

From *No Long Down Under* by Mike Brown:

A politician learns to walk humbly

‘It’s alright to be arrogant as long as you’ve got something to be arrogant about,’ said the wife of one of Beazley’s colleagues in the Whitlam Labor government, defending her husband. Arrogance seems to be an occupational hazard of political life. The media, of course, treat it as the spice that saves political reporting from total boredom; and we the public, whatever our protestations, are entertained by the blood sport of our ‘pollies’ having a vicious swipe at each other.

Kim Edward Beazley, you might say, had ‘something’ to be arrogant about. At the end of his 32 years in Parliament, the Melbourne *Herald* wrote that he was ‘beyond any dispute one of the best Members of Parliament Australia has ever had’. *The Age* said he was ‘a brilliant debater’ and political columnist Peter Hastings of *The Australian* wrote: ‘He has always had intellectual force and clarity. He is undoubtedly Labor’s – and probably Parliament’s – greatest orator.’

Beazley’s upbringing provided what was needed for a classic Labor poverty-to-power political career. His childhood memories in the working class suburb of South Fremantle include images of yellow quarantine flags on houses hit by ‘Spanish flu’ or bubonic plague. Two of his eight brothers and sisters died at an early age. ‘Pigeon pie’ and rabbit were frequent diet.

Yet the fact they lived in poverty hardly impinged on the consciousness of young Beazley. He recalls being somewhat amazed when in 1927 his primary school teacher announced that the Duke and Duchess of York (not the one who marched up the hill) would be visiting the area, and all children *must* wear shoes so their Royal Highnesses might not be disquieted by any signs of poverty amongst their subjects. To young Kim, both notions were barely comprehensible: why should shoes impress Royalty? They had always gone to school bare-footed. And ‘poverty’ was just the way the Beazleys and their neighbours lived. Nevertheless, on the day Royalty came, all bare-footed schoolchildren were relegated to flag-waving from the back lines.

‘Our family was held together by my mother,’ recalls Kim. His father had switched from being secretary of the Church of Christ to secretary of the local race club, much to his mother’s alarm. ‘The Shamrock Hotel was his ruin,’ she complained. She battled for education (Kim remembers trips to the Fremantle Literary Institute at an early age). She was active in such areas of social reform as the Children’s Protection Society (child abuse was an issue then as now) and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Her steadfast attendance at the local Church of Christ meant that Kim, at the tender age of 12, came forward for baptism.

A few years later Kim Beazley got the break he needed – entrance to study at Perth Modern School. Much later, as Minister for Education, he had cause to remember that Perth Modern was the only non-fee-paying high school in the city during his childhood and that only seven per cent of his contemporaries across Australia finished high school. Beazley finished at Perth Modern – as did Prime Minister Bob Hawke, Governor-General Sir Paul Hasluck, political adviser H C ‘Nugget’ Coombs and singer Rolf Harris.

Beazley professes to not being consciously ambitious. ‘I never intended going into Parliament... It was an accident really.’ Trained as a teacher he pursued his love of history and became a tutor at the University of Western Australia and vice-president of the WA

teachers' union. His involvement in the Labor Party was natural, given all this background. When John Curtin, Australia's legendary Labor Prime Minister died unexpectedly, Beazley agreed half-willingly to seek party endorsement in the resulting by-election and was surprised when he won.

Without ever having met Curtin, Beazley took the great man's seat in Canberra as Member for Fremantle at the age of 28, the youngest Member in the House. Ambitious or not, he was neither passive nor very humble. Alan Reid, doyenne of Australia's political journalists, wrote that young Beazley had come 'riding out of the West... full of reforming zeal'; and that his 'lecturing Parliament in a hectoring, sneering tone .. earned him almost universal dislike'. He was soon known around the House derisively as 'the Student Prince'.

That was a very different Kim Beazley from the one who bowed out of Parliament three decades later, a man whose grace and principles won him such admiration. Before Beazley rose to make his last speech on the floor of the House of Representatives, Speaker Sir Billy Snedden, a member of the opposing party, paid tribute to him as 'a fine parliamentarian and a great Australian'.

