

Tribute to Kim E. Beazley AO

given by James Coulter at the State Funeral in Perth, 20 October 2007

I first met Kim in 1946 just after I had returned from the war. We were young, but the post war world seemed a serious place. In the wake of the war we talked about the need for a power that could not only change human nature but also national policies.

We met later in Europe in 1953. Kim had been sent by the Australian parliament to the Coronation and then had come on to participate in the world conference for Moral Re-Armament taking place in Caux, Switzerland. I met him off the train and we immediately got into a disagreement. I was insistent on carrying his bag and he seemed to be determinedly egalitarian. No one was going to carry his bag.

Later that night, over coffee, Kim got into a spirited debate with two of his fellow delegates as to whether God could guide you. Kim agreed he probably could. When it was suggested it might be a good idea to write down any thoughts God might give, Kim demurred on the grounds that he had such a good memory he did not need to. But then graciously conceded he would try the experiment. The next morning Kim said he had been given the clear thought that he should make a policy of restoration to the Aboriginal people a central point of his public life.

In fact this 'experiment' of a time of quiet prayer and listening became the early morning practice of both Kim and Betty from then on.

A turning point in Kim's life was to see at Caux how Robert Schuman on the French side and Chancellor Adenaur on the German side came together to move ahead of public opinion in their courageous efforts to heal the wounds left by centuries of war. Schuman commented that what they had found was 'not just another idea, but a philosophy of life applied in action.' It so impressed Kim that while he had planned to be at the conference for 10 days he actually stayed for seven weeks!

Kim of course was 32 years in parliament and 28 of those were in opposition. Many of the changes he effected were when he was in opposition because Kim's motives were trusted on both sides of the house. He and Sir Paul Hasluck worked together to help the 1967 referendum come about and when the Commonwealth Government for the first time set up a Department for Aboriginal Affairs, Prime Minister Harold Holt called Kim in to get his advice.

When he was up in Papua New Guinea as independence was approaching, the leaders of the Pangu Parti asked Kim if he would arrange for them to meet Australia's political leaders 'on a spiritual rather than a political basis'. Within weeks they were in Canberra with Kim arranging for them to have lunch with Prime Minister Harold Holt and to consult with Gough Whitlam. The luncheon with the Territories Minister 'Ceb' Barnes was cancelled because of some of the abrasive things the Pangu Parti men had said about him in the press. Kim rang 'Ceb' and said: 'I have said much worse things about you than they did and you would still have lunch with me!' 'Ceb' laughed, came to the lunch and established quite a fresh relationship with these men who formed the first Cabinet of an independent Papua New Guinea.

Kim was similar to Jimmy Carter and Al Gore in that much of his most effective work was done after he had left elected office. His outreach took him to the Indian sub-continent, South Africa and America. My wife and I accompanied Kim and Betty on a speaking tour to the USA that was to encompass 8 cities but was too big a success and spun out to 20 including Canada! When we came to cross back into the USA we realized that all our passports were in our luggage. The very large, very black US immigration officer said he would let us in if we could sing our National Anthem. Since we had all been at Perth Modern School, Kim led us in a spirited rendering of our school song: *Moderna Schola Te Amamus; O Sodales Concinamus* and we were waved across the border by the beaming officer!

In *Amazing Grace*, the film about William Wilberforce, it depicts his dilemma as to whether he should seek to deepen his spiritual life or to make an impact politically. John Newton the writer of the hymn *Amazing Grace* told him bluntly 'do both!' What a challenge! Yet that is exactly what Kim, with Betty at his side, did so effectively in a life of service spanning more than 60 years.