

Losing Trust in Leadership: Philosophical & Theological Factors

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Abstract

In western democracies and business communities of the past, leadership was presumed to be trustworthy on the basis of accepted concepts, defined relationships, and a fixed understanding of reality and truth. However, leadership is no longer presumed to be trustworthy on the basis of an ideal. Rather, in the postmodern setting, leadership must be continually establishing its trustworthiness in the context of a progressive “dialogue” with its constituencies, taking into account the key indicators of the postmodern mindset.

In this setting, leadership in the US, UK and Australia is increasingly finding itself in credibility and ethical calamities. Popular explanations for this growing cultural angst have ranged from the skeptical to a variety of rather pessimistic anthropologies. Some skeptics view leadership as always being corrupt. On the other hand, some philosophical and theological anthropologies have asserted the inherent self-centeredness of the human character and psyche.

Trust is no longer an issue determined primarily by presumptions, standards and character. Trust is also molded by human interactions in the context of the postmodern mindset and expectations. This paper identifies and interacts with key indicators of the postmodern mindset that establish points of tension in relation to the leadership discourse that was associated with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the continuing conflict in Iraq.

Thesis

In the Western democracies of the United States of America, the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Australia there is a waning of trust in leadership.¹

While many factors are contributing to this waning of trust, one factor that must not be overlooked is the character of leadership discourse. This paper seeks to begin identifying some of the major points of tension within the contemporary postmodern mindset of these western democracies that affect leadership discourse.

¹ The Russell Sage Foundation in November 1995 launched an interdisciplinary study about trust in the social, economic and political context. This initiative resulted in numerous articles and books being published on this issue. These all expressed acknowledgement of the importance of trust in these areas and the growing concerns that trust was waning. Robert Putnam’s article, “Bowling Alone” in the *Journal of Democracy*, lamenting the decline of social connectedness and trust in America and warning of the serious consequences this trend could have for participatory democracy. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). See also his Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust : The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Free Press, 1995). argued that trust between individuals is essential to a healthy economy. This initiative ended in November 2005. In 2007 a survey conducted by the Culture and Media Institute and the firm of Fabrizio, McLaughlin and Associates revealed that 88 percent of those surveyed view agreed that classical virtues like industry, truthfulness, thrift and charity were important for America and 74 percent of those surveyed, representing all the cultural and social groups surveyed, believe that moral values are in decline. Also informative in this area is Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent : America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).

In this paper I shall examine these points of tension in relation to the leadership discourse that was associated with the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the continuing conflict in Iraq.² In looking at this relationship I will seek to understand how these tension points impacted three general elections; the Australian general election of 2004, the British general election of 2005 and the US Congressional elections of 2006.

Background

There is an interesting point to ponder here. If there was in fact a loss of trust in government by mid 2004 in particular over the Iraq war, then one would expect that the lack of trust would have some impact on the results of the elections in 2004, 2005 and 2006. There was an impact but not the type of impact that one would have expected.

By 2004 polls and pundits agreed that there was a rapidly growing distrust in these three communities against their governments regarding the war in Iraq, and that distrust was undermining trust in these three governments.

In Australia the polls showed that Prime Minister John Howard (a center right PM who supported President Bush) was unpopular and likely to lose the election. Instead, in the General Election of October 9, 2004 the Howard government was re-elected with an increased majority and gained 45.1% of the vote.³

In the United Kingdom in May of 2005 British Prime Minister Tony Blair (a “New” Labor politician with pragmatic economic policies and socially liberal views, and a supporter of Bush

² The 2003 invasion of Iraq by United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Poland and Denmark (other countries were also involved in its aftermath) began on March 20, 2003, based on U.S. military intelligence of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein’s alleged support for the Al Qaeda terrorist organization and Iraqi’s alleged production of weapons of mass destruction.

