Australian Soul challenges the idea that religious and spiritual life in Australia is in decline. This fascinating book describes the character of religious and spiritual life in Australia today, and argues that, far from petering out, religion and spirituality are thriving.

Gary Bouma, the leading expert on the state of religious life in Australia, provides the most up-to-date facts and figures and compares the ‘tone’ of our religious practices with those of other countries. Australians might be less vocal and more reticent about their religion than Americans are, but their religious and spiritual beliefs are no less potent. Australian Soul describes and analyses our religious and spiritual life in detail as well as providing a series of case studies that illustrate the range of practices and beliefs in Australia today.

Australian Soul predicts a vital future for religion and spirituality.

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AUSTRALIAN SOUL
Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-first Century

Gary Bouma
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Even before September 11, 2001 religion and spirituality were gaining increasing attention and discussion both in Australia (Tacey 2000, 2003) and in other parts of the world (Anderson 2004; McGrath 2002; Martin 2002). Since then there has been a rapid increase in publications dealing with religion and spirituality, particularly those discussing Islam, Buddhism and global movements in the realm of the religious. This change has taken many by surprise. After all, according to the dominant sociological view of the last half of the twentieth century, religion, along with the state, was supposed to wither away as the successes of modern, secular rationalism in the form of science overcame the vicissitudes of life: poverty, illness and indeed death itself, thus making the religious, the mystical and the spiritual unnecessary. Death, plagues, genocides and the failure of attempts to bring about global peace, harmony and justice have radically undermined the underlying optimism of those assumptions. Secular humanism has not proven as satisfying as many thought it would be. The best evidence of this is the rise of other philosophies and world views, including religions and spiritualities, alongside a discernible reawakening of more traditional forms of the religious life. However, the return of the religious and spiritual is not merely a return to times past. This reawakening is taking place in a different sociocultural environment: a world characterised by the global movement of ideas, capital and people; and a world to which some are happy to apply the term ‘postmodernity’; that is, a world that is radically different to modernity. While some prefer to speak of high modernity (Giddens 1997; Beckford 2003), the choice is a matter of taste and the argument not worth a candle as both groups agree that today is substantially different from the immediate post-war period and from the 1950s. For Australia, this postmodernity is also secular and post-Christendom.
A secular, postmodern and post-Christendom society presents a different context for religious and spiritual life. The secularity of the twenty-first century is not anti-religious or irreligious, as it was in the twentieth century (Fenn 2001). Rather, according to Fenn, contemporary secularity is best seen as a social condition in which the religious and spiritual have moved out from the control of both the state and such formal organisations as the church. No longer strictly controlled, the forms taken by the religious and spiritual become increasingly varied, divisions between the forms previously assumed to be fixed blur and the ethical implications of belief are less clear. The implications of these changes for Australia’s religious and spiritual life and for social policy are discussed in chapters 4 and 5 while the responses to these changes are examined in chapters 6 and 7.

While some scholars blench at the term ‘postmodern’ (Beckford 2003; Giddens 1997: 526–529) and argue that the degree of change does not warrant the claim to a radical break with the recent past, I find the concept useful in describing the social and cultural changes currently shaping Australia’s religious and spiritual life. Many of those who reject the use of the term ‘postmodern’ react understandably to some of the excesses in the early formulation of this term. Others who object are often either American scholars whose sociocultural context is not postmodern but appropriately described as a high modern industrial and imperial, or European scholars whose religious context is still subject to much higher levels of state control to constrain diversity. Australian society provides an opportunity to examine the workings of twenty-first-century secular postmodernity in a post-Christendom context.

This book is for people who want to understand Australians and the nature of twenty-first-century religious and spiritual life in Australia. Australian society can be seen as post-empire, post-colonial, post-modern, post-ecumenical, post-secular and post-family. As a result of this unique social structure and culture Australians experience religion and express spirituality in distinct ways.

This book is also intended for students of sociology and theology as much as it is intended for those who work as clergy: priests, pastors, imams and leaders of religious communities; indeed anyone who seeks to shape, nurture or develop Australian religiosity. This includes counsellors, social planners and marketers – anyone who is interested in the nature of Australian life.
Most particularly, this book is for sociologists. Understanding the nature and operation of Australian religion and spirituality is important to an understanding of Australian society. Some sociologists of the late twentieth century failed to notice the religious and spiritual in Australian life because they confused it with what happens, or was supposed to happen, in churches or other formally organised forms of the religious and spiritual. Few sociologists have taken seriously the religious and spiritual life of Australia, often because their expectations have been shaped by secular, anti-religious social theories on the one hand or by negative comparisons between Australian and American religious activity on the other.

I take sociology to be that discipline that seeks to find in differences or changes in the qualities, quantities and arrangements of sociocultural contexts partial explanations for some patterns in human life. After a discussion of the nature of the religious and spiritual in chapter 1 this book describes the qualities (chapter 2) and quantities (chapter 3) of Australian religious and spiritual life, including the way they have been shaped by their sociocultural origins. Then the book explores those factors at work to change Australian religion and spirituality (chapters 4 and 5) and the responses being made to these changes (chapters 6 and 7). Chapter 8 explores current issues of religion and public policy. Finally, chapter 9 revisits the question of hope in the light of the analysis of Australia's religious and spiritual life. In addition to data from a variety of sources and my own experiences, I have included a number of spirituality vignettes or case studies to provide an exposure to the variety of spiritualities current in Australian society.

Gary Bouma
Ash Wednesday, 2006
I am deeply indebted to the Re-Shaping Australian Institutions project conducted by the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, and in particular Professor John Braithwaite, Professor Geoffrey Brennan and Professor Frank Jones, who provided an opportunity to think and reflect on these issues.

I am also indebted to my postgraduate students who met in a monthly proseminar to discuss issues related to Australia’s religious and spiritual life. Several have read sections of the manuscript of this book, in particular, John Rietveld, Bob Dixon, Tuba Boz, Laine Duffy, Victoria Yew, Jennifer Sinclair, Peter Pfizner, Rod Ling, S. Bruce Thomson and Rabbi John Levi, who did to my manuscript what I do to their theses.

A vote of thanks to Dr Sylvie Shaw, who provided several of the case studies about Australian spirituality that are interspersed through the book to give rich examples of the variety of Australian religious and spiritual life. Thanks to Mark Manolopoulos who diligently read several drafts, commented thoroughly and provided a case study of his own. Anna Halafoff has provided a helpful Buddhist perspective at the end. Finally, thanks to Dr Ian Dobson and Naomi Berman for producing the tables in chapter 3.

I am also deeply indebted to my father, Dr Donald H. Bouma, from whom I first learned about sociology, theology and critical thinking about their relationship to each other, to life and to society.

Last and foremost I am indebted to my wife, the Reverend Patricia V. Bouma, from whom I have learned a great deal about spiritualities, contemporary and traditional, and how their various forms have many mothers whose progeny are often hard to distinguish.
Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

As we find ourselves increasingly in a twenty-first-century postmodern and secular world where spiritualities are rife and religious diversity is an accepted feature of a seriously multicultural society, it is time once again to consider the nature of Australian religion and spirituality. One piece of evidence supporting the reality of the change in religion and spirituality is that it is now possible to speak of Australian religion without facing glum stares or peals of laughter. This was not so when I arrived in Australia in 1979. Secularism was in its heyday, universities its temples, and professors of philosophy and sociology among its high priests. While to many educated in the 1960s and 1970s ‘Australian religion’ was a contradiction in terms or at best an embarrassing legacy of the forgettable past, that is not so now. The life of the spirit, the practice of the presence of the numinous, the more-than-the-ordinary, the heartfelt connection with life, the practice of divine arts, the search for more holistic healing of more than just the body, and the desire to address the social policy implications of religious belief permeate Australian culture as practised and experienced daily.

Moreover, where Australian religion and spirituality are being taken seriously, they are being taken seriously in a distinctively Australian way. These Australian characteristics include a tentatively curious exploration involving listening, attending, venturing with the whole person and being true to one’s experience. They also involve being unsure about foreign categories or techniques, being hesitant in the presence of certainty, doubtful when faced with a faith declared with too much surety, and often happier with the questions
than with what some pose as answers. Australian spirituality, both indigenous and more recently arrived, is grounded in place and land. Australian sacred places can be found in the bush and in the cities and towns. They are there; they are used, but may become apparent only when threatened.

A shy hope in the heart

‘A whisper in the mind and a shy hope in the heart’ is a phrase used by Manning Clark to describe—and by Thornhill to refer to—a key characteristic of the ANZAC psyche or spirit (Thornhill 1992: 172–173). ‘A shy hope in the heart’ aptly expresses the nature of Australian religion and spirituality. There is a profound shyness—yet a deeply grounded hope—held tenderly in the heart, in the heart of Australia. It is not characteristically Australian to trumpet encounters with the spiritual like some American televangelist. That would be an obscene dealing with what is so precious. Australians hold the spiritual gently in their hearts, speaking tentatively about it. The spiritual is treated as sacred. What is held protectively in the heart is sacred; the sacred is handled with great care. Not all things that evoke awe and wonder are loud and noisy, brassy and for sale. For example, the prophet Elijah (I Kings 19: 9–13), wanting to see God in the cataclysmic, the huge, the thunderous and overwhelming, was treated to a ‘still small voice’, according to the King James Version, or the ‘sound of deep silence’, as translated for the New Revised Standard Version—a shy hope in the heart.

This book first uses an institutions perspective to describe Australian religion and how it has been reshaped through migration, separation from Britain and emancipation from the USA and forced to an emerging awareness of her Asian context. Then the factors of cultural change, revitalisation and globalisation currently shaping Australia’s religious institution are delineated and their relation to social policy described with a glimpse into the future.

The setting – Australian society

To understand religion and spirituality, it is necessary to understand their sociocultural contexts. Religion and spirituality are different in postmodern
secular societies. While much has been written about secularisation, post-modernisation and globalisation (see Beckford 2003), the actualities of these processes in a particular society have not been teased out in systematic detail. Doing so will enable a better grasp not only of these key processes of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries but also of the nature of religious and spiritual life as lived today in order to detect trends that may well extend into the near future.

