop Smith's lead, did indeed refuse to join the UPM's 'Stop Moran' campaign,²⁰ but their neutrality cut both ways: it did not mean simply refusal to oppose Moran, but also refusal to support him. So there was small comfort for Moran here. The fact that among Protestants and Anglicans the main polarization lay between the opponents of Moran and the neutralists, rather than between his opponents and supporters, conclusively makes the point that Moran had failed to persuade the non-Catholic churches to accept him as a spokesman for the 'Christian' view of federation.

Yet while Moran badly mishandled the strategy which, in the circumstances, his aim of election as a 'Christian' spokesman virtually forced upon him, there was more to Moran's defeat than simply bad tactics. The situation was loaded against him from the start.

In the first place, in recent years the non-conformist churches had come to act and to see themselves as a 'moral' power bloc in the colony's politics.²¹ Their solidarity and political sophistication were proof against the blandishments of any cardinal. Furthermore, they had a strong and fundamental feeling that Australia was essentially, and should remain, British and Protestant. Given the strong anti-Catholicism that lay not far beneath the surface of much colonial Protestantism, Moran's candidature was bound to attract vigorous and fairly unified Protestant opposition; and that in turn would certainly stir anti-Protestant feeling among Catholics. In a short while, correctly prophesied a writer in the militantly secular *Bulletin*, the 'yellow pup of sectarianism may be expected to howl... and the Holy Roman and the vicious Orangemen to reach for each other's hair in the sacred cause of unity.'²² It was unrealistic for Moran to expect otherwise.

Secondly, the secularist conception that it was mutually beneficial for Church and State to operate in separate spheres was widely diffused through the community. The antipathy of this section of the community to Moran's candidature, if that candidature was considered in itself and not in terms of the sectarian conflict it would generate, would mostly express itself in little more than firmly declining to vote for Moran, and hoping that he would fail to be elected. Often this sort of secularism consisted more of an unreflective aversion to mixing religious and secular affairs than a positive determination immediately to stop such mixing when it occurred. In some circumstances, then, this secularist group was a negligible political force. However in one type of situation secularist aversion quickly would become outright hostility; namely when Protestants and Catholics introduced their quarrels into the political domain. A cardinal at the Convention, provided there was no Protestant back-lash, could easily enough be ridiculed, ignored and generally contained. He would in the secularist viewpoint be out of his 'proper place', but no great threat to anybody or anything. But the introduction of sectarian conflicts in the political arena was regarded not simply as 'out of place', but as positively dangerous. Religious conflict, it was widely felt, generated passions and a loss of perspective fully capable of destroying those networks of social and religious tolerance on which economic prosperity and the security of life and property ultimately depended. 'The giant of religious sectarianism has awoken from his slumber', warned the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

[His exclusion, hitherto,] has been secured rather by the strong distaste of the secular world for religious controversies and animosities, than by self restraint or the conversion to milder ways of feeling of the sectarian spirit itself. It was held in check by being shut out of the arena of public life... [The only way of preventing sectarianism] from imparting to our public life its own rancour and disunion is by forbidding its intrusion into the field upon any pretext whatsoever.

The *Daily Telegraph* expressed a similar view:

The place for Cardinal Moran and every other ecclesiastic to use his influence for making religion the basis of our Commonwealth is in the Church... There can be no guarantee of liberty of conscience so effectual as that of the state keeping aloof from the religious question altogether...²³

It was remarkable that Moran did not foresee that, in the circumstances, his candidature would arouse strong secularist antagonism, precisely because it was bound to trigger off that Protestant-Catholic public wrangling that so alarmed many secularists.

So in sum, it was not simply Moran's tactics or timing that were at fault. The time itself was wrong. The predictable opposition of the Protestants to Moran meant that if he were elected, it would simply be as a Catholic rather than a Christian spokesman, while the predictable strengthening of secularist antagonism to Moran, once Protestants and Catholics began to lay into one another, meant that he was unlikely even to be elected.

In the poll on 5 March, Moran finished only fourteenth. Since it can safely be assumed that not many Protestants voted for him, the conclusion must be that quite a few of his own people – tinged by secularism perhaps or frightened of the consequences of sectarian conflict – failed to support him. The *Australian Star* on 6 March suggested that the general feeling of Catholics was that it was 'a wrong step for His Eminence to take'.²⁴

Moran failed to understand, or perhaps in a surge of patriotic or pious ambition simply forget, that in the Australian colonies in his day a Catholic prelate had to choose between a modest portion of secular power and a modest portion of secular standing. A Protestant correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, writing on the eve of the election and making reference to Moran's predecessor but one, Archbishop Polding, pointed the moral. Polding, he said, had been a 'gentleman'.

[He] recognised the privilege of freedom [and] though never afraid to champion his church, so did it as not to offend others. Pity 'tis, that the unwritten law which these men made... was not observed at the present time. It would have preserved us from the sectarian fight forced upon us by the Cardinal.²⁵

Moran, after the rebuff he had received, retired from the 'recognition' campaign. If the issue was to be carried forward, it would be by hands other than his own.