Religion and public morality pre-1945

Christian influences on public morality can be seen in the examples of Sabbatarianism, family law and laws relating to the consumption of liquor and the regulation of gambling.

1. Sabbatarianism
Sunday observance has always been followed differently in the different churches. In the 19th century an influential coalition of Protestants fought any attempts to weaken the sanctity of the Christian Sabbath.

2. Such groups opposed Sunday work, as well as the sale of goods, the playing of sport, the opening of hotels and theatres, and the running of public transport on the Sabbath.

3. Roman Catholics rejected the justification offered by Protestants. Catholics were obliged to attend mass and to abstain from servile labour, but once religious obligations had been met they were free to pursue recreation.

4. Sabbath observance was often lax in the bush, and some radicals saw Sabbatarianism as another form of oppression against the working class.

Divorce
In the 19th century there were bitter struggles over attempts to liberalise the divorce law. In New South Wales in 1886, an eminent judge, Sir Alfred Stephen, a devout Anglican, led the campaign to widen the grounds for divorce. The campaign was pursued in spite of opposition from bishops. The reforms became law in 1892.

1. Alcohol, gambling and censorship
Many Protestants were concerned about the social problems caused by alcoholism and gambling. They wanted to ban the sale of liquor altogether. Such a ban was unlikely to be legislated, for too many Christians saw no harm in responsible drinking and believed that legal prohibition would create more problems than it solved.

2. The high point of temperance campaigns was reached during the First World War, when a significant majority voted for the closing of hotels. Influenced by the Protestant churches, such legislation persisted until the 1950s. Local opinion still ensures that some suburbs have no licensed hotels today.

3. Church opposition to the restriction of gambling lasted much longer, with roots lying in the 19th century denunciation of games by Methodists and other Baptists.

4. Such attempts to social control have been called 'wowserism'. These views were strongly influenced by the tradition of virtuous living and moral virtue at touchstone times; the example of the body that adhered public holiness, diligence to virtues and virtues, the breaking of the Sabbath and the support of moral and immoral habits. Based on the example of social reform and the service of God and mankind, werewolves must look itself to define and control.

Christian attempts to control leisure can also be seen in the troubled history of censorship. The prohibition of the sale of certain books and newspapers, the banning of some plays and films, and the closing of the theatre and other venues provided opportunities for the application of the Christian conviction that there were certain forms of entertainment that were intrinsically corrupt or offensive, and that these should not be published, performed or broadcast.

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