³ For factual data on the 2004 Australian General Election see Australia. Parliament. Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters., *The 2004 Federal Election : Report of the Inquiry into the Conduct of the 2004 Federal Election and Matters Related Thereto*, Parliamentary Paper (Australia. Parliament) ; (Canberra: [Australian Government], 2005). For academic interpretations of the election and its results see Marian Simms, John Warhurst, and Richard Nile, *Mortgage Nation : The 2004 Australian Election* (Perth: API Network, 2005), Julian Thomas and Peter M. Browne, *A Win and a Prayer : Scenes from the 2004 Australian Election* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005).

in Iraq) appeared to be in serious electoral danger. While the election results clearly showed Blair's government was affected by the Iraq war situation, the Blair government was re-elected on May 5, 2005 but with a decreased majority from 167 in 2001 to 66 in 2005.⁴

In the United States in 2006 President George Bush (a social conservative and free enterprise/big business proponent who was committed to the war in Iraq) was confronted with his Republican Party majority in both Houses of the Congress being at stake in the November 7, 2006 Congressional Elections. Bush's polling data set his popularity at all time lows! Unlike the Australian and British situation, the incumbent Republican majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate were swept away (and for the first time in electoral history the Republicans gained no new seat in either House).⁵

In addition to this interesting point to ponder there is an interesting challenge here - the challenge is to give an overview of the elements of the contemporary postmodern mindset or world view when this mindset is open and by its nature continually developing. The characteristics of this contemporary postmodern mindset are themselves malleable, elastic, and, most significantly, they vary according to the social, cultural, academic or other contexts in which they operate.

Glenn Ward suggests that one must distinguish between "postmodernism" in general use and the use of the word postmodern in its application to a specific area of human experience. Ward gives, for example, the phrases "the postmodern world view" and the "postmodern mind"⁶ and concludes that "postmodernism is most usefully thought of as an elastic critical category with a range of applications and potential understandings"⁷

⁴ For factual data see the UK Electoral Commission's web site. This commission was set up by act of parliament and is independent of partisan politics: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/genelec.cfm>. Also some help information of a more general nature can be found in "United Kingdom general election, 2005," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=United_Kingdom_general_election%2C_2005&oldid=157370272 (accessed June 20, 2007 and September 14, 2007).

⁵ For a helpful summary of the data and some commentary see CNN's political coverage at <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2006/>.

⁶ Glenn Ward, *Postmodernism* (Chicago, IL: McGraw-Hill, 2004), 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

Richard Tarnas observes that “*Like Nietzsche. The postmodern intellectual situation is profoundly complex and ambiguous*” and then suggests that “*a few widely held working principles have emerge.*”⁸ He concludes his discussion of the “working principles” by saying that “*Properly speaking, ..., there is no “postmodern world view,” nor the possibility of one.*”⁹

Recognizing these challenges in this paper I shall focus on some of the major trends or “working principles” of the contemporary mindset. I shall indicate the way they impact upon the notion of “trust” in the context of three western democracies, Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom. I recognize that I will be painting this picture with a very broad brush for each of three contexts. I will leave it to others to examine the unique distinctive nuances that apply in each of these contexts.

1. A radical open-endedness

In relation to this radical open-endedness the contemporary mindset is orientated to the philosophical view that there is a “plasticity and constant change of reality and knowledge”¹⁰. In this setting the quest for knowledge is endlessly self-revising and reality is viewed as being fluid, as an “open universe”. This radical open-endedness produces a mindset that is constantly in a process of being open to revising and reevaluating views, perspectives, and relationships. Who and what is trusted is not exempted from this process.

At first, openness of any kind might seem to be a positive for any trust relationship. At one level openness is a foundation for trust. However, there is another level at which radical open-endedness can become more problematic. The mind can find itself confronted constantly with alternative possibilities of perspective, reality, truth and justice. Then the mind is confronted with these questions; how can we believe, who is being truthful and how can we be certain we are getting the whole story?

⁸ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind : Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, 1st ed. (New York: Harmony Books, 1991), 395.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 401.

¹⁰ Sheldon S. Wolin, "On the Theory and Practice of Power," in *After Foucault: Humanist Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univeristy Press, 1988), 181ff, Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1996), 131 ff.

In the build-up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq the debates in the US, the UK, and Australia (and the other partners to the invasion) justified military intervention in Iraq on the basis of military intelligence that suggested Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was supporting the Al Qaeda terrorist organization and that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.

However, in the lead-up to the first election we are considering, the Australian General election of 2004, the failure to find any weapons of mass destruction set the scene for a growing community sense of outrage and distrust. This distrust was in the various governmental assertions about the war in general and of military intelligence in particular. By June and July of 2004 a biological weapons specialist from Australia had claimed that US officials were suppressing information that suggested that the WMD's would most likely not be found. With these revelations and the open-endedness of the contemporary Australian mindset, Australians were ready to re-evaluate the entire war situation and the total Iraqi situation. As the setting for elections in the UK in 2005 and in the US in 2006 began to unfold the communities in Australia, the UK and the US showed widespread openness to reassessing the Iraq war on the basis of mistrust of each of the reasons and motives of the governments involved.¹¹