This examination of religion and spirituality focuses on Australia because it is an example of the direction of current sociocultural change. While Australia’s deep Aboriginal origins have been largely ignored, they remain present and active. While of British modern origin, Australian society is not British. While heavily overlaid with substantial European migration, it is not European. While deeply allied with the USA in foreign policy and subject to massive cultural injection from the USA, it is not American. While close to Asia, it is not Asian. On the other hand, Australia is one of the most advanced multicultural societies and has seen itself as secular for decades. Australia can be seen as a postmodern, secular and multicultural society. As such, Australia provides a different context for the production of religious belief and practice, a different context for the enactment of spirituality. Insofar as postmodernity, secularity and multicultural diversity characterise or lie in the future of other societies, this analysis of Australia’s religious and spiritual life may shed light on their situation. To the extent that these features of Australia’s religious and spiritual life do not apply to other societies, this analysis will provide a useful comparative study that adds to our knowledge of the diversity of ways societies are religious and spiritual.

Postmodern

Few terms raise more dust than postmodernity. This book neither describes nor seeks to settle that dust. Instead, I argue that Australia can be considered postmodern in many ways; that is, significantly different from modern. Much of the argument about postmodernity hangs on whether the writer sees the social and cultural changes that have occurred and are occurring as significantly different from what had been happening in modernity, or simply (much) more of the same.

I find it helps to remember what modernity was supposed to be. The search for the single best product, the one way of life, the single unifying religion, the most productive economic order or the most efficient
organisational style characterises the modern. Modernity was also characterised by dichotomous thinking: us vs them, black vs white, East vs West, right vs wrong, poor vs rich and left vs right. Modernity offered and sought a single meta-narrative; what Berger (1967) referred to as a Sacred Canopy, an integrative story or religious belief that united into one meaningful whole all of life, linking the activities of each group, unit and person in a society.

Modernity reached full expression in World War II when the globe was divided into a worldwide ‘us against them’, pitting the righteous side against darkest evil. World War II provided the unifying meta-narrative of all-out war and a cause that unified diversities as great as race, gender, class and ethnicity into one single-minded war machine. It gave birth to a massive modern myth and socially integrating ideology. This ethos was sustained after World War II by the Cold War. Again, it was us against them; the powers of light against atheistic communism; and the liberation of reason against the dark tyranny of despotic totalitarianism. While the rhetoric of modernity continued during the Cold War, many felt that the experience of World War II was a high point in their lives. Never again would they feel so purposeful, dignified and right.

Echoes of this time, of modernity, are heard today in calls for a single culture, assimilation to one way of being Australian, a single religion to unite and legitimate the state, and some arguments that there are limits to multicultural diversity. Nostalgia for the unified, single purpose, one for all and all for one, the adrenalin rush of the call to total war drives some calls for unity – read uniformity and singularity – in the policies of churches, educational organisations and governments. Moreover, modernity continues strong and healthy in the United States, which is one of the reasons the term is so debated. Postmodernity does not fit with the experience of those sociologists who live in societies characterised by high industrial modernity. Pax Americana seeks to insert its view of democracy as the only view; it imposes its foreign policy using ‘us against them’ imagery and all but the word ‘crusade’. Modernity can also be detected in much of what passes for contemporary corporate management: declare your goals, aims, objectives; have a single big ambition; design all activities towards achieving a single goal, and integrate divisions, departments and units.
Australia sits differently. This ancient land, recently called Australia, is diverse, for tens of thousands of years comprising hundreds of indigenous societies and cultures, and of late being populated by many ethnic groups, including the English, Irish and others who at one time took themselves as normal and referred to others as ‘ethnics’. Even in my short sojourn of just over a quarter-century in Australia, I have witnessed the adoption of Italians and Greeks into the ‘normal’ and out of the ‘ethnic’ category. Australia has many religious groups. The Church of England is no longer hegemonically normal. Even as the Catholic Church became ethnically more diverse, it also became mainstream both in its self-perception and in its social location. Australia is multicultural and multifaith. Being consciously multifaith is part of being a postmodern society.

Secular

Before proceeding, it is essential to correct a misapprehension that dominated the late twentieth-century discussion of religion and secularity: secular societies are not irreligious, antireligious or lacking in spirituality (Wilson 1966, 1982; Martin 1978; Fenn 2001; Beckford 2003). Whatever theories of secularisation predicted, it has become extremely clear at the opening of the twenty-first century that spirituality is not on the decline, that religion is growing in strength in most areas of the world (Martin 2005), and that religious belief and practice have moved towards the centre of many public policy issues in Australia (Maddox 2005). Rather, in secular societies religion and spirituality have seeped out of the monopolistic control of formal organisations like churches. This has resulted in vastly increased diversity of both organised religion and private spiritualities. In this newly emerging context, sociologies of religion that focus on religious organisations – churches, mosques, synagogues and temples – are likely to miss much of the action, particularly if attention is paid to those that were prominent, mainstream and influential through much of the twentieth century.

The secularity pointed to by much twentieth-century theorising was driven by an ideology of secularism (Beckford 2003). However, religion has not withered away, although those seeking evidence of decline can certainly find it in the falling fortunes of what were in the twentieth century referred to as mainstream religious groups. In the West, this mainstream was
either Protestant (the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia), Catholic (France, Brazil, Spain, Italy) or Orthodox (Russia, Greece, Bulgaria). But of course neither the West nor the USA was ever the whole picture, although at times they certainly give the impression that they were, if not the whole picture, then certainly an advanced position on the path we were all to tread sooner or later. However, the evidence that irreligious secularity is not the future of us all has become increasingly clear at both the centre and the fringes. The ‘inexplicably’ high level of religious participation, belief and influence in the USA continues to be an empirical thorn in the side of secularisationists – those ideologically committed to the inevitability of irreligion for developed societies (Davie 2002). Meanwhile, religious revitalisation accompanies economic development in Latin America, Asia and Africa in ways that suggest it would be useful to revisit Max Weber’s ‘Protestant Ethic Thesis’.

Hence, the understanding of secularity as a social condition in which the religious and spiritual have moved out from the control of religious organisations, out from the domination of churches, proposed by Fenn (2001), seems to be much more useful in seeing and understanding current trends in religion and spirituality. This is particularly true in Australia, which has never been energetically religious like the USA, nor as irreligiously secular as Sweden, but where religion and spirituality seem to be undergoing change rather than simple decline. If indeed we are witnessing change rather than simply decline in the religious and spiritual (Davie, Heelas & Woodhead 2003), then it may be possible to detect aspects of the nature of these changes in Australia. A description of these changes should attract the attention both of those wishing to understand Australia and of those wanting to understand the current directions of change in religion and spirituality.

**Diverse**

The global movement of people and ideas has transformed Australia’s religious and spiritual domain and produced a rich diversity. Australia’s multicultural society provides a tolerant – within describable limits – context for the exploration and expression of spirituality and religious practice. There is much more diversity in Australia’s religious life than there was at the high watermark of modernity in the 1950s. As we shall see,
there are more denominations of Christianity, a wider diversity within each denomination of Christianity and a richer diversity of other religious groups. For example, the Catholic Church was transformed by the immigration of large numbers of Italians who brought forms of Marian devotion and veneration of saints not as prevalent in the Irish-dominated church that received, if not welcomed, them (Lewins 1978). This example is critical because it demonstrates that ethnicity is associated with forms of religion and spirituality. The global movement of people carries with it the global movement of spiritualities as well as religions and cultures.

At the same time, globalisation links the elements of Australia’s religious and spiritual life to their counterparts around the world. Through these links even small groups can be sustained by electronic association with extensive virtual communities. While the global movement of religious and spiritual ideas and practices may write over some of Australia’s distinctiveness, this has not completely erased the effect of the local. Rather, Australian society and culture have tended to shape the local practice of imported religious and spiritual goods.

As a result of rising diversity, increasing secularity and the global movement of religious and spiritual ideas, beliefs and theologies, and spiritual technologies, such as meditation, liturgies and mega-churches, the ways religion and spirituality relate to social policy have shifted and the issues of concern are different. Diversity has brought some ideas and practices that challenge acceptability. Old alliances between government and a few religious groups break down as a wider diversity of religious belief and spirituality relate in new ways to issues of work, family, leisure, culture and security.

**Defining religion and spirituality**

Defining religion and spirituality has exercised the minds of philosophers and sociologists for centuries. Weber refused to try. Others have only to be challenged by those who differ. Beckford (2003) cuts this Gordian knot by the very sociological argument that groups and societies define what counts as religious or spiritual and that these differences in definition, and indeed
the process of definition itself, provide critical clues to the nature of the religious and its role in a society. Certainly there have been debates over what is to be labelled religious in Australian society. The emergence of new religious movements such as Mahikari and Tenrikyo (Clarke 2006; Bouma, Smith & Vasi 2000) has challenged the established religious order of societies and raised such questions as whether these groups are religions. Some of these questions are answered in court cases, the most famous dealing with Scientology.

Scientology has grown and attracts high-profile converts such as Tom Cruise and John Travolta as well as many ordinary people. It has, like many new religious movements, suffered resistance to its presence in the community. However, most new religious movements that survive the generation of their founding develop levels of acceptance that permit them to offer their approaches. This acceptance has been facilitated by the ability of new religious groups to appeal to guarantees of freedom of religion enshrined in the Australian Constitution. Such appeals have largely been successful following the High Court definition of religion in the early 1980s (High Court of Australia Church of the New Faith v. Commissioner for Pay-Roll Tax 154 CLR 120).

In response to the question about whether Scientology was a religion, the High Court of Australia in 1983 proposed the following test. A religious group is one that offers:

1 a belief in something supernatural, some reality beyond that which can be conceived by the senses;
2 that the belief in question relates to man’s nature and place in the universe and his relationship to things supernatural;
3 as a result of this belief adherents are required or encouraged to observe particular codes of conduct or engage in particular practices that have supernatural significance; and
4 the adherents comprise one or more identifiable groups (Church of the New Faith v. Commissioner for Pay-Roll Tax 154 CLR 120).

