

Meet The First Pentecostal Prime Minister

When Scott Morrison became prime minister last week, Australians got a man who speaks openly about his Spirit-filled faith.

Morrison is a regular attender at Horizon Church, one of the largest Pentecostal churches in the country.

“We believe that as we allow the Holy Spirit to reveal His purposes and to presence Himself among His church, people’s lives will be transformed. Our leadership is Spirit-led and our activities and programs are Spirit-directed,” according to the church’s website.

That Morrison is Pentecostal has caught the attention of several mainstream outlets, even in the United States.

“I think that people of faith around the nation are very much filled with hope that someone of Christian faith and principle is holding such a role in public life,” Kristy Mills, the executive pastor, tells the *New York Times*. “I think there is a great hope that decision making will be influenced by godly principles.”

Each outlet is quick to point out that Horizon members speak in tongues and experience divine healings.

But some Australians are skeptical about how the new PM’s faith will affect his politics.

“If I were Morrison, I’d be careful about appearing too religious and pushing it too much,” says Geoffrey Robinson, a senior lecturer in social sciences at Deakin University. “Those ‘heart on the sleeve’ declarations of religious faith make some people a bit uncomfortable. There’s something of a

suspicion about religion in politics. Seeming overtly religious can be a problem.”

Major biblical issues have already made waves in the country, as Australians voted to legalize same-sex marriage late last year.

According to the *Times*, Morrison abstained from the vote.

Morrison says his “personal faith in Jesus Christ is not a political agenda ... for me, faith is personal, but the implications are social.”

Statements like these help Australian Christians breathe a sigh of relief.

“He doesn’t think he’s the biggest and most powerful person,” Martyn Iles, managing director of the Australian Christian Lobby, says. “He knows he’s under God.”

In 2017, Morrison vowed he would no longer “put up with” religious discrimination against Christians.

“And I’m just gonna call that out,” Morrison says. “With what I’ve seen happen in the last year, I’ve just taken the decision more recently, I’m just not going to put up with that anymore. I don’t think my colleagues are either.

“Where I think people are being offensive to religion in this country—whichever religion that might be, but particularly the one I and many other Christians subscribe to—well, we will just call it out and we will demand the same respect that people should provide to all religions,” Morrison says.

Morrison shared part of his faith journey in 2008 in a speech to Parliament:

I turn now to the most significant influences on my life—my family and my faith. Family is the stuff of life and there is nothing more precious. I thank my family members here in the

gallery today for their support. It is my hope that all Australians could have the same caring and supportive environment that was provided to me by my parents, John and Marion Morrison, and my late grandparents, Mardie and Sandy Smith and Douglas and Noel Morrison, whom I honor in this place today. My parents laid the foundation for my life. Together with my brother, Alan, they demonstrated through their actions their Christian faith and the value they placed on public and community service. In our family, it has never been what you accumulate that matters but what you contribute. I thank them for their sacrifice, love and, above all, their example. To my wife, Jenny, on Valentine's Day: Words are not enough. She has loved and supported me in all things and made countless sacrifices, consistent with her generous, selfless and caring nature. However, above all, I thank her for her determination to never give up hope for us to have a child. After 14 years of bitter disappointments, God remembered her faithfulness and blessed us with our miracle child, Abbey Rose, on the seventh of the seventh of the seventh, to whom I dedicate this speech today in the hope of an even better future for her and her generation.

Growing up in a Christian home, I made a commitment to my faith at an early age and have been greatly assisted by the pastoral work of many dedicated church leaders, in particular the Reverend Ray Green and pastors Brian Houston and Leigh Coleman. My personal faith in Jesus Christ is not a political agenda. As Lincoln said, our task is not to claim whether God is on our side but to pray earnestly that we are on His. For me, faith is personal, but the implications are social—as personal and social responsibility are at the heart of the Christian message. In recent times, it has become fashionable to negatively stereotype those who profess their Christian faith in public life as “extreme” and to suggest that such faith has no place in the political debate of this country. This presents a significant challenge for those of us, like my colleague, who seek to follow the example of William

Wilberforce or Desmond Tutu, to name just two. These leaders stood for the immutable truths and principles of the Christian faith. They transformed their nations and, indeed, the world in the process. More importantly, by following the convictions of their faith, they established and reinforced the principles of our liberal democracy upon which our own nation is built.

Australia is not a secular country—it is a free country. This is a nation where you have the freedom to follow any belief system you choose. Secularism is just one. It has no greater claim than any other on our society. As U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman said, the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, not from religion. I believe the same is true in this country.

So what values do I derive from my faith? My answer comes from Jeremiah 9:24: “I am the Lord who exercises loving-kindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things, declares the Lord.”

From my faith I derive the values of lovingkindness, justice and righteousness, to act with compassion and kindness, acknowledging our common humanity and to consider the welfare of others; to fight for a fair go for everyone to fulfil their human potential and to remove whatever unjust obstacles stand in their way, including diminishing their personal responsibility for their own well-being; and to do what is right, to respect the rule of law, the sanctity of human life and the moral integrity of marriage and the family. We must recognize an unchanging and absolute standard of what is good and what is evil. Desmond Tutu put it this way: “We expect Christians ... to be those who stand up for the truth, to stand up for justice, to stand on the side of the poor and the hungry, the homeless and the naked, and when that happens, then Christians will be trustworthy believable witnesses.”

These are my principles. My vision for Australia is for a

nation that is strong, prosperous and generous: strong in our values and our freedoms, strong in our family and community life, strong in our sense of nationhood and in the institutions that protect and preserve our democracy; prosperous in our enterprise and the careful stewardship of our opportunities, our natural environment and our resources; and, above all, generous in spirit, to share our good fortune with others, both at home and overseas, out of compassion and a desire for justice.