At this point an observation may be made that shows that the contemporary mindset is continually open and re-evaluating, and when new evidence raises doubt about trusting a position or a course of action that leaders have put forth, such as the Iraq war, the community mindset loses trust in that direction. Thus, as early as 2004 various surveys in Australia (as well as in the UK and in the US) began showing that a considerable percentages of people were no longer supporting the Iraq war. What was important about this shift was that people began to oppose the war because they did not trust what was going on. While this loss of trust did not result in Prime Minister John Howard losing the 2004 elections as was expected, it is clear that the rapid

¹¹ A help summary of the unfolding of the confusion over WMD may be found in Wikipedia contributors, "Iraq and weapons of mass destruction," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Iraq_and_weapons_of_mass_destruction&oldid=157569008 (accessed June 10, 2007 and September 13, 2007).

reevaluation of the war by 2004 (just one year after hostilities began) contrasts greatly with how long it took western communities to begin losing trust in the Viet Nam conflict of the 1970's.

In the present contemporary mindset context leaders need to accept that the community will be constantly engaged in the process of knowing, formulating and reformulating its views and perspectives.

2. Knowledge perceived as power

No longer does the western mindset see knowledge as an end-in-itself, and as being something objective that a specialist or expert can obtain and set before the community to debate the use and significance of that knowledge.¹²

Even in the waning years of the modern era the modern mindset still had a commitment to the Enlightenment view that accepted knowledge as being objective, as being “out there” for all to know and use. Leaders were viewed as being the “experts” who had all the “facts” and they were thus in the best position to make the decision about what to do and who needs to know what! Behind this modern view of beginning with the assumption that it is leaders who should make the decisions about who “needs to know” lay the three enlightenment beliefs; that there was an objective body of knowledge “out there”; that knowledge was value-free or was neutral; and that knowledge benefits all mankind and not just one group in society.

In this modern context trust is assumed until it is undermined when someone has reason to believe that relevant information is being withheld from them, or that the “truth” about a situation is not being fully and openly disclosed to another person or persons who have a right to that knowledge. However, the Viet Nam era began the process of moving the culture away from its Enlightenment view of knowledge. That era and its conflicts showed how inescapably knowledge was linked to the exercise of power. The growing cultural suspicions of the 1960's

¹² By 1968 Michel Foucault was challenging Enlightenment and Modernist assumptions asserting there was no “objective knowledge” and arguing that knowledge was a product of the “will to knowledge” because knowledge is inescapably linked to the exercise of power. See his “The Order of Discourse,” in Robert Young, *Untying the Text : A Post-Structuralist Reader* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 113, Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London,: Tavistock Publications, 1972).

and the Viet Nam debacle was that governments used the release of information as a means to enhance their power controls!

Today there seems to be a growing, if not settled, openness to seeing knowledge as a means to an end, being used by those with “knowledge” to gain advantage and power over others. Foucault called this a “will to knowledge” that arbitrarily establishes its own “truth” for its own purposes (an echo of Nietzsche’s will to power).¹³

In this new contemporary context trust is *not* built upon facts or knowledge but rather it is a process of sharing and dialogue in relation to “knowledge”.

Of all the debates and discussions leading up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq the most illustrative of the issue of knowledge as power was the historic debate in the House of Common in March 2003. Prime Minister Tony Blair had agreed to an open debate, one in which members would be free to speak and vote their own conscience. He opened his address with this affirmation “*At the outset I say: it is right that this House debate this issue and pass judgement. That is the democracy that is our right but that others struggle for in vain. And again I say: I do not disrespect the views of those in opposition to mine.*”¹⁴ This debate had the potential of bringing down the government. It was a debate where the majority party had, and still values deeply, peace and diplomacy rather than war and invasion. It was a debate where “facts” were not the telling factor. Rather, the telling factors were the Prime Minister’s perceived conviction that he was acting against WMD and that he was engaging in a dialogue with the Commons on the matter that was genuinely open. While many remained unconvinced of the Government’s position on Iraq, the Government won the vote in the house of Commons and retained the basic trust of the community.¹⁵

¹³ This concept reflected in Bill Gates and Collins Hemingway, *Business @ the Speed of Thought : Using a Digital Nervous System* (New York, NY: Warner Books, 1999).