These High Court criteria reflect Australian community understandings: that religions focus on things beyond the material, beliefs locating the human in the cosmos, practices related to these beliefs and the formation of a group of adherents.
Seeking cleansing, clarification and enlightenment via Scientology

Spending time in the sauna, going for a run in the park, eating a healthy diet. Sounds like the prescription for a new weight loss program rather than a religious practice, but in fact these three elements, sauna, exercise and healthy eating, are the foundation of what’s known as the ‘Purification Rundown’ in the Church of Scientology. It is a process of physical and emotional cleansing that prepares people for their entry and full participation in the life of the Church.

As an initiation rite, the Purification Rundown has been specially formulated by the founder of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, to address what he identified is a major component of the contemporary spiritual malaise: the chemical and radiation toxicity of much of our environment and many of our less enlightened activities.

The Purification Rundown, or ‘Purif’ as it is known, aims to strengthen the body through exercise and good nutrition and to remove any accumulated toxins from the body. A healthy body leads to a healthy mind. A healthy body and healthy mind pave the way for spiritual enlightenment. People who have been through the process describe it as ‘marvellous’. It aims to bring a sense of peace, abundant energy and spiritual inspiration. For some the going can be difficult, and they feel a real achievement at the end. One participant loved the process, saying he ‘felt mentally clarified and spiritually renewed’. Another said she ‘had the best time of her life’; she felt so healthy, her body felt ‘lighter’ and she had an enhanced sense of joy and well-being.

People come into Scientology from a range of different sources. They might be on a journey of self-discovery and spiritual exploration and find that Scientology’s outlook and philosophy stimulates their interest, or they might have experienced deep personal issues such as the death of one’s parents, the breakdown of a marriage, or involvement in drugs and alcohol. By going through the Purification Rundown, which may take around four weeks, participants find that they not only have a new outlook on life, they also feel healthier, clearer about their life’s direction and spiritually uplifted. One participant commented that he had finally found what he had been looking for. And as a bonus, he was now free from drugs and alcohol.

At the end of the Rundown the participants are welcomed as members of the Church of Scientology. Their decision to transform their lives and their determination to persevere through the Rundown process is acknowledged and applauded.

Sylvie Shaw
In the debate about Scientology it became clear that to apply the criteria used to exclude this religious group more generally would require the exclusion of other groups already well accepted as religious groups. The process and the Australian response indicated that Australia’s definition of religion was widening in response to greatly increased cultural and religious diversity.

Religion and spirituality both relate to dimensions of human life that intersect with but point beyond the ordinary, the temporal, the material and the physical; hence the use of such prefixes as meta-, trans-, super- and extra- in the description of spiritual and religious phenomena. The terms ‘spiritual’ and ‘religion’ are not synonymous. Since the 1990s the term ‘spiritual’ has become popular, while the appeal of the term ‘religion’ is waning. Because of its association with formal organisations the term ‘religion’ has taken on a rather negative connotation.

Aboriginal spirituality

The Aboriginal spirituality website maintained by the National Museum of Australia (www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenous/spirituality.cfm) presents an understanding of the spiritualities of Indigenous Australians and provides helpful examples of spirituality.

One of the key terms is ‘the Dreaming’. According to Merv Penrith (Elder, Wallaga Lake, 1996), ‘The Dreaming means our identity as people. The cultural teaching and everything, that’s part of our lives here, you know? . . . it’s the understanding of what we have around us.’

The Dreaming has different meanings for different Aboriginal people. It is a complex network of knowledge, faith and practices that derive from stories of creation, and which dominates all spiritual and physical aspects of Aboriginal life. The Dreaming sets out the structures of society, the rules for social behaviour and the ceremonies performed in order to maintain the life of the land.

It governed the way people lived and how they should behave.

Those who did not follow the rules were punished.

The Dreamtime or Dreaming is often used to describe the time when the earth and humans and animals were created. The Dreaming is also used by individuals to refer to their own dreaming or their community’s dreaming. During the Dreaming, ancestral spirits came to earth and created the landforms, the animals and plants. The stories tell how the ancestral spirits moved through the land creating rivers,
Introduction

lakes and mountains. Today we know the places where the ancestral spirits have been and where they came to rest. There are explanations of how people came to Australia and the links between the groups throughout Australia. There are explanations about how people learnt languages and dance and how they came to know about fire.

In essence, the Dreaming comes from the land. In Aboriginal society people did not own the land: it was part of them and it was part of their duty to respect and look after mother earth. The Dreaming did not end with the arrival of Europeans but simply entered a new phase. It is a powerful living force that must be maintained and cared for.

The Dreaming is celebrated, honoured and taught through Dreaming Stories.

Dreaming stories vary throughout Australia and there are different versions on the same theme. For example the story of how the birds got their colours differs in New South Wales and in Western Australia.

Stories cover many themes and topics. There are stories about creation of sacred places, landforms, people, animals and plants. There are also stories of language or the first use of fire. In more recent times there are stories telling of the arrival of the first Europeans on ships or stories about trading with Macassan fishermen in Northern Australia.


Both spiritualities and religions have ethical dimensions governing relations with humans, with the beyond and with the environment. These reflect ideals for the shape and nature of society. While essential for promoting healthy human association, these spiritual and religious ideals can be seen as oppressive by some. From the early nineteenth century, in Australia religion was associated with a punitive imposed order and wowserism, which was seen by many as the attempt to throw wet blankets over those few enjoyments open to an impoverished general population, and by others as the attempt to remove life-destroying evils of drinking, gambling and carousing.

In postmodernity, definitional concerns tend to focus less on establishing boundaries between concepts and more on indicating the central tendency
of a concept. Such definitions sensitise the observer to the feel of the terrain, the domain of interest. In secularity, definitions of the religious and spiritual are less likely to refer to organisations. In a multicultural, religiously plural society, definitions of the religious and spiritual will be constructed to take in a diversity of religious traditions and not define one in terms of another. The following effort tries to be true to Beckford’s call and to the sociocultural context provided for the religious and spiritual by Australia.

As it is used in Australia today, the ‘spiritual’ refers to an experiential journey of encounter and relationship with otherness, with powers, forces and beings beyond the scope of everyday life. To be spiritual is to be open to this ‘more than’ in life, to expect to encounter it and to expect to relate to it. Tacey (2003: 1) refers to a ‘spirituality revolution’: ‘It is a spontaneous movement in society, a new interest in the reality of spirit and its healing effects on life…’ Tacey sees the spirituality revolution as a response to the fact that ‘our society has been running on empty, and has to restore itself at a deep, primal source, a source which is beyond humanity and yet paradoxically at the very core of our experience’. This hunger for something more than the material is fed by experiences that draw the person into relationship, out of and beyond self, through encounters with forces, powers and visions that are beyond the mundane and yet deeply present in the everyday.

Being spiritual can be done alone and often is. At the most basic, to be spiritual is to allow self to be open to relationships, experiences and realities outside the ordinary frame of life, or to admit that there are more dimensions to life than time and space. At the core of spirituality is the encounter with the other, some other, be it God, nature, a tree, the sea, some other person or the core of our own being. This otherness is often experienced as being other than material, not limited to the constraints of material being – time, place, space, or life and death. People report that such an encounter affirms the reality of the person, the other, and a larger frame of being both uniting and defining each (Hay & Morisey 1978). Encounters may also be confronting. Brady (1998: 8) points out that spiritualities are neither ‘merely individual or inward-looking’ but help ‘us to come to terms with our place in the world, geographically and historically, and with the indigenous peoples of the land . . .’. Thus, while some see spirituality as essentially an individual activity and reflective of cultures of individualism, spirituality always involves the self in relation with some other and indeed is
more profoundly relational than it is individual. Like religions, spiritualities can be transforming and may raise ethical issues.

Spirituality has also come to be associated with movements and groups that are not usually seen as religious. Books have been written about women’s and feminist spirituality and about men’s spirituality – although the former seems more likely than the latter. Recently there has been an increased awareness of the spiritual dimension of efforts to protect and nurture the environment (Shaw 2002). Seeing a spiritual dimension to these activities has become increasingly popular. Spiritual terminology has also emerged in the corporate sphere as mission statements are devised and motivational jargon takes on language sounding most otherworldly and faith-based – if only faith in self and company. The following case study gives the flavour of this kind of spirituality in Australia.

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**Saltwater spirituality**

It’s the night of the full moon and there’s a ritual going on at the beach. With the sound of waves breaking and the wind blowing off the ocean, a pagan group stand in a circle, barefoot on the sand, paying homage to the moon. Dressed in dark cloaks but skyclad (or naked) beneath their robes, the pagans perform their sacred ritual. With prayers and invocations, chants and dance, they connect with each other, and with the gods and goddesses of sea and sky. At dawn the next morning, while the moon hangs low over the horizon, one of the pagans dons his wetsuit, picks up his surfboard, and walks towards the sea. And just as pagans wield an athame (or small dagger) for casting their ceremonial ritual circle, the surfing pagan wields his surfboard to push through the shore-break and enter sacred space. Every entry is a ritual. For sea witches, connecting with the water and the wild ocean waves is an integral part of their spiritual practice. Whether they go surfing or fishing, they are connecting with deities who demand great respect, as the ocean can take life in an instant.

Paganism, one of the fastest growing religions in Australia, is a religion that venerates nature. Pagans and witches, or Wiccans as they are known, pay homage to the phases of the moon, the changing seasons and the turning of the tides; they also work to protect the natural environment and honour the interconnections between themselves and the whole cosmos. Paganism originated in the British Isles, and pagan rituals and ceremonies usually take place on land, in valleys, sacred groves and stone circles. But Australian pagans have adapted their spirituality to local conditions and so performing
a ritual to honour the sea or catching a wave or a fish is embraced as part of their spiritual repertoire.

Putting her life in the hands of the gods, the pagan fisher climbs gingerly down the steep sea-cliffs to the rocky ledge below. She ties a talisman to her rod and tackle box so that, even when not fishing, the gear holds the memory of the food-catching ritual. And as she throws out the line, she visualises the fish swimming up and taking the bait. She becomes part of the ocean, connecting with the subtle energies of moon and tides and with the fish on the end of the line.