In a crowd Kim, a tall figure, is easy to pick out. Betty, his wife, was an athlete, a national record-holder for the half-mile for ten years. She approaches people with natural grace and effervescent warmth. Kim's lumbering frame belies the agility of his powers of debate. A true intellectual athlete, he excels in many fields besides politics. History is a passion and the Beazley mind readily digs out some historical detail to reinforce the point he is making. Talk about cricket and he bowls up facts about past Test matches. In full flight he may quote whole sections of a play by George Bernard Shaw or poems from Wordsworth or Browning. As his three children grew, the Beazley family table became a forum for intellectual parrying – a training ground for Kim Beazley junior.

Yet there is nothing haughty about Kim's physical or mental bearing. He suffers fools if not gladly then at least graciously. In fact, a respect for another person's genuinely-held convictions is one of Kim's qualities.

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The fact is that early in Kim Beazley's political career something happened that humbled him as a politician. Beazley travelled to London as one of ten MPs selected to attend the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953.

Intrigued by the ideas of Moral Re-Armament, Beazley had decided to spend a week on his way home to Australia at an MRA international conference in Caux, Switzerland. Instead of a week he stayed for two, three... finally seven weeks. 'I had to admit that what I saw at Caux was far more significant for the peace and sanity of the world than anything being done at that time in Australian politics,' he says. Caux is a mountainside village, surrounded by stunning alpine scenery, high above Lake Geneva. Soon after the War a number of Swiss had pooled their life savings and purchased a large hotel there, and with volunteers from many nations had worked to restore the near-derelict buildings in the belief that Europe needed a neutral meeting place where former enemies could find reconciliation and strength for the task of reconstruction. In 1946 'Mountain House' in Caux had opened as a world conference centre for MRA.

Beazley's historian's interest was caught by the reconciliation shaping between arch enemies, France and Germany, still raw from the wounds of war. French resistance leaders and German Marxists were finding a common moral ground for reconstruction, which flowed on to those in the political arena. French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman was at Caux that same summer and Konrad Adenauer (before becoming German Chancellor) had been there earlier. Both men, through their shared beliefs, had come to trust one another and

were promoting the 'healing of nations', as Beazley put it.

Impressed as Beazley was, he soon discovered that the healing process involved personal changes in people's attitudes and relationships – his own included. As Beazley said: 'MRA is the ultimate in realism, for it suggests a simple experiment anybody can try – searching for God's leading, testing any thoughts that come against absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, and carrying into practice those thoughts which meet these standards.'

That was not just politician's rhetoric. A British Labor Party friend and a South African Rhodes Scholar sat Beazley down at Caux and suggested he should take time alone, to seek God's guidance, having 'nothing to prove, nothing to justify and nothing to gain for yourself'.

'What a shockingly subversive thing to say to someone in politics!' remembers Beazley with a chuckle. 'I had been proving just how right I was at every election; justifying everything we had ever done; and gaining political power for myself was the minimum I must do.'

But the young 'Student Prince' MP was challenged. He realised that what was involved was 'no cheap subscribing to principles but restitution which is costly to our pride,' he told those at the Caux conference. 'You can never understand MRA by sitting back and trying to comprehend it intellectually. There must be a decisive act... a turning of the will. For me a chain reaction was started off by sitting down and writing a letter of honesty to my wife.'

For Betty Beazley, back home in Perth, that letter must have come as something of a bombshell. 'Some things in that letter I already knew,' she says. 'Some I had guessed; but some I did not know. I had a wonderful sense of relief and trust after reading it.'

Similar letters were written to his sister and brother, and to his secretary. While disentangling 'a web of deceit' in his personal life, Beazley found he was tackling a web in his political life. He reflected on his father's drinking problem and regretted that he had 'given him no friendship of any kind' before his death. He had treated two parliamentary colleagues who had alcohol problems with superiority and contempt. More apologies followed.

God seemed to be challenging basic motives: political ambition, self-will and pride. He realised that his university education had made him aloof from the working class, from his roots. His constituency was the port of Fremantle and every Friday when he was in town, Beazley would go to the 'pick-up' where waterside workers (or 'lumpers' as he knew them from childhood years) would get job allocations for the coming week. Beazley, notebook in hand, would move among the crowd, hearing complaints, offering what help he could. Yet he never wanted to know them socially or to have them in his home.