¹⁴ The text PM Speech of March 18, 2003 may be found in “*Prime Minister's statement opening Iraq debate*” at <http://www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page3294.asp>”

¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of Blair’s leadership see James K. Withher, “British Bulldog or Bush’s Poodle? Anglo-American Relations and the Iraq War,” *Parameters*, no. Winter (2003-04): 67-82. Also available at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/03winter/wither.htm>.

Contrast this debate with that in the United States where the President's party held the majority in both houses of the US Congress where the debate was cast around the issue of unity and loyalty around a national security response to the tragic events of September 11, 2001. The rationale for the President's action in Iraq was based on the "facts" of the intelligence community. Tragically the begrudging trickle of information released from those sources found in the contemporary mindset a fertile ground for growing suspicion. Was knowledge being used to advance a power position? Later these suspicions were to grow as no WMD's were found. While the President "powerfully" won the vote and even managed to lever votes from his opponents, he sowed the seeds for distrust and destruction of his own position.

3. An affirmation of cultural diversity and "cultural pluralism"

Trust is significantly affected by feelings and convictions, by emotion and moral sentiments. Why has the Iraq war elicited such strong community angst about trusting governments? The debates in the US, the UK and Australia about the invasion of Iraq began the erosion process. The mindset of these contemporary communities valued peace above the symbols and trappings of western culture (democracy, freedom, secularism, and free enterprise). This mindset is increasingly biased toward affirming the value of cultural differences within their own communities as well as the cultural values of other communities. Because the Iraq invasion began without international community support (for example from the UN) the invasion of 2003 raised in the deep crevices of our post modern mind the specter that the west was returning to a new form of western imperialism.

The Iraq war set the scene for an all out military conflict between two cultures, one from the west committed to democracy, freedom, secularism, and free enterprise, and the other from the middle-east committed to tribal allegiances, sectarianism and religious fever. While groups and movements from within the middle-east had been waging military action against the west leading up to the vile and brutal actions of 9/11, and one middle eastern nation, Iraq, seemed to be preparing for all out military conflict with one western country, Israel, there was no all out aggression until the west invaded Iraq in 2003!

Western modernity, and its imperialist past, was rooted in western culture and western thought patterns and value systems. While the foundations for modernism's view of trust were predictability and truthfulness, it has been suggested that the social and cultural objective of such trust was to preserve cultural relationships and leadership so that western thought patterns and values systems would be preserved and promoted. Trust had a "public face". Support for this conception of trust came from Christianity's view of "faith" in God as being faith in a predictable and unchanging God whose actions and reactions were deemed to be always good and consistent with His self revelation.

Our contemporary western postmodern mindset is open and affirming of all thought patterns and value systems, subject to one general qualification; that qualification being that the thought patterns and values systems being affirmed need to be consistent with this cultural and intellectual openness.

The postmodern mind does *not* seek to build trust upon consistency but rather upon forming and reforming conceptions of relationships and values. As we noted in the case of modernism trust had a social and cultural objective. This is also the case with postmodernism. However, in the case of postmodernism trust has the objective of enabling communities to "trust" in the process of formulating and reformulating a culture of diversity.

I suggest that this is the point that Richard Rorty is making when he advocates his thoroughgoing cultural pluralism¹⁶. Rorty is reflecting the intellectual climate that, in his words, is divesting itself of the correspondence model of truth, the subject-object model of inquiry, and the "child-parent" model of morality¹⁷.

This introduces a significant problem for advocates of the invasion of Iraq and the continuing war effort who, regardless of their sincere intentions, give the appearance of imperialism. The "facts" and the "realities" they describe and assert to justify both their actions and plans are received by a community that is open to a variety of modes for interpreting these "facts" and

¹⁶ See Rorty's "Science as Solidarity," in Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 39.

¹⁷ *Ibid* 17-18

“realities”. Indeed in the context of this contemporary mindset “reality” tends to be viewed as unfolding in response to symbolic frameworks and assumptions utilized by the individual, communities and cultures. One person’s or group’s explanation is no better or more valuable than another person’s or group’s interpretation. Tarnis put it this way when he said the fluidity of human interaction provides plausible support for many different conceptions of reality and culture, and for the multidimensional nature of reality and culture¹⁸.

4. A new view of discourse and of the impact of “difference”, deconstruction and interpretation.

In the debates and battles over Iraq leading up to the elections of 2004, 2005, and 2006 only one leader, Prime Minister Tony Blair, showed that he understood how to position himself as the interpreter of discourse.