Sea witches seek energy nexes in the ocean. They tune in to the movement of the waves, the pull of the tides, the relation between sun, moon and earth, the lay of the coast and ocean bed, the influence of wind. As the soul surfers glide down the wave and lose themselves in the moment, they become one with nature. But it can be a risky business. In negotiating the space between life and possible death, in the euphoria of primordial excitement, the bliss takes over and, for that brief moment, they are flying.

Shaw and Tacey are correct in arguing that concern for the environment may take spiritual new age and pagan forms, but it is also evident in mainstream groups. ‘A spirituality sensitive to the environment is now widespread among Catholics and has been endorsed and promoted in numerous ways, including the establishment of Catholic Earthcare Australia by the Australian Catholic Bishops Council’ (Dixon 2005b). The Uniting Church has been at the forefront of developing liturgies that celebrate and care for the environment. This is in addition to, grows out of and provides much of the energy for religiously grounded political and social action movements aimed at caring for the environment.

The ‘spirituality revolution’ takes many other forms, including a rising appeal to young people of monastic forms of life, much to the surprise of the baby boomers. Meditation is offered within traditions that range from Anglicanism to Zen. While meditation is often seen as of ‘eastern’ origin, Christian groups have rediscovered the ancient roots of this practice in their own history. People are seeking wonderment, inner journeying and simply being more deeply attentive to themselves and others. They are re-enchanting a world disenchanted by secular ideologies of materialism and
corporate greed. This rich diversity of experience and encounter provides the ongoing vitality of spirituality and religious movements.

As currently used in Australia, the term ‘religion’ refers to more socially organised and structured ways of being spiritual. Such religions as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Hinduism, among others, provide deep and rich traditions of the practice of being spiritual. Each religion has many strands of tradition and a wide variety of ways of developing the spiritual practice and life of followers. They have also borrowed extensively from each other over the centuries. Religions have social structures of officials to promote the practice of their forms of spirituality, to ensure proper practice and to relate to other organisations and the state. Through such organisations, religions have made available many forms of spirituality. At the same time some people feel these structures have interfered with the very things religions are supposed to do.

While spirituality may be pursued and experienced individually, religion, like most other human activity, is essentially social – foundationally the activity of a group. Groups induct people into spiritual beliefs and practices, groups nurture commitment, groups define what is acceptable in the realm of the religious or spiritual. In addition, religion is organised. Religions offer established patterns of ways of approaching the beyond, the numinous and the powers of life, the gods or god. Spirituality is more free-form and flexible, at least at the outset. But here again, what the individual expects from the spiritual is shaped by the sociocultural context. Like any other human activity, anything spiritual done more than once and by a group quickly becomes socially organised and hence religious.

I have defined spirituality and religion as separate and consider it useful at this time to view them as in many ways distinct because of the way the term ‘religion’ has been overtaken by formally organised Christian structures. The use of the term ‘spirituality’ in this alerts the reader to the fact that we are talking about more than what happens in and is organised by churches. In doing this I have pointed to the central features of each of spirituality and religion. I confess that I would be hard pressed to identify their boundaries. My intent is certainly not to set up an opposition between them, although in a particular context there may well be tensions between religious organisation and spiritual activity. Any religious group that is alive will be characterised by a vital spirituality that it promotes and is evident in the lives of at least some of its members. Moreover, spiritually alive and
aware people perceive spirituality in everything. It is neither helpful nor correct to consider spirituality and religion as separate worlds, even though common Australian parlance sometimes suggests this: ‘I am spiritual but not religious.’ While at times spirituality seems to be a private matter and religion public, this distinction does not hold, either. Neither is spirituality new and religion old. Many New Age and other recently renewed spiritualities claim links with ancient religious and spiritual forms. Similarly, the spiritualities associated with mainstream groups, such as praying the rosary, Marian devotion and veneration of saints for Catholics, or Bible study and prayer groups for Protestants, or the five daily prayers for Muslims, provide powerful ongoing vigour for these groups. However entwined the two are, using both terms sensitises the social analyst to a wider domain of activity than the currently limited word ‘religion’.

**Spirituality, religion, persons and society**

Is the spiritual and religious a property of the person or of a group, an activity and orientation of the individual, or a process and property of a society? Forced dichotomies like this have characterised social thought since the Enlightenment. They are now increasingly seen as both misleading and unhelpful. Religious belief may be seen to be held and applied by individuals as they work out who they are and what they are to do. But that is only one way of looking at things spiritual and religious. Societies – even secular societies – have religious orientations, religious histories, religious organisations and religious cultures that serve to shape the nature of life in each society. These social processes, organisations and characteristics are neither merely the sum of individual decisions nor the product of individual action. Having reached its peak of influence in the late twentieth century, the myth of the autonomous self is receding as a dominant framework for considering most aspects of human life. There is very little that we do by ourselves, without forming patterns of expectation, relationships and organisations that then begin to pattern our subsequent actions and those of others. From conception we are in constant interaction with self, others and a variety of environments that shape us and, to a limited degree, we shape. We construct identities in our interactions with others. We construct our selves in relationships, using material supplied from our culture and
material environments. In our self-construction, we shape the relationships through which we are linked with others.

European Australia has long been strongly individualist. This is hardly surprising. European Australians for decades after 1788 arrived as individuals – sentenced and transported, or sent as warders, the military or representatives of the British Empire. Family migration came much later. This individualism has led some to deny or denigrate the reality of the social. But a relational perspective is returning, one that focuses more on narrative and story as both constitutive and indicative of the processes by which both the social and the personal are mutually constructed (Nietz 2004). The social relations were structured by legal status, great differences in power, and formal regulation on the one side, matched by informal processes to subvert the formal. These are social facts, characteristics of a society; traits not of persons but of their relationships, as well as by the ideas, beliefs and expectations provided by their cultures.

Beckford (2004) argues that exploring religion provides a good window through which to consider social theory. While psychologists will legitimately pursue a description and analysis of the ways individuals are religious and how the religious shapes individual processes, a sociological approach describes and analyses the complex network of relationships that characterise the ways a society is religious and shapes the way groups and persons within the society do religious and spiritual things. This analysis of Australia’s persistent and changing features of religious and spiritual life takes up Beckford’s approach by raising theoretical issues as they emerge, rather than foregrounding theory.

Australia’s religious and spiritual life is not something separate and apart from the rest of society but is as fully integral to the operation of the society as health, family and economy. Australia’s religious and spiritual life is not merely the sum of the individual religiosities and spiritualities of Australians. It has a life, form and dynamic of its own. There are persistent characteristics that seem to be greater than the many changes in the composition of Australia’s religious profile. On the other hand, the changes that have occurred in the religious and spiritual composition of Australia shape the nature of individual religiosity if only by moving from a fairly limited and almost closed market to a free market full of choice and product differentiation.
One of the most basic functions of religion and spirituality at all times is to provide hope. While in the past religions may have also been called on to promote allegiance to the state or duty to society, today in Australia the focus is on hope. Most spiritualities and religions offer hope in a variety of ways. Religious meaning addresses the issue ‘what is the point in anything, life, work, love or getting up in the morning?’ At the very least spiritualities work by saying that effort, even if that is the cessation of striving, is worthwhile and that the universe is in some way, regardless of the vast evidence to the contrary, essentially friendly. Spiritualities say that by attending to the more-than-physical in your life you will become attuned with the universe and as a result will be happier, healthier and wealthier – at least spiritually if not monetarily. Through encounters with otherness, self is affirmed, connected and made to feel part of a larger whole.

I hope because hope is essential to all (human) life. Without hope we wither and die. Depression, the loss of hope, is debilitating physically, socially and mentally and requires hope to be cured. When I ask people from time to time, ‘Is the universe friendly?’ they often puzzle, but rarely say ‘No’. The simple act of getting out of bed presupposes hope. Willingness to expend energy for self, for another or for a project requires hope. At least humans and possibly all of life have a hopeful dimension, an ability to go forward, to pick up and persist, to seek the next, to take the next breath, to reproduce the next generation.

The major work of religious and spiritual activity as meaning is to make sense of the past and paint a picture of the future such that action in the now is worth the effort. Religious meaning motivates action in particular ways by relating that action to larger, even cosmic intents, causes, or purposes. Religious reflection on action occurs within certain themes, usually involving submission, redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, trustworthiness of the universe or promises to be fulfilled in the near or distant future. All of these are required to maintain hope. Religious meaning systems are characterised by assertions about how a greater environing reality guarantees the future and takes, in varying degrees, an interest in the now, thus providing hope.

However, religion is not just a matter of theological propositions used to construct meaning. This is far too cerebral and rational a picture of the religious life. It is a viewpoint that has been prominent in Western
post-Enlightenment analyses of religion and particularly nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Protestant rationalism. A closer examination reveals that religions work by providing action frames, patterns of interaction and social networks that link people, encourage movement towards hope, enable the hurtful past to be left behind and restore the fabric of human interaction, thus providing an experienced basis for hope. Religious meaning is provided in various ways, not all of which are as cerebral as the foregoing suggests (Bouma 1991, 1992). Enlightenment Western culture is heavily cerebral and has seen religion largely from a rationalist perspective; however, the late twentieth century saw the flowering of the charismatic reaction against the rational and traditional forms of sacralising paths used to encounter the transcendent (Bouma 2003a, 2003b).

Hope is also an essential ingredient for the functioning of societies. All societies have configurations of beliefs and practices that serve to sustain hope, to give hope a marginally greater likelihood of being selected as a response to the now than despair. For example, incentives are grounded in hope. We do something because we hope to achieve some goal, reward or desirable outcome. Some hope is grounded in past experience, or at least our perception of past experience that we can trust the universe and some others, and that our efforts have been fruitful in the past; that is, hope is in part a conditioned response to the present and a conditioned anticipation of the future. However, in the face of disconfirming evidence, recourse to more than recollection of the past is required to sustain hope in the now.