Then came a tough thought for a politician, which he noted down: that he had 'formed the habit of not being absolutely accurate in political statements'. As he told the conference in Switzerland, 'I have always congratulated myself that my campaign speeches were objective. I objectively analysed the government's mistakes, but never their virtues. I have come to realise that this is one of the most mischievous forms of lying in politics.'

Honesty in politics? Before he left Switzerland Beazley decided that he must 'concern myself daily with the challenge of how to live out God's will, to turn the searchlight of absolute honesty on to my motives, and to try to see the world with the clarity of absolute purity... and absolute love'.

Hardly usual language for a politician. In Australia the shock waves were soon being felt.

Betty Beazley was delighted. 'He arrived home and was so different. All I could say to my

mother was “Hasn’t Kim changed?” He had always been a thoughtful person but so thoughtful that he never knew who was passing by! But his approach to people – his eyes, his voice – were different. I wanted to learn from him what it was all about; and he being a good teacher took me through it good and proper.’ His change affected their relationship. Often left home alone with three young children, Betty had found that by the time Kim returned from Canberra at the end of a fortnight she had had enough. ‘He would get a blast as he walked in the door. By the end of the weekend we were just about talking again. I had seen many marriage breakups in political life. His new approach showed me the possibilities of change.’

Back in Canberra after his mountain-top experiences, Beazley found his parliamentary colleagues did not warm so easily to his new found convictions – if anything they triggered an explosion. Canberra correspondent for the *Brisbane Telegraph* remarked on the ‘political dynamite that might be set off by Mr Beazley’s practical sincerity’ and continued, ‘No one with even a slight working knowledge of politics could fail to delight in the confusion that could result from even one of our politicians resolving to be absolutely honest.’

But his Labor Party colleagues were *not* delighted. While reporting to Prime Minister Robert Menzies on his overseas trip, Beazley had evidently passed on some concerns he held about Communist sympathisers within the Labor Party. He believed they posed a national security risk. Though Beazley denied that was the main reason for seeing Menzies, word of it got out. ‘Beazley is supposed to have impugned to Menzies the trustworthiness of certain members of Evatt’s personal staff,’ reported Perth’s *Sunday Times*. And Alan Reid wrote in *The Sun*, October 1953: ‘Facing the prospect of political destruction at this moment is young Kim Beazley. Powerful, office-hungry individuals fear that his idealism and his current determination to pursue the truth, whatever the price, could cost the Labor Party the next election. The story they are assiduously and effectively peddling is, “Beazley has lost his balance.” So the word has gone out, “Destroy him”.’

Cold War ideological issues were already driving a wedge between conservative Catholics and the militant left-wing of the Australian Labor Party based in the union movement. At the disastrous 1955 ALP conference in Hobart, Beazley and others walked out, splitting the Party. ‘My biggest mistake,’ he says, looking back. The divided ALP was effectively kept out of power for almost two decades. Beazley’s opponents in the Party held it against him for years.

But they did not destroy him. He survived 32 years in Parliament, on retirement its longest serving member. He was elected Vice-President of the ALP, a member of its national executive, and was twice Minister for Education in a Labor government. Many have said that, but for MRA, Beazley could have got the top job. ‘The Coronation was his ruination,’ quipped Gough Whitlam, in oblique reference to the trip which took Beazley to Caux. And Bob Hawke, next Labor PM after Whitlam, told Kim Jnr’s biographer that if Beazley Snr ‘hadn’t got diverted from politics by MRA he could have, and *should* have, got the leadership of the Party. He was a better orator and intellect than Whitlam.’ For his part Beazley himself seemed more intent on what he could achieve outside of the Party ranks rather than gaining leadership within it.