As we have previously noted the contemporary postmodern mindset, unlike the modern mindset, does not look for justification of the trustworthiness of a view or position on the basis of “brute facts”. Rather, the contemporary mind looks to discourse about how to make sense of whatever data or “text” is before it. Thus the justification for any point that needs to be trusted is to be found in the discourse of interpretation.

This discourse of interpretation has an interesting background and it also has two challenging consequences for leadership.

It was Jacques Derrida who focused his attention upon the Western philosophical tradition of assuming that there was at the foundation of language a “presence” of being, an essence we can know.¹⁹ This is a kind of foundationalism for language not unlike metaphysical foundationalism. Behind this modernist foundational assumption (logocentrism) was the conviction that through linguistic “signs” philosophers could “signify” or represent a given reality in its essential nature.

¹⁸ Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind : Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, 406-07.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 1st American ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 35.

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Two implications have been developed out of this starting point. The first is “*differance*” (Derrida’s own coinage) and the second is “*deconstruction*”. Derrida’s view of “*differance*” results in words and texts having no single and irrefutable meaning. All verbal interaction becomes “interpretation”. Secondly, the process of “*deconstruction*” results in texts being read or separated from their alleged original context; texts are to be read without drawing clear or necessary connections between the text and anything the text might represent.

The impact of this view of the roles of interpretation and discourse has significant implications for addressing the issue of trust in leaders. Once a leader uses words and reduces these words to text form, what he or she said raises two disturbing concerns: first, what he or she said is inherently a matter of “interpretation”. Secondly, what he or she said has no clear or certain connection with the subject matter of the text.

Thus for a leader to be trusted he or she must constantly be aware of placing themselves where they can be the interpreter of their own text to their own followers. There is a sense in which leaders in the post modern world need to realize that it is no longer a battle for the hearts and minds of their followers, but rather it is a battle between competing interpretations.

As I will show later, the Australian Prime Minister John Howard had positioned himself in these Iraq debates as upholding the ANZUS alliance. This was a position in the Australian context that provided a “valid” paradigm to interpret his actions and policies. However, in the case of President Bush he seemed to be following the game plan devised by advisors who, for the majority of his presidency, were people who represented his father’s generation and the modern mindset. Bush found himself unable to find a point of contact, let alone find the high ground for winning the battle of interpretation. Some interesting changes in regard to this situation came with the appointment of Robert Antony “Tony” Snow as the White House Press Secretary who was much more in contact with the contemporary mindset.

Prime Minister Tony Blair, on the other hand, was a master of the process of winning the high ground of interpretation. His handling of question time in the House of Commons displayed all

the elements of working with the contemporary community's expectations for discourse and interpretation.

5. Defining self (and the import of gender and feminism)

One of the enemies of trust is oppression. Much of the contemporary postmodern critique of historical western culture arises out of a concern that various structures within western cultural, economic and political life are structures of oppression. The cultural and intellectual imposition of gender and sexual roles that are so much a part of traditional western life are not perceived as coming out of a contemporary discourse that represents the world today. Rather, they are perceived as coming from allegedly historical processes that define and limit the essence of a person.

Along with concerns over WMD's, President Bush spent much time arguing that one of the purposes of the Iraq invasion was nation building, the establishment of democracy and freedom in the midst of the Arab world. Prime Minister Howard gave some support to this aspect of the "mission" but did not use this aspect as a basis for his commitment to the mission. Prime Minister Blair did not speak so much about nation building as ending oppression and the gruesome tyranny of Saddam's regime. While Bush's motives are clearly commendable from a modern western perspective they raise the question of western culture and structures being imposed on a middle-eastern culture.

In the Arab world this specter of western aggression is an issue that the Iraqi government must deal with if it is to gain legitimacy in its own people's eyes. In the west this issue is brewing in the background.

The philosophical background for the west growing concern over structures of oppression has its roots in Michel Foucault's concerns about the modern western conception of the self. Stanley Grenz says Foucault launched a thoroughgoing rejection of the modern worldview, including a rejection of the self as the autonomous knowing subject who viewed the world outside as an

object accessible to human knowledge and human exploitation.²⁰ According to David Couzen Hoy this led Foucault to two concerns.