Producing religion and spirituality

At this time in Australia and increasingly elsewhere, religions and spirituality are called upon to produce and maintain hope. Much is made of the impact of the ‘aspirational’ on voting and consuming patterns in Australia. Yet little has been done to understand this group that ‘hopes’, that aspires to something. To what, is less clear. In the 1980s it seemed that wealth and material ends justified and satisfied all aspirational effort. This became less clear in the 1990s as ethical issues began to be raised in the corporate sector following major and costly collapses. But religious groups have been caught in the ethics searchlight and found wanting in their handling of the ‘stolen
children’ and the reality of sexual abuse within churches. Again we had hoped for better and expected more. The violation of trust was bad enough, particularly for those directly victimised. But for others, for the whole society it was a violation of hope. One of the sources of hope had in fact undermined hope. While this has certainly driven some from the churches and made many wary of religious professionals and formally organised religion, it has not driven Australians from spirituality. Australians are quite ready to do for themselves what some had previously sought from mainstream providers of religious goods and services.

In the twentieth century religions were seen to do this through the production of meaning, making sense out of human life and destiny. Religion has often been defined in terms of meaning (e.g. Yinger 1970; Berger 1967). This is a rational, verbal, liberal Protestant and Western approach to religion. It does point to one of the things religion does and how it does this, but only in one way. The defining statements in the previous section point well beyond words, reason and meaning to sensitise us to the breadth of spiritual and religious activity. Hope has been placed at the core of spirituality and religion. To the extent that meaning is sought in order to sustain hope, meaning is then less inclusive of the spiritual and religious genius than hope. However, meaning has been a major feature of the religious, and in Western societies meaning continues to be an important foundation of hope. But, as we shall see, meaning is only one way of producing hope.

The meaning approach to defining the religious is partly grounded in the observation that all people everywhere make some sense out of their lives. When asked, they can tell their story: where they have been, how they got here and where they are going. Humans everywhere can be seen to be constructing meaning, making meaning out of the disparate elements of life. Individuals construct life stories that make sense of their lives; groups and societies do likewise. Meaning is ascribed to events often in order to soften an otherwise sharp attack on hope. Cancer made meaningful is more manageable. The loss of a loved one made meaningful reduces the impact of that loss on the hope held shyly in the heart.

The sense people make of things may not be consistent, systematic or well integrated, but some order, purpose, meaning and intention will be discerned. Modernity was characterised by the expectation that meanings would be consistent, systematic and carefully related to other aspects of life. Modernity was also characterised by the expectation that individuals would
have overarching integrative ultimate principles, values or commitments that structured the meaning of their lives. Societies, too, were expected to have, if not a single religion, then a describable set of values and beliefs that integrated all aspects of the society, values and beliefs held to be of utmost importance, a sacred canopy. The degree to which such integrated systems of belief and value ever existed or operated has been disputed. However, postmodernity holds out no such expectation. One of the tensions between passing modernity and emerging postmodernity is found in the conflict between the expectations of older, often more powerful, leaders of organisations imposing the expectation of consistency on those who find it foreign to their experience and needs. There is a similar conflict within sociology between those studying high modern societies such as the USA and those studying societies like Australia.

Not only do people make sense of their lives, tragedies and triumphs but also, in a similar way, groups can be observed to make meaning of their existence, actions and goals. Statements of purpose, goals, mission statements and other declarations of intent form part of the formal meaning of many groups. Groups also seek to continue their existence, seek to benefit members and the group itself. Groups and societies require hope to persist and achieve these ends. Groups can be seen to construct meanings to make sense of disasters, tragedies and failures.

In making meaning of their lives, people and groups make explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the universe. They also invariably include an element of hope, a hope that often is hoped without the benefit of any evidence to support it. These assumptions and hopes include explicit or implicit beliefs in cosmic order, an ultimately friendly universe, and a notion that, on average, things will be better than worse. The norms about the way persons and groups relate to these metaphysical, transcendent or religious issues form a society’s religious institution.

Societies differ in the ways these elements of faith are articulated, in the expected levels of practice relative to them, and in the degrees to which the content is clear, consistent, articulate or systematised. Societies also differ in the ways in which formal organisations have developed to systematise, express, celebrate, inculcate and apply elements of their religious institution.

Spiritual and religious meaning is distinguished from other forms of meaning by the way groups constructing and using these meanings ground the hope they proffer in some transcendent referent (Bouma 1992; Singleton,
Mason & Webber 2004). In the face of despair, their assertion of hope, whether quiet or loud, the declaration of meaning in the context of chaos, is grounded in something greater, much greater than the person or the group. For many religions this transcendent referent is usually personified in a god-type entity, which is seen to be the source of all that is, takes interest in and, at times, interferes in the ongoings of everyday life. Religions usually express metaphysical beliefs about the orderly, predictable and ethical nature and operation of the universe as a whole, or at least some aspect of the universe.

In addition to providing, at the most general level, a cosmically supported tendency in favour of hope, religions and spiritualities usually also support tendencies in favour of altruism and cooperation. There are of course non-optimistic and non-altruistic religions, but groups and societies that select them tend to die out. It is often heard in interfaith dialogue conversations that various religions share the same values. Some take the truth of this to indicate that there are ‘universal values’ and argue that if only we could all agree on these values then conflict would disappear and peace ensue. Yes, religions can be seen to promote similar values, but each religion and religious group grounds these values in different narratives and discourses, different histories and locations, which radically locate and specify the universal. The values shared are shared not because they are ‘universal’ in the sense of being of a higher order, like Platonic ideals, and, as a result of this metaphysical superiority, become objects of aspiration. They are universal because they are essential to social, cultural and personal sustainability. Groups that promote these sustainable values survive; those that do not disappear or transform themselves.

Spiritualities may involve relationships with highly personified entities or with less distinct powers and forces. There are spiritualities of nature, of the earth, of stars, of spirits, of the water, of rocks, of plants and animals, of wind and weather. Spiritualities may involve a great deal of inward self-exploration and self-development. Spiritualities may be derived from pre-existing religions. There has been a fascination with appropriating aspects of various indigenous spiritualities: Native American, Inuit, Australian Aboriginal, Aztec and others. Buddhism has been the origin of many spirituality movements current in the West. Some other, even less personalised, forms of a spirituality, or religious meaning systems, include belief in fortune, chance or luck.
The celebrations and remembrances on ANZAC Day are an excellent example of Australian spirituality. As Australians mark the losses incurred during World War I, they have created meaning, myth and ritual. Sometimes these are referred to as the ‘ANZAC legend’. The legend has grown to include more than just the landing at Gallipoli, or even all of the war. The marking of the ANZAC legend involves diffuse activities carried out in many different locations by an increasingly wide range of people. Conflict, diversity and lack of consistency characterise the meanings associated with the ANZAC legend in part because it is alive and still developing. While many of the events are organised by the RSL, a quasi-military organisation of veterans, the ANZAC legend is largely without hierarchy, imposition or direct cost, and it breaks out into myriad devolved places of continued celebration: pubs, homes and other places of consultative solitude. Recently it has added that great Australian dimension – overseas travel – as Gallipoli annually becomes a site of pilgrimage.

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**Gallipoli, 25 April 2005**

We walked for several kilometres under a clear sky lit by a full moon. We were Australians, New Zealanders, Turks and others. Some people had come the day before and camped overnight. Our bus was number 300. Thousands had converged on this isolated Turkish shore. Most were young, under 35. Three warships steamed in circles in the bay – Australian, New Zealand and Turkish. When we arrived the area was full of people, waiting for it all to begin.

Then a bank of searchlights swept the hills and ravines with blue light, resting for a moment here and highlighting a detail there. Then they were raised to the heavens and snapped off. There were speeches, respectful of suffering and loss. A leaflet describing the sequence of events was passed around. It included a review of the losses incurred and offered stories of humane risks taken by each side. Attaturk’s assurance to Australian mothers that their sons were now respected and adopted by Turkey was read. The words to several hymns and the three national anthems were printed on the form. We sang national anthems and a few Christian hymns such as ‘Abide with me’. All the while up in the hills there were occasional flashes of light as someone took a photo or lit a cigarette – a reminder of the sniper fire that would have been so deadly ninety years earlier. People helped each other, made space, let someone through; the spirit was good. And with some distant martial
music from a band it was over for that site. Some went on to Lone Pine and the cemeteries.

This year we were about 20,000 in number. The numbers have been increasing. It is too hard to just be a lark. Yes, it was well organised: the loos absolutely spotless, the litter removed in an hour, and 20,000 people back on their buses and gone in an hour. There was no glorification of war. There was multinational solidarity in the face of loss. There was no maudlin sentimentality. Respect for loss, for those who have gone before, and some increased hope that lessons will be, or at least can be, learned. The hope was fragile, not trumpeted; alluded to, but shy.

Gary Bouma

The ANZAC legend is an Australian example of a society rekindling hope. The continuing appeal of ANZAC is hope, mateship and self-giving in the face of pointless sacrifice and suffering, the ultimate declaration of hope in the face of hopelessness. The ANZAC legend is also associated with sacred places – shrines of remembrance – and rituals. There is a host of meanings associated with ANZAC, and these can be unpacked and examined. But the critical feature I wish to draw out is that to see ANZAC as a set of meanings is to miss the fact that it is primarily a set of activities – rituals: dawn services, the blare of the bugle, getting together with mates, arguing about the meaning, marching or not marching. The very activity of engaging in these events promotes hope, gets a person going and provides something to look forward to. The meaning is not primary either in being central to the event or in being an outcome.

The relationship between ritual meaning and hope is complex. A ritual can do no more than get a person moving, provide a form of actions that reconstitute a group, or bring together people who would otherwise stand apart. The action has the effect of moving into at least the present and often the near future. The mere action is enough. That there may also be meanings, official or otherwise, associated with the rituals may or may not help in their efficacy. Meanings alone are much less likely to achieve the end of movement into the future, resolution of conflict, expression of grief, joy, deliverance or whatever.