Before he left Parliament, the Australian National University awarded Beazley an honorary Doctorate, citing his contribution in education and Aboriginal affairs. The Whitlam government had swept into power in 1972 with the promise of reform – and education was one area targeted. The three years of Beazley’s Ministry are now regarded as ‘the honeymoon period of education financing’. Gough Whitlam himself would later claim that his government’s reforms in education amounted to ‘the most enduring single achievement of my government’. As the *West Australian* summed up, tertiary education was made

completely free and enrolments in technical education nearly doubled; Federal grants to schools increased six-fold; a scholarship scheme was established for the disabled and for children in isolated areas; existing study grants were extended to every Aboriginal high-school and tertiary level student. Overall education spending rose from 4.8 per cent of Gross Domestic Product to 6.2 per cent.

Beazley's greatest contribution, the ANU citation continued, 'was not the expenditure of money but the healing of an ulcer that has festered in our society for close to 200 years. Sectarian bitterness, which has focused on schools and their funding... was dealt a death blow by needs-based funding which Mr Beazley introduced.' The introduction of Commonwealth aid to church-run schools was perhaps the most controversial issue of his Ministry. Before the legislation finally passed, Beazley was stricken with exhaustion. *The Australian* quoted him from his hospital bed, 'For 20 years I've waited to become a Minister so that I could implement what I believed since I was a boy... equal opportunity (to education).'

It was in Aboriginal education, however, that some of the most radical and rapid changes came. During the first days of dramatic executive action in December 1972, Whitlam called in Beazley to discuss the education portfolio. That morning, as every morning, the Beazleys had spent their first hour between 6 am and 7 am seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. During that time he had written down what was, for him, an important principle: 'To deny a people an education in their own language is to treat them as a conquered people, and we have always treated Aborigines as a conquered people.' Then he added a line of action: 'Arrange for Aborigines to choose the language of Aboriginal schools, with English as a second language.' At 3 pm, during his appointment with Whitlam, he repeated these thoughts using the same words. Whitlam accepted the suggestion instantly. Two hours later on national news, the Prime Minister announced as government policy a program of bilingual education for Aboriginal children.

Until that day funding could not be given to schools that taught using an Aboriginal language, rather than English. By the time Beazley left his Ministry, education was being given in 22 Aboriginal languages. Mission teachers and linguists in the Summer Institute of Linguistics cooperated to create books in some of the 138 languages spoken in the Northern Territory, which was then under Commonwealth jurisdiction. Aboriginal parents became involved in school policy, leading to the introduction of adult education for Aboriginal people.

Appalled by reports of widespread malnutrition amongst Aboriginal children, Beazley wrote a note to Whitlam with some of the facts – 'the starkest letter I've ever received,' said the Prime Minister. Without delay a program was set up with other Federal and State ministers to tackle the disasters of leprosy, yaws, hookworm, trachoma, alcoholism and malnutrition. Aboriginal health is still a national disgrace but a beginning was made through those initiatives.

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Beazley's contribution was not limited to his years in government. As the ANU citation underlined: 'It has become popular over the last years to recognise... the injustices that have been done to Aboriginal people. But over the last half-century this was far from popular. In that time few people have done as much, and none have done more, than Kim Beazley has to bring about that change in attitude.'

It began during that same visit to Switzerland in 1953. Beazley had already got Aboriginal land rights onto the Labor Party platform in 1951; and in August 1952 made the first speech ever given on the issue in the House of Representatives. But it was in Caux that 'the subject

ignited for me as a vital issue'. At that point Aborigines had no civil and voting rights. They lived in appalling conditions, mostly in white-administered reserves in complete subjection. They did not own one acre of land. Few white Australians cared – at best they were seen as a primitive dying race; at worst, they were regarded as sub-human.

As part of his search in Switzerland 'to live out God's will', one thought stuck in his mind: 'If you live absolute purity you will be used towards the rehabilitation of the Australian Aboriginal race.' Purity, he saw, was 'the alternative to living for self-gratification, which kills intelligent care for others'. Without seeing all the implications, he felt instinctively that land ownership was the key. 'If Aborigines are not acknowledged as owning land, they will negotiate from a position of weakness,' he noted down in one of his morning meditations. These thoughts set the direction for Beazley's next years in politics.

In 1953 the Beazleys began by inviting Aboriginal people into their home in Perth, 'for breakfast, lunch and dinner', said Betty. Kim credits his wife for that idea. Aboriginal personalities – like the late poet/ playwright Jack Davis and community spokesman Ken Colbung – became firm friends.

'Two things characterise Australia's race relations in the past: an absence of gentleness and an absence of listening. We always knew!' Beazley told a conference at Melbourne University. The humbled politician was learning. 'It was only when I began to take a special interest in Aboriginal affairs that I realised the extent of their deprivation. They are a people of dignity, a very gentle people in many ways.'

Beazley began to look for opportunities to advance their cause, to help right a historical wrong. In 1961, as part of a Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Voting Rights, he travelled 32,000 kilometres and heard from 364 witnesses. 'It was an eye-opener,' said Beazley. It revealed not only the oratory and intelligence of many Aboriginal witnesses, some with the help of interpreters, but also the dogmatism of some white witnesses opposing equal rights, including some well-intentioned bishops. The committee's recommendation of voting rights for Aboriginal people was accepted by Parliament, paving the way for the historic 1967 Referendum which gave the Commonwealth responsibility for Aboriginal affairs and ensuring full citizenship rights for every Aboriginal person. Introduced by Liberal Prime Minister Harold Holt, it belongs 'to a rather special phase of Australian conscience and consciousness', wrote Beazley.

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'Restoring the dignity' of Aboriginal people was – and still is – a long and sometimes complex process. If that 1961 Select Committee was a turning point in the struggle for Indigenous voting rights, then the struggle of the people of Yirrkala during 1962-63 was key to gaining land rights.

Located on the tip of Arnhem Land Reserve on the far north coast, Yirrkala was then administered by missionaries of the Methodist Church. Like many reserves the land was considered virtually worthless – until bauxite was discovered and a French/ Swiss consortium began negotiations with the government to develop the resources. By the time the traditional Aboriginal owners of the land heard about it, the consortium had made plans to establish a town for 3,000 people, to open a port and build an ore treatment plant. A large area of land was being excised from the reserve for the development. Mission superintendent was the Rev Edgar Wells. In his book *Reward and Punishment in Arnhem Land*, Rev Wells described how the local people faced an emergency because of 'the secretive and politically motivated contrivance by which mining companies avoid public debate until arrangements within the business community are agreed on'.

In May 1963, from the Opposition benches, Beazley introduced a motion in the

House of Representatives calling for recognition of Aboriginal land title and requesting genuine consultation with the people of Yirrkala. At first there was little response along the corridors of power.

During a Parliamentary break Beazley, in his capacity as Chairman of the Labor Party's Committee on Aboriginals, went to Yirrkala with Labor colleague Gordon Bryant (who, a decade later, became Minister for Aboriginal Affairs under Whitlam). Bauxite mining involves razing large areas of land surface. The Aboriginal people Beazley and Bryant met feared the destruction of their hunting grounds and fishing areas, as well as pollution of water supplies. But there was a deeper fear – the destruction of their spiritual heritage.

The Rev Wells explained the spiritual associations which tribal people had with particular areas of land. Their belief, for instance, that the Creator earth spirit enters a pregnant woman – and the tradition in some areas that the child will be named by some feature of the earth observed by the mother. Galarrwuy Yunupingu, one of the young men Beazley met on that trip (later chair of the Northern Land Council) is named after 'horizon at sea rock', a name given him before his birth. Upon death, the Creator spirit returns to the earth. So where, asked the tribal elders, would their spirits go if the land was destroyed?

Non-Indigenous Australia has adopted Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' heritage as being culturally fashionable. But in 1963, remembers Beazley, 'there was a persistent tendency to belittle the spiritual and mythological significance of the land to the Yirrkala people'. By comparison, argues Beazley with a touch of irony, our white Australian claim to Australia is hardly less 'mystical' in the eyes of Aboriginals – based as it is 'on proclamations by Captain Cook and Governor Philip that King George III "by the grace of God" owned it all'. Our claim to land was supported 'only by greater firepower'.

In his book superintendent Wells describes how he found the two politicians one morning after breakfast in the church 'engaged in a serious religious conversation... about freshly painted Aboriginal art boards and what they meant within the Aboriginal cultural system. It was here in the sanctuary that Mr Beazley had what he described as a "guided" inspiration... "Make a bark petition," he advised his Aboriginal friends. "A petition (to Canberra) surrounded with an Aboriginal painting will be irresistible."