The first concern was that this modern approach compresses the varieties of reality into an artificial homogeneity. Of particular concern here is the homogeneity of the conception of “human nature” arguing that social discourse of this kind is in fact a construct derived from our subjective social and historical experiences, many of which we unconsciously internalize. The second concern was about the claims of modern anthropology that “humanity” as seen in the present was based upon unearthing truths from the past. This process presupposes a concept of historical continuity and it assumes that history is the unfolding of the essential attributes of humanity. Foucault asserted that anthropologies assertions about humanity were nothing more than a fiction created by the modern sciences.²¹

The outcome of these concerns is that our contemporary postmodern view of the self and humanity needs to be developed in the midst of a discourse that represents the world as it is today. In this context numerous writers have described how the postmodern mind is now open to alternative lifestyles and in particular to the feminist perspective and its concern over issues of oppression.

Richard Tarnas, for example, gets at the heart of the important impact that feminist writers are making. He says of their analysis that it is helping to “*illuminate parallel patterns and structures of domination that have marked the experience of other oppressed peoples and forms of life.*”²² Feminism’s great legacy may be its ability to move postmodern culture to overcome the prejudices and oppressions of modernism that have been hidden from the view of what was once a patriarchal western culture.

While sincere efforts have been made to empower Iraqi leaders to develop their own solutions for their own political future, the western frustrations about slow progress have resulted in the

²⁰ Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 127.

²¹ David Couzen Hoy, "Foucault: Modern or Postmodern?," in *After Foucault: Humanist Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 27.

²² Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind : Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, 403.

promise of continued western support being predicated on western “bench marks”. Bush argued that “people everywhere love freedom” but seeking to impose cultural and political structures strikes a discord with the contemporary mindset. Bush is not alone in striking this discord. The present Democratic Party in the US Congress in seeking to impose “political bench marks” upon the president Iraqi government and this too raises the specter of a similar discordant note!

6. A radical “hermeneutic” of suspicion of established structures of western culture

Of all the tension points discussed in this paper the radical hermeneutic of suspicion has had perhaps the most significant impact on the waning of trust in leadership and ought to set before leaders the most sobering challenge to discourse; namely that the justification of a leader’s motives is as important, if not more important, than the justification of the leader’s views, policies, positions and actions. It is this issue of justification of motives that is most significant in understanding the electoral results of 2004, 2005 and 2006.

The prophet of postmodernism, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and his avid disciple Michel Foucault asserted, in opposition to the optimism of modernity’s view of mankind, that mankind was not “getting better and better”. Nietzsche’s view of humanity was that we are a part of the animal community, and we are motivated by the “will to power” that drives real human beings to use their every word and action to gain more and more control over self and others. Leaders were essential humans manifestly driven by the “will to power!”²³

Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida set loose in the intellectual world of the west this view that justified an inherent suspicion of the motives of anyone in power and leadership. The social and economic realities of the latter half of the 19th Century and the opening years of the 20th Century increasingly seemed to confirm the view that the west needed to have a different view of itself, and a different view of its institutions and its leaders. The west was not necessarily led by high-minded, trustworthy, and heroic leaders bent on service over self.

²³ Philip Stephens, *Tony Blair : The Making of a World Leader* (New York: Viking, 2004), Paul Kengor, *God and George W. Bush : A Spiritual Life*, 1st ed. (New York: ReganBooks, 2004), Wayne Errington and Peter Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Publishing, 2007).

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The twentieth century continued to build upon the benefits of the 19th Century's industrial revolution and political reforms producing social and economic advancements were real. However, two world wars, a world wide depression, the Cold War and the brutalizing of Soviet Russia by Stalin and his successors, the Korean and Viet Nam conflicts left the west deflated. Worse still, the new developments in mass communication in radio, TV and the press began to make known widely the misrepresentations and injustices being brought about by the so-called heroic western leaders.

Nietzsche was right in saying that leaders were all too human, and the will to power was all too real (every word and action of a leader aims at getting and controlling more power to the self. In this context all power structures exist to serve the ones in power).

This brings us back to the salient point; leaders need to understand that it is their motives that need to be justifiable perhaps even more that their policies and plans.

Let us return to the puzzling election results of 2004, 2005 and 2006. In the lead up to each of these elections each of the leaders set about justifying their position on the Iraq war. Interestingly, in all three cases Howard, Blair and Bush argued that the invasion of Iraq was based on the need to seek out and destroy WMD's, and to oppose terrorism and hunt down and depose terrorists.

Even by 2004 Howard was having difficulty in establishing credibility for the hunt for WMD's. By 2005 Blair was experiencing even more difficulty on this issue because by 2005 the failed intelligence and the failure to find any WMD's had all but destroyed the credibility of this justification for the war. By 2006 even President Bush had to concede this issue as a "lost cause" for justifying the war.

A similar de-validation was occurring in relation to justifying the war as a valid means of opposing terrorism and hunting down and deposing terrorists. Ben Laden remained at large, terror attacks continued both inside Iraq and elsewhere, and al-Qaeda continued as a significant terror organization. However, in the US, in the UK and in Australia terror attacks had inflicted

real harm and that fear remained in the contemporary mind. In the US the attacks of September 11, 2001 on the twin towers in New York killed almost 3,000 people, the bombing of a night club in Bali on October 12, 2002 killed 202 people, of whom 88 were Australians, and the London Underground bombings of July 7, 2005 killing 52 people (though this bombing occurred after the UK election in May 2005).

However, in the case of Prime Minister Howard and Prime Minister Blair there was a third argument – the importance of supporting the American alliance.

In Australia, particularly after World War II and the events in Indonesia, supporting the American alliance is viewed and valued as an essential national security matter. Prime Minister Howard's motive on this matter was self validating and, regardless of the concerns over the other grounds for justifying of the invasion, this ground justified Howard's motives! Australian commentators before the 2004 election, reading polls and survey results on the community's disdain for the war, were convinced that Howard would lose the election. However, it was one thing to be against the war but quite another to be against supporting the American alliance. Howard may have even been disliked over the war but his motive for supporting America in that war was externally validated by the common community concern about maintaining the American alliance. Howard may have been mocked over this position of supporting Bush but the electoral reality was that Howard was re-elected.

In Britain in 2005 Blair also spoke about maintaining the Trans-Atlantic alliance with America and her new alliances with Europe. Britain's security or sense of security, unlike Australia, is not as dependent upon the American alliance. However, Blair's open admission that one of his major motivations for the war was supporting the American alliance gave him, as it gave Howard, an external validation for his policies and actions. Again it is one thing to be against the war but Blair's motives, while questionable, were not impunable. However, Blair paid a price for this support of the alliance both in terms of his personal reputation and legacy and in terms of the size of his electoral majority, but the electoral result was that Blair was also re-elected.

In the US Bush was not in a position to argue that one of his motives for going to war was to support the Pacific and Atlantic alliances. Indeed, if he had he would have gained no credibility. Had he gained the support of the UN or the international community at large he might have received some external validation of his motives. However, the situation was that Bush had no way of getting, establishing or generating any external validation for his motives for going to war. When the possible existence of WMD's went away so did any hope of any external validation of Bush's motives. By 2006 Bush, while he personally held most sincere motives for opposing terrorists and the work of al-Qaeda in Iraq and around the world, had no external validation for his motives and justifications for war. The electoral consequences were seen in the 2006 Congressional Elections when the Republican majority in both houses was swept away. While there were other factors that were a part of this 2006 defeat, Bush lacked external justification for his motives.

In the contemporary setting of the postmodern mindset leaders need to be aware that it is their motives as much as their policies and plans that need justification. Justification is not found in the form of personal arguments that the leader puts forward, but justification is to be found externally from outside the leader and his supporters.

7. A radically new view of religion.

In the debates over the Iraq war the perception of the religious views of Prime Minister Howard, Prime Minister Blair and President Bush came under scrutiny in relation to the contemporary postmodern mindset's views of religion. In the case of President Bush the perception of his religious position further weakened his trust status. Let us first set the scene.

The events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in 2003 have certainly placed the issue of religion and religious extremism as a major social and political issue before the west in a way not seen since the time of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. The west, along with its various intellectual, political and religious structures, is under a siege from an eastern culture that comes out of a very different mindset and religious suppositions; one that is committed to tribal allegiances, a sectarianism that claims exclusive objective knowledge about truth and reality, and a religious fever bent on dominion over all the peoples of the earth.

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Complicating this situation is a growing and radically different religious mindset in the west. The modern secular society and mindset is yielding to a postmodern thorough-going cultural pluralism which desires a polite and affirming discourse that seeks to build an even greater mosaic of social, political and religious order. This cultural pluralism is open to all religious perspectives with only one exception, namely that any religious perspective, western or eastern, must be a participant in this polite and affirming discourse. The contemporary postmodern mindset operates around a thorough-going open-endedness about truth and reality, a view of discourse that focuses on interpretation and historical discontinuity, and a suspicion of all power structures, whether religious or secular.

While this issue of how the contemporary cultural pluralism of the west is to come to terms with the religious challenge from the east is an issue that needs further attention. The issue that we first need to come to terms with is the radical new view of religion and theology that is unfolding in the west and how it has impacted the discourse (or perhaps more correctly, limited the discourse) over the war in Iraq.

First, let us draw a contrast between the modern mindset and the growing post modern mindset on the issue of religion and theology in social and political life.

The modern secular mindset diminished the impact and influences in modern society of institutional religion and traditional theology. In the US concepts such as the separation of church and state had become a part of the modern approach to politics and public life. God was being separated from the public market place of intellectual and cultural dialogue. Indeed, whenever religion made claims to be heard in the debates about public policies, the majority of modern men and women branded such an intrusion as an exercise in extremism, bigotry, and irrelevancy. This is not to say that religion had no place in the public square. Rather, its place was to support the secular state and the modern concept of a pluralistic culture that tolerated all religious views but limited the exercise of religion to the privacy of one's personal life.

However, postmodernism's openness to cultural diversity and to all religious ideas old and new has created new sensibility to religious perspectives old and new. Richard Tarnas identifies this new openness to religion with "*the newly ambiguous intellectual circumstances of the postmodern era.*"²⁴ However, this new openness to religion is an openness to religion and theology as a cultural phenomena and not to religion as an institution or as a group of institutions.

One must not forget that postmodernism is inherently suspicious of all western intuitions and social structures, and religious institutions and structures are no exception. These institutions are perceived as structures of intolerance whose power agenda is antithetical to the postmodern conception of a pluralistic culture.

These distinctive perceptions of the postmodern mindset have profound implications for leadership and for trust in leadership. A leader who espouses "religion" in the public square needs to do so in a manner that is in tune with the openness of the postmodern mindset. However, where leaders are perceived as promoting a religious view that asserts claims of exclusive objective knowledge about truth and reality, and a religious fervor bent on dominion, or are perceived as promoting the programs of any of the institutions of religion, then these leaders immediately create for themselves a situation of distrust.

It is interesting that Prime Minister Howard (Liberal Party), Prime Minister Blair (Labor Party) and President Bush (Republican Party) have all expressed themselves to be men of faith and all three are perceived as being regular church goers. In terms of affirming the symbols of cultural pluralism all three leaders have stated on various occasions their commitment to religious freedom and tolerance. Even in the aftermath of terrible terror attacks, all three have called for understanding of non extremist Muslim religious groups. While some misgivings about Howard's and Blair's religious commitments have been expressed over the years, it is President Bush whose religious views have been perceived by many as bordering on sectarian.²⁵ While Bush is clearly sincere in openly connecting himself with the evangelical and religious right in

²⁴ Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind : Understanding the Ideas That Have Shaped Our World View*, 403.

²⁵ Kengor, *God and George W. Bush : A Spiritual Life*, Errington and Van Onselen, *John Winston Howard*, Stephens, *Tony Blair : The Making of a World Leader*.

America he has connected himself to their perceived claims of exclusive objective knowledge about truth and reality, and their religious evangelical fever.

Conclusion

The loss of trust in government in our time may have come because of a number of factors. This paper has set out some of the tension points between the contemporary postmodern mindset and discourse that has taken place over the Iraq war.

Each of these tension points brings out various issues that negatively impacted the community's trust in the US, UK, and Australian governments over the war in Iraq. However, three general observations ought to be drawn.

First, when justifying policy positions and programs leaders need to realize that, in the context of the contemporary postmodern community mindset, the process of discourse needs to be continuous. Policies and programs are constantly being evaluated, and then re-evaluated and re-interpreted. The discourse and dialogue between those leading and those being led needs to have a credible sense of being genuinely open.

Secondly, in the context of a contemporary community mindset that is moving towards a thoroughgoing cultural pluralism, those which have been traditional modern symbols, values, and social and political structures may no longer be valued or hold the same sway in debates as had previously been experienced. The debates and discourse over the Iraq war and its aftermath indicate that the symbols of modern western society, such as democracy, free enterprise, freedom and secularism, may not be as "important" in the community mindset as peace, respect for different cultures (eastern as well as western) and different social structures. Similarly, even when there is a good case for security and defensive action the great western democracies must ensure that their actions do not raise the specter of past imperialism.

Thirdly, in the context of the contemporary postmodern mindset that is quietly convinced that government and leadership in general are engaging in an exercise of Nietzsche's "will to power", a leader's motives are perhaps even more important than policies. It is essential that a leader's

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motives be open and visible, and that they be credible and preferably justified by an external source.

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