The same is true of other activities related to the restoration of hope: church services, funerals, weddings, prayer, meditation and aerobics. Yes, aerobics. People do not go to gyms just to work out, or for the social life,
but because just getting the body moving raises the spirits and provides hope. There is a sense that the gym is one of the new forms of church found in Australia and elsewhere. These activities are not necessarily or primarily dependent on or dominated by meaning. Yes, they were seen to be productive of or sustaining of meaning in modernity because in modernity rational meaning was everything. But the change from the rational to the experiential is one of the most critical shifts in postmodernity. Postmodernity involves a transition from dependence on rational meaning, which was inspired by the Enlightenment, towards a more experiential, activity foundation for hope in postmodern Australia. This theme will be developed in greater detail in chapter 4. The religious and spiritual is not primarily about meaning but is a set of activities that promotes hope, if only by getting the person moving. The focus on religion as meaning (Parsons 1951: 367–368; Yinger 1970; Berger 1967) reflects the high modern society within which that definition was struck, and in the current Australian context, the use of such a focus would blind the sociologist who seeks the religious and spiritual in Australian life to much of what is going on.

**Spirituality and the sacred**

To be sacred is to be special, precious, protected, shielded, other than ordinary. The sacred is dealt with differently, usually with respect, fear, care or special dignity. Sacred things are not sacred in themselves but become sacred through association with powerful, numinous or meaningful otherness. Sacred symbols are not sacred in themselves but are sacralised, made sacred, because of the things they point to. Shrines of remembrance become sacred as people visit the spaces provided to relate to the loss, memories, values and ideals they symbolise and represent. Churches, shrines, mosques and temples are not sacred in themselves but become sacred as they are prayed, worshipped and meditated into sacred being. Trees, animals, places may become sacred things as people encounter otherness through them, as they become foci of connection with entities beyond self. Preaching alone does not seem to have this transforming effect. The space merely functions to enable the sermon to be heard, but word-oriented Protestants resist sacralising their spaces, only to discover, for example, when they propose changing some feature that it has become sacred to some of their people.
Spiritual and religious places, actions and meanings quickly assume the characteristics of the sacred because of the way religious hope, indeed all hope, is asserted in a context of uncertainty, often in the face of despair. For every shred of evidence sustaining hope – the birth of a baby, the joy of a new day, beauty and acts of human kindness, there is ample other evidence against – untimely death, cruelty, disaster and hatred. The evidence for hope is never overwhelming. To hope is a choice, not a forced option. Similarly religious belief is always faithed. In a secular, desacralised environment, belief in the spiritual, the religious needs protection from profanation, from ridicule. It becomes sacred – precious and protected. While religious organisations set aside places for attending to the sacred, places where it is architecturally alluded to and protected from profanation by barriers, veils and smoke; in a secular, postmodern society the spiritual is also encountered, enshrined and referenced outside such official structures. In this secular context the sacred may become more personal, ever more vulnerable and even fragile. The construction of shrines in homes and private places, places of meditation, candles in offices, points of spiritual focus, wearing of symbols and crystals are all forms of sacralising the ordinary in public spaces, making sacred spaces away from established religious zones. Religious places may still be visited, treated as places of solace and renewal, but for many their sacred space is set up in the face of the secular, their connection with the power of the universe is found in the world rather than in withdrawal from it, and their spiritual is transacted and conducted in the context of the secular.

The spiritual and religious dimensions of life are often shared and (re)created through the telling of and listening to simple stories. Storytelling always involves a listener. The listener is an active participant in the process, taking in the story, relating it to their own, adding it to their repertoire or rejecting it. Tales of encounter tell of awesome powers, visions of holy ones, a sense of the reality of the other in a person, tree or place. Tales of rescue tell of success, coping against all odds, unlikely outcomes, reward for risk, or trust, or duty. Tales of healing recount occasions of restoration, renewed wholeness and liberation. These stories may be intensely personal, or particular to families, tribes or societies. In more established meaning systems these stories become or are selected because they fit the grand narrative of the meaning system: deliverance, redemption, hope, submission, release (Singleton 2000). These stories, legends or myths work to locate, order and motivate by providing deeply grounded examples of the way the
sacred works, incidences of its application and role models of its practice. Through shared story hope is affirmed and lives (re)constructed as they are lived.

Religious belief in the essential beneficence of the universe is usually expressed in a personified form. Late modern Western attempts within liberal Christian theology, such as those produced by Paul Tillich and Rudolph Bultmann, to depersonalise the symbols used to refer to the ultimate failed to win the hearts of people. The gods of the philosophers provide cold comfort in the face of despair, and reason alone is an inadequate basis for hope. Where religious and spiritual symbolism personalise the ultimate, the beyond, God becomes a social actor, an agent in human affairs through the representations regarding God’s nature, preferences and degree of activity in human affairs. Even in religions with less personified deities, religious ideals are often personified in the saints, holy ones, bodhisattvas or other role models and wielders of cosmic sanction. Where there is no such personification of the transcendent, religious principles enter social transactions through principles of what is – cosmological – and of what ought to be – religiously grounded ethical principles.

Around this major work of religion and spirituality to provide hope through activities, symbols, meanings and story sharing cluster such relationships as communities, organisations, identities, systems of ethics and media of communication. As these things emerge the boundary between religion and spirituality becomes increasingly difficult to draw.

A communal and social hope in the heart

This shy hope is not held solely at an individual level. It is clearly a social and group phenomenon. Those alert to its signs, its whisper, its murmur, can share in it. But it retreats quickly in the face of a potentially uncaring boisterous person. The Australian pattern of ‘inarticulate pointing to the transcendent’ (Bouma & Clyne 1995; Clyne & Bouma 1994) is not invented by individuals. This mode of dealing with things beyond, this pattern of being religious, this mode of discourse, is learned. Its uses are known; its applications to life are learned in each generation.

The communal nature of the religious and spiritual is clear from the ways they are passed from generation to generation in Australia. Sons learn
it from their fathers in ways that no Sunday School teacher would ever dare use. Mothers pondering with their daughters pass their version of this shy hope from generation to generation. This is a gendered process, especially in Australia where there has been comparatively little significant interaction between the distant spiritual cultures of male and female for any mutually expressed culture to emerge. The transmission of expectations about the religious and spiritual is gendered. As feminist spirituality has found its voice in an Australian idiom, the males have held their shy hope even more tentatively; for, once again, they were being told they were somehow wrong and to blame.

Nor is this Australian pattern of being religious and spiritual to be judged as inadequate by any other than Australian standards. The whingeing of Australian evangelicals about the level of biblical knowledge or church attendance among Australians is to judge an Australian institution by the standards of the American religious institution, as they were once judged according to British and Victorian standards. Why should Australian patterns of religiosity be judged by American standards? Similarly for church leaders to complain that religion is being supplanted by spirituality is but for them to complain of the loss of their market shares in the religious economy.

A methodological reflection

All analysis, all description and all reflection is done from a particular perspective. I use the first person in this book because it is my voice, my perspective and my analysis. Some try to write their selves out of academic discourse. I view this as a modern affectation in which the author strives to present analyses as objective, beyond the individual, from outside of themselves and from a ‘god’s eye’ vantage point. I do not apologise for the particularity of my viewpoint. My perception has been shaped by my intellectual commitments, sociological and theological, as well as by my journey through various societies. Insofar as my views resonate with those of my readers and colleagues, challenge their views or open new ways of seeing things, we move together beyond the personal to the space of shared discourse. I expect and hope that others will find what I say to be familiar, to evoke their sense of what it is to be religious and spiritual in Australia, or to provide images and understandings that square with their experience. The validity of this
analysis is to be found in the extent to which others can see themselves and Australian society in it.

Long involvement and careful observation were needed for me to discern the ways Australian society is religious and spiritual; how Australia negotiates its daily life in the context of the transcendent, discovering grace, encountering the ‘other’ and offering redemption as well as explaining to itself the joys and the pains of ordinary life and its national origins, destiny and process. I have spent much of that time tracking Australian religious change through the analyses of census and survey research. However, a rightful interpretation of a society and its culture requires that the analyst examine them both from a distance and from a standpoint of involvement.

A worthwhile discussion of Australian religion also requires a critical comparative context to clarify what is Australian and what is not. I was raised among Dutch immigrants in the Midwest of the USA, did my postgraduate studies on the East Coast, then emigrated to Canada where I lived and taught through the 1970s. Since coming to Australia, I have researched and/or lived in New Zealand, England, France, China and Italy. These immersions in other societies, in addition to the use of comparative surveys and census data, provide the experiential dimension for comparative analysis. Not only have I been experientially grounded in my comparative understanding of religion and society but also I have been a religious professional in several Christian denominations. I was raised in the Christian Reformed Church, a small Dutch reformed church. I served the United Presbyterian Church, USA, in ministries in Harlem and mid-town Manhattan. I was minister of a Quaker Meeting in upstate New York for three years while doing my PhD and have subsequently served in the United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and the Anglican Church of Australia. I have had brief appointments in the Church of England and the Diocese of Europe. My research has also been enriched by substantial involvement in Muslim communities in Australia and elsewhere, as well as Buddhist, Hindu and Sikh groups. My deep involvement in a variety of faith traditions and expressions has helped me to become attuned to the richness and distinctiveness of Australia’s religious and spiritual life.

Finally, I take a social realist perspective in studying Australian religion. I consider the social and cultural each to be real, to have irreducible properties, processes and dimensions. A society is more than the sum of the individuals found in it, and a culture is more than the sum of their thoughts, ideals
and senses of right, wrong and beauty. Some will accuse me of reification—
making real things that do not exist in themselves but only as concepts.
In response, I make two arguments. The first is empirical. The religious
lives of different societies are describable and discernibly different. I find it
impossible to accept that these empirical differences are best explained by
the independent decisions of individuals who just happen to be located in
that sociocultural space. Second, I am unashamedly a sociologist. I am aware
that some of my colleagues adopt individualist perspectives arguing that the
social is not real. There is no question that the social and cultural are social
constructs, but that makes them no less real once constructed. Nor are the
degrees of freedom for social and cultural construction and reproduction
infinite. The emergent properties of social life—relationships, norms, struc-
ture, meaning, expectation, networks—are experienced as real and can be
analysed as real, for they are certainly real in their effects. Sociologists who
deny the reality of their subject matter engage in professional suicide.