'Mr Beazley gave the Aborigines the essential preamble for the petition to Canberra... A small group of Aborigines struggled valiantly with the wording... Meanwhile senior artists were at work on the bark boards on which the petition was to be glued...' Mrs Wells was asked to type it; and a mission teacher reluctantly agreed to explain some of the complex concepts. Despite such minimal non-Aboriginal involvement, within weeks angry accusations were flying around that it was all the work of 'Southern stirrers' and 'do-gooders'. Even 'the Communist influence' was seen to be involved. The Rev Wells was ultimately forced to resign by his own Mission Board, ostensibly because of his part in 'arousing the natives'. But, as Beazley said, Aboriginal people were just as entitled to petition Parliament as any mining executives or pastoralists.

Petitions normally do not arouse much interest. This one did. Still today it is preserved in Parliament House for public viewing. Presented in the Yolgnu Matha language and translated into English, the petition asked that the House appoint a Select Committee, 'accompanied by competent interpreters, to hear the views of the Yirrkala people before permitting the excision of this land'. From the Opposition benches Beazley presented the petition to Parliament, moving that the Select Committee be formed and stressing that this was 'not a party question... It is not a question of the Government being on trial. This Parliament (is) on trial'.

Then something rare in Australian politics happened: Paul Hasluck, the responsible Minister,

rose and immediately accepted the motion from the Opposition. 'I've only known this to happen once in 32 years,' said Beazley. Within a week a Select Committee was named, including Beazley, and were soon holding hearings in Yirrkala accompanied by the media. Their findings, presented before the end of 1963, were 'a tremendous advance in political thinking,' wrote one newspaper.

Mining ultimately went ahead at Yirrkala, with guarantees that sacred sites and hunting areas would not be violated and with considerable royalties paid to Aboriginal people. But a principle had been established. 'Never again will any agency or Government body be able to acquire land... without consulting tribes of the area,' wrote the Rev Edgar Wells in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*. 'The success of the Aboriginal people in achieving the right to be heard in defence of their own spiritual land values... altered forever the balance of power in Aboriginal Affairs.'

The Yirrkala case opened the door for Aboriginal repossession of tribal lands. 'We will legislate to give Land Rights,' promised Gough Whitlam in 1972. Within two months of becoming Prime Minister, Whitlam appointed Mr Justice Woodward as Aboriginal Land Rights Commissioner whose recommendations were accepted in legislation introduced by Labor in 1975, but passed and extended by the Fraser Liberal government in 1976. From not owning an acre, Aboriginal people gained freehold title to 643,000 square kilometres, an area two and a half times the size of Great Britain.

In Beazley's view the Australian government was not 'giving away' anything. It was simply justice. Despite the ongoing controversy surrounding Native Title, a historical wrong had gone some way to being righted – and as Beazley wrote at that conference in Switzerland, Aborigines could 'negotiate from a position of strength'.

Social change often brings a backlash. 'There is a philosophy in Australia that anything done for me is "justice"; anything done for anyone else is a "handout",' observed Beazley. As Education Minister he faced hostile public meetings, particularly critical of funding for Aboriginal students: 'It was useless to point out the facts at these meetings. It takes a moral force to break the pattern of resentment and prejudice.' Undoubtedly Beazley's facing of his own prejudices in Switzerland helped him find that 'moral force'.

'What a poor reward it would have been for the nation if Kim had pursued the cause of personal power during those years in Opposition, because it was as much in Opposition as in government that he brought progress and healing,' commented a senior adviser in the Prime Minister's department when Beazley left politics in 1978. 'Great issues, such as the welfare of Aboriginal people and the preparation of Papua New Guinea for independence, were brought into focus from the Opposition side of Parliament.'

Beazley spent 28 of his 32 years in Parliament in what, he once despaired, was 'Her Majesty's permanent Opposition'. A year before Australians voted the Whitlam Labor government to power, Beazley told a conference in India: 'I have come to believe the true function of an Opposition is to out-think the government at the point of its successes. Only then can alternative policies be framed and social advance take place.' Nearly three decades in Opposition had shown him that 'the question of motive is the key to social advance... If your motive is power, you will most likely distort the truth. If your motive is the truth, you will be fit for power'.

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Beazley's experiences with Aboriginal people naturally led him into that other great process of political change in the Sixties and Seventies – the ending of Australia's colonial relationship with Papua New Guinea.

Under a United Nations' mandate Australia was charged to prepare PNG's 700 tribes for nationhood. But in 1961 when Beazley first went there to look at educational needs, he found 'expatriate' plantation owners and administration officials resisting decolonisation with all their powers. In a hangover of history they saw PNG as a buffer zone between Australia and the 'yellow peril' of Asian invasion.

As he did with Aboriginal people, Beazley went to listen to the people themselves. On a second visit he found himself in a home with the future leaders of the Pangu Party who were leading the drive towards independence. Beazley offered to help arrange meetings for them with the Australian leadership. Within a few months they were in Canberra to take up his offer. Though still on the Opposition benches Beazley set up meetings with the Minister of External Territories responsible for Papua New Guinea – 'a conservative gentleman to his fingertips', Charles Edward Barnes – with Prime Minister Harold Holt and with ALP leader Gough Whitlam.

Land rights became the clash point in the last years of Australian rule – particularly in the Gazelle Peninsula. Land and dignity seemed synonymous. Beazley made three trips into the area as Labor Party spokesman on Papua New Guinea, one with Whitlam. With the land issue still on the boil, a telegram from Beazley to the leaders of the Mataungan movement on the Gazelle Peninsula helped diffuse a flashpoint when 1000 Mataungans, armed with machetes, faced troops armed with automatic rifles. As promised, the Labor government, as soon as they were elected, enacted self-government.

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After three stormy years in power, the Whitlam government was dismissed in 1975... and then thrashed at the polls. The following year as details of the 'Iraqi loans scandal' surfaced, Beazley – who had been kept in the dark – resigned from the shadow Cabinet. 'A man who will not silence his conscience,' was the front page headline in *The Age*.

Two years later he retired from Parliament. His final speech before a full House highlighted the 'assumptions' which underlay his education ministry: 'The needs of every child must be met... Every child is meant to be a temple of the Holy Spirit...' Most of us are understandably cynical about the influence of God and conscience in politics. The conventional political wisdom is they do not mix: those who stick to scruples will be taken for a ride. Beazley disagrees, and survived a third of a century in Parliament to prove it. 'If you are devoted to God's guidance and to absolute love, your political environment is not strewn with corpses. The fact that you are not lethal but gracious makes a big difference,' he said during an interview in Canberra in 1982.

That grace did not come automatically: there was a struggle involved – a struggle which has continued through his lifetime, to give supremacy to the mind of God over the 'intellectual force' which could make him appear aloof. It was, one might say, a struggle of heart and spirit over intellect.

'The most practical point in politics is that there is an intellect, God's intellect, beyond the perception and self-interest of man,' he said in his last year in Parliament.

Beazley's own life spells it out. The experience of Caux 'took the strain out of striving', as he once said. It humbled his political ambitions and redirected his prime loyalties. Morning by morning he and Betty consciously turned to 'seeking the kingdom of God'. And though the 'kingdom' of political power eluded them for 28 years, he was instrumental in 'adding justice' to the cause of Aboriginals, the people of Papua New Guinea and disadvantaged children. The brief period of political power simply took further what he had already worked for.

It has continued – whether leading a far-reaching ‘Inquiry into Education’ for the WA State government or helping to shape a ‘code of ethics’ for Parliamentary debate. Serving on the board of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies or speaking on family and community issues for the Australian Family Association. In New Delhi Beazley shared the platform with an Indian Prime Minister speaking on democratic reform. In North America he assisted Native Americans and the Inuit (Eskimos) on Aboriginal land rights issues. In South Africa he spoke in support of black educators and those ‘building bridges of trust’ between races.

Through it all, says the bare-footed boy from Fremantle, ‘there is sanity from the Holy Spirit beyond human ideas of justice’.

‘The thoughts of God, given primacy in the life of a man, bring to the innermost motives the virtue of mercy, and with it the cure for hatred that can turn the tide of history. This is the essence of intelligent statesmanship.’