

## **No More Public Prayer in the Senate?**

There is a move to do away with public prayer in the Parliament. Greens Senator Bob Brown has announced that he will seek to have Senate Standing Order 50 changed. This Standing Order requires the President of the Senate to open each day's business with a public prayer to God.

The Acting President of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference, Archbishop Francis Carroll, has issued the following statement:

Senator Brown has suggested that the current wording of the prayers is out of date. However, it is not only the wording of the prayers that Senator Brown wants to change. His motion would have the effect of removing all reference to God.

Senator Brown does not want the Senators to acknowledge a higher power than themselves. And yet, these days, as our country faces deep questions of justice in native title and other issues of public policy, we need that acknowledgment more than ever.

Senator Brown's proposal does not reflect the beliefs of our pluralistic nation. It is true that Christianity is the belief professed by the large majority of Australians. It is also true that there are many others who acknowledge God in terms of Jewish or Moslem belief, or without allegiance to any specific religion.

The wording of the prayers may well need improving, but their substance and central message, which is expressed in the preamble to our Constitution, should not be obscured. We unite as a nation "humbly relying on the blessing of Almighty God". It is a message which needs to be proclaimed more clearly if we are to find, and persevere in, the path of respect for human rights and of national reconciliation.