I have experienced many societies, and my experience tells me that their
religious and spiritual lives differ. Turkey is not Indonesia, but they both
offer a form of positively engaged Islam in emerging liberal democratic
structures. The USA is not Britain, and neither of them is France. Each
country provides a social and cultural context for the conduct of religious
groups and the expression of spirituality. These sociocultural differences
are real, important and interesting. A study of Australia offers a case study
worthwhile in its own right and useful in comparative analyses of religion
and spirituality.

Conclusion

Thus, while in the twentieth century religion and spirituality often provided
an identity and meaning for people, in the twenty-first century the core is
the production and maintenance of hope. Religious belief and practice may
still form a basis for identity for some but, as we will see, not in the same
way as in modernity. Religion and spirituality in Australia is about hope, the
production and maintenance of hope through actions, beliefs, practices and
places that link the person and/or group to a reality or frame of reference
that is both beyond the immediate perceptual and material frame and deeply
imbedded within the person.
Chapter Two

QUALITIES OF AUSTRALIAN RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

There is a distinctive quality to Australian religion and spirituality. This claim is made in the face of the fact that aside from the religious life of indigenous Australians, most of Australia’s religious groups trace their origins to Ireland, the United Kingdom and Europe. Moreover, much of what passes for spirituality ‘down under’ has been imported from places overseas. Nonetheless, while Australian religion and spirituality is largely an amalgam of imported streams and strands, these are constructed and reproduced in distinctively Australian ways. There has been a resurgence of interest in the role of religious groups, organisations and beliefs in the emergence of this nation (e.g. Carey 1996; Breward 1993; Piggin 1996). These histories provide a corrective to those histories of Australia that follow the secular ideologies dominant at many universities, which ignore, or give little place to, the role of religion (e.g. Macintyre 2004; Grimshaw et al. 1994).

Indigenous Australians have been practising religion and spirituality for more than 40,000 years (Swain 1985). This rich diversity provides one historical frame for Australia’s religious and spiritual life: it has always been diverse, respectful of the land, and attuned to the links between the here and now, and promoting responsibilities extending over generations and sharing. However, most Australians who identify themselves as Aboriginal also indicate that they are Christians. According to the 2001 Census, only 1.2 per cent of Aboriginal people said they held to their traditional religions whereas 69.0 per cent identified with a Christian denomination: 23 per cent each for Catholic and Anglican, 6 per cent Uniting and nearly 3 per cent
each for Baptist, Lutheran and Pentecostal, 15.5 per cent claimed to have no religion and 10.9 per cent did not reply (Hughes 2004a). These proportions roughly follow the religious proportions of the Australian population as a whole (Bouma 2002).

The focus of this book is on those religious groups and spiritualities that have settled in Australia since European colonisation. These include Islam, beginning with the Macassans fishing in the north, to many forms of Christianity, Jews arriving with penal transportation, Taoism and Buddhism brought by the Gold Rush, and later Hindus, Sikhs and many others. The fact that Christian groups predominate in Australia both demographically and culturally will be reflected in the weight of the assessment given to them.

On the basis of my studies of the way religious groups have come to and settled in Australia, I argue that there is a quality to Australian religious and spiritual life that can be described and that is peculiar to Australia. This Australian quality is not described by a creed that most or all Australians accept. That would be a far too cerebral, too verbal an approach. Nor is Australian religious and spiritual life characterised by a particular form of worship or a specific spirituality. Rather my claim is that there is a distinctive Australian quality to the way religion and spirituality are constructed and negotiated by Australians. This quality is summed up in Manning Clark’s phrase ‘a shy hope in the heart’ (Thornhill 1992: 172). Sinclair (2004: 284) draws a similar conclusion about the Australian imaginary, which is described as ‘characterised by a distaste for display – whether aesthetic or affective’.

Many evangelical Christians who have come to Australia from the USA quickly form the impression that Australia is spiritually dead and that Australia is ripe for conversion. If American standards are used to measure and assess Australia, such a determination is not surprising. In the USA religion is a mega-industry that attracts the regular participation of nearly half the population. During the second half of the twentieth century American religious groups, in keeping with other social and economic changes, moved from a primary dependence on small and medium-sized congregations to mega-churches. These changes involved different organisational arrangements and styles of worship being offered. Yes, small to medium-sized congregations continue, just as do boutique congregations; but the resource-to-congregant ratio characterising the mega-churches means that they are able to offer a greater diversity of programs attractive to a wide range of people and addressing a diversity of interests and needs, and are more able
to influence their communities. As a result huge churches with vast parking lots dot the American landscape (Connell 2005). However, Australians do religion differently with much less use of neon lights and much less explicit public spirituality. But that does not mean that religion and spirituality is not present; they are just different. This difference does imply that measures used to detect religious and spiritual life in the American context may not be sufficiently sensitive to detect the Australian forms of this phenomenon.

On the other hand, visitors from Europe are surprised by the comparatively high vitality of religious and spiritual life found in Australia, particularly among people from parts of Europe where religious life has almost disappeared (Davie 2002). Tiffen and Gittins’ (2004: 238–241) comparative review of data on religious identification, belief and practice place Australia mid-way between highly religious Ireland and the USA and barely religious Scandinavia and Japan. Once again, standards and expectations about a nation’s religious and spiritual life grounded in other societies have limited relevance to a study of Australia and certainly do not provide bases for normative judgements about Australian religion and spirituality.

Meanwhile many immigrants to Australia have found participation in religious communities helpful in settling into Australian society (Bouma 1992). Attending religious communities can provide source of connection to Australian society through new friends made. Such participation also provides places to celebrate rites of passage. However, in being neither European nor American, Australia offers an interestingly different context for the examination of the shape of religious and spiritual life in the twenty-first century.

The specifics of non-indigenous Australian spirituality and religion have undergone several major transformations since 1788 and are undergoing further change now. This chapter examines those abiding characteristics of Australian religious and spiritual life that emerged early in the development of European settlement, have persisted through subsequent transformations and will qualify the changes currently occurring.

**Religious institutions**

The abiding characteristics of a society’s life can be described as social institutions. A social institution is a set of norms and expectations regulating
or describing the way a society goes about some area of social life like education, family, work or, in this case, religion and spirituality. Societies are different, and the concept ‘social institution’ can be used to describe these differences and to compare societies. The concept of religious social institution is developed here to describe certain persistent features of Australian religious and spiritual life and to compare those features with the religious social institutions of some other societies.

It is important to the analysis developed in this chapter to keep separate the concept of a social institution from the major organisations associated with these institutions: schools, the nuclear family, factories, or churches, synagogues, temples and mosques. While the terms ‘institution’ and ‘organisation’ are regularly treated as synonymous, this sociological approach to the analysis of religious and spiritual life maintains the distinction between them. One of the uses of this distinction is to compare the religious institutions of different societies, or to see how they have changed over time. Studies that focus solely on religious organisations – denominations, congregations, churches, synagogues, temples and mosques – fail to discover the underlying expectations that shape the way these organisations are able to operate. Moreover, while organisations may come and go, a society’s institutions tend to last for a longer time (Bouma 1998a).

A society’s religious institution sets the levels of religious belief and practice required for a member of that society to be accepted. While these are basic, both over-conformity and under-conformity will be sanctioned. A society’s religious institutions refers to the patterned ways that society organises access to the sacred and both produces and applies meanings that refer to the transcendent. Religious meanings are assured by reference to some power, force or being beyond the ordinary, beyond the temporal. This institution or set of norms and expectations includes the patterned ways in which a society raises and answers questions of transcendentally grounded meaning; the ways it patterns action relating to spiritual and religious life; and the sociocultural – as opposed to organisational – norms regarding religious belief and practice. A society’s religious institution is an arrangement of norms and expectations that provide a foundation in the transcendent for the hopes, dreams and aspirations of members of the society in such a way as to make sense of the past, motivate the present and cushion the blows of disconfirming evidence.

A society’s religious institution includes norms and expectations about religious and spiritual practice and belief, such as intensity, expressivity,
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frequency, periodicity and cyclicity. These dimensions are useful for describing and comparing differences among societies. For example, the Australian norms and expectations associated with the dimensions of patterned relations with the transcendent, religious and spiritual include:

- **intensity**: a strong tendency towards the subdued, laid back
- **expressivity**: a strong tendency towards the shy, withdrawn and not exuberant
- **frequency**: a strong tendency towards infrequent or occasional attendance
- **periodicity**: annual/biannual participation is more acceptable than weekly
- **cyclicity**: a tendency for participation to occur early and late in the lifecycle
- **consistency**: a low level of consistency between belief and practice is accepted
- **singularity**: persons are expected to identify with one religion
- **proximity**: the transcendent is expected to be distant, localised and diffuse
- **efficacy**: the transcendent is subject to influence, trustworthy and effective
- **access**: the transcendent to be accessed directly and through professionals
- **social location**: religious groups are expected to be on the margin, not central.

Thus, the Australian religious institution has expectations that shape the nature and operation of Australian religious and spiritual groups and individual religiosity. Groups are expected to offer and adopt forms of belief and practice that are not intensely demanding. Weekly attendance is not necessary for social acceptance and might be seen as over-conforming. People in their late teens and twenties are not expected to give religion and spirituality much time, at least until they have children and then they might be legitimately too busy. Religiosity and spirituality should not require exuberant expression, particularly in public. Those who must be noisy about their religion and spirituality are encouraged do so within enclosed areas and to think many times before making a public display of prayer, eating norms or religious insignia and distinctive clothing. Finally, people may believe what they like, but the society does not expect either the group or individual members to be explicit about putting beliefs into practice.

These norms of the Australian religious institution are quite different from the expectations of the average Christian church where higher levels of
intensity, a high degree of consistency, higher frequency and at least weekly periodicity are the ideals towards which all are encouraged to strive. In seeking to achieve conformity to these norms, Christian churches are making demands that exceed the norms of the Australian religious institution and can be expected to experience difficulties in doing so. The levels of expectation outlined above are also different from the cultural expectations associated with Buddhism, but much closer to those of Islam and Judaism. These examples demonstrate the variability of norms from one society to another and among religious groups. The focus here is on the norms and expectations of the society. Further comparisons with other societies will be outlined later in this chapter.

Conformity to the norms of the religious institution, like other social norms, is ensured by the application of sanctions. Sanctions are rewards for conformity and penalties for non-conformity. People who are ‘too religious’ in Australia may be sanctioned by scornful looks and derisive remarks. It is OK to be religious, just do not overdo it. On the other hand, someone who is stridently negative about spirituality may well be avoided. There is a range of acceptable forms of behaviour with respect to the religious and spiritual. For example, most Australians call themselves religious and even more say they are spiritual, but most also believe that it is not necessary to attend church, synagogue, mosque or temple to be religious. Only 24 per cent of respondents to the National Social Survey of 1989 said that ‘attending church regularly’ was important to ‘being a good Christian’ (Bouma & Mason 1995: 45). Seventy-nine per cent of Australians had declared themselves to be Christians in this survey. Clearly a lower rate of church attendance is both the behavioural norm and expectation in Australia when compared with the USA where, as Greeley put it, ‘you have to be something’ (1990: 7).

In the religious and spiritual domain the sanctions usually applied include a sense of moral well-being, cosmic social acceptance and inclusion in a time-transcending myth. Once the rewards of involvement of religion are accepted, the group can use them as sanctions by granting or withholding them to enforce conformity. One of the key ways religions work is by providing, or withholding, a sense of moral well-being and cosmic social acceptance: God, the cosmos, the universe loves, accepts, affirms the person, or does not. Guilt, the sense of not being good enough or having failed to maintain some standard, is a powerful sanction. Another way religions
work is by providing a sense of inclusion in a time frame that transcends the person, making them a part of an ongoing story that starts in the distant past, for example, at creation; a story that has a future that extends beyond death and has implications for the present. Heavenly rewards have proven powerful motivators throughout the history of the monotheistic religions of the Book. These examples indicate ways that the rewards and sanctions offered by most religions are available not only in the next life but also in this life.

All sanctions depend on beliefs for their efficacy. Sanctions are sanctions precisely because we believe that, to be given something, or to have something withheld from us, is directly related to some aspect of our well-being and chances in life. For example, money is a powerful sanction in Australian society. However, although money can be shown to buy goods and services, there is nothing intrinsically valuable about money. The value of money is located in the beliefs people hold about it. This is true for almost all of the gratifiers upon which sanctions rely for their efficacy: social acceptance, love, pain, hope, career or health. While the sanction strength or salience of cosmic social acceptance may seem to stretch the imagination of some, so long as God is believed to exist and to take some interest in daily life, God becomes a social actor with describable properties, properties that can be compared across societies and times (Stark & Finke 2000).

The norms of a society’s religious institution may serve as a screen to exclude some religious and spiritual groups, by making their efforts unprofitable or too difficult to instil, for example, some organisations that seek to increase member commitment to a level of practice at variance with the norms of the society’s religious institution. Many religious groups seek to increase the level of their members’ participation and giving (Hoge & Yang 1994). In so doing they challenge and seek to alter the norms of Australia’s religious institution about acceptable levels of attendance at religious services. Religious organisations and religious leaders often chafe as the religious institution limits the possibilities open to them at the organisational level. On the other hand, the norms of the Australian religious institution should make it easier to establish religious groups with comparatively low levels of demand. The best example here is the rapid growth of Buddhism, which is perceived to be relatively less formally organised, to demand occasional, rather than weekly attendance, and to not require the acceptance of a belief system.
Origins of Australian spiritual and religious life

A good grasp of Australia’s religious institution, or those things foundationally and persistently Australian in terms of religion, can be grasped by looking at pre-1947 Australians: those Australians whose families have been here for several generations. Since World War II Australians have welcomed and taken seriously a great many other cultures within Australia. But then it can be said that it was Australians from the generation born in the early twentieth century who did the welcoming. They represent a pre-1947 Australia whose voices continue to reflect the effort involved in being open to newcomers and finding change difficult.

Aussie spirituality

Friends of mine who were born in Australia during the 1920s and 1930s usually believe in God or, as they would say, ‘the man upstairs’. This comment is often accompanied by a gesture in a vaguely upward direction, not pointing, not certain, but a sort of wave. Other expressions include ‘going to God’ for dying. Conversations that get close to religious topics are characterised by the use of agentless passives such as ‘I’ve been put on this earth . . .’, ‘the talents I have been given’, ‘We’ve been helped, um, guided I suppose, to find the way out . . .’ (Clyne & Bouma 1994). Similarly, Australians of this era tend to hedge the degree of confidence used in expressing meaning. For example, when asked about meaning one male replied, ‘Well – I – the way that is sort of phrased – ah – seems to tend – seems to me that you’re tending towards a [long pause] question that could be deemed as do you believe in God or some sort of being controlling or directing one’s life – I’m inclined to feel that I’m being thrown challenges and I’m trying to be shepherded in perhaps a particular direction with my free will’ (Bouma & Clyne 1995: 141). I watched a Queensland politician who was in his sixties try to say the word God. He made an oblique wave and looked down, while muttering something about ‘. . . you know, you know, the man – uh – the one up – up there, you know’. Australian spirituality characteristic of those over 60 is not given to articulate declaration, but more to shy, vaguely respectful recognition of an important if largely indistinct force, slightly shaped by the imagery of Christianity.

Gary Bouma
Those who seek to change aspects of Australia’s religious and spiritual life encounter this religious culture as the one needing and resisting changing. In the long run, the established culture will set the tone. By ‘established’ I do not mean elite or supported by the state, but simply the culture of long standing. This established way of going about religious and spiritual things can also be called a society’s religious institution: the expectations and patterns of dealing with a particular domain of social life. What religious and spiritual tone does Australia’s religious institution set for Australians?

Australia’s foundational institutional orientation to religion and spirituality was established in the period 1788 to 1840. During this time Australian religion was least organised. While Church of England chaplains were present, neither convicts nor free settlers had yet been substantially colonised by English religious organisations (Macintyre 2004: 47–49, 80–82; Breward 1993: 12–23). The late eighteenth century was also one of the low points of state church religion in the UK, where participation was at an all-time low, due in part to the failure of the Church of England to relate to the new urban poor. Already disaffected from the religious organisation and left to establish their own religious and spiritual ways, those sent to Australia in this in-between time were a particular cultural group. They were religiously inarticulate. They had been beyond the ministrations of organised religion while in England and stayed largely outside religious groups following transportation.

When they arrived transported convicts were subject to the enforced religious blandishments of clergy who were instruments of the state that had oppressed them. Insofar as they cared about religion at all, convicts were also in reaction against a moribund state church that, through its neglect of the emerging urban working classes, had fuelled anticlerical attitudes. Moreover, the dominant religious ethos in Britain was deist and mechanistic, which led to a notion of a distant and largely deaf god who had left everyday things to run by chance, by luck. Chance and luck continue to be dominant themes in the lives of Australians, who have one of the highest participation rates in casinos and other forms of gambling.

The time of European settlement of Australia was also a time when Roman Catholic practice was officially discouraged in England and in Northern Ireland. At this time only Anglicans could be educated at university, serve in the public service or hold public office, and Catholics were strictly limited in the amount of education they could receive. Thus, Australian religion starts
during a historical period of low rates of participation in church, low levels of spiritual enthusiasm, inadequate provision of religious organisations in areas of population growth, greatest disaffection of the populace from matters religious; a period of greatest indifference to religion on the part of the commoner and greatest indifference to the commoner on the part of the religious organisation. The religious was tied up with the Church of England, which was directly related to the imposition of authority, punishment and discipline rather than compassion and caring. Groups like Catholics and Dissenters may have derived increased energy operating as repressed oppositional groups, but that was limited in the first three decades of European settlement.

Moreover, in Australia, religion was used by the state to ‘civilise’ the prisoners in penal colonies, those free settlers who had set themselves up beyond the control of the state and the indigenous inhabitants of the land. For Catholic convicts sent to Australia this meant being subject to the Church of England, as there was no legal provision of Catholic religious services until well into the nineteenth century (Carey 1996). One result of this use of religion as a civilising force is the association of religion and morality often heard in parts of the former British Empire. This association can be heard in comments such as ‘religion is ethics’, ‘so long as you are good, you will be all right’ or ‘churches are there to make people behave’. This view of the role of religion reaches its zenith in Edwardian England. According to this view religion is synonymous with good behaviour, duty, doing the right thing, conforming and supporting the Crown. This civilising function of religion pre-dates the meaning emphasis that emerged during the late twentieth century, but lingers in Australia with the assumption that religion will be associated with fun-denying elements in the society, those wowsers who would close the pubs and brothels, proscribe sport on Sundays and in general oppose Australia’s proclivity to hedonism. There is almost the sense that, so long as religious groups behave in this life-denying and fun-avoiding way, they can easily be dismissed except for rites of passage by Australians who might be uncomfortable with a more accepting and affirming form of religion that would make other demands on them, like caring for the stranger, accepting those different from themselves and seeking inclusive justice.

From the 1820s to the 1860s, after the establishment of Australian penal colonies, England’s religious and spiritual life was transformed by a series of
Qualities

religious revitalisation movements, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 4. In the early nineteenth century the Church of England was renewed through the work of the Tractarians – those proposing a return to traditional and catholic ritual in worship – and the Evangelicals, who were concerned to proclaim their view of Christian faith through the whole world, starting at home. Methodism and other non-conformists in Britain gained much popular support often by actively seeking the participation of people who had been ignored by the established church, as opposed to passively waiting for them to come to existing congregations. These movements of religious renewal regained the attention of non-elites, repatterned church attendance and changed the expectations held about spirituality and religion both within the churches and by the general public (Gill 2003).

However, these religious revitalisation movements did not have much impact on Australia. They were indigenous to the United Kingdom, and parallel developments occurred in the USA and Europe. But there was no such movement in the same period of Australia’s spiritual history. By the time they came to Australia these transformation movements were largely tamed and arrived as established parties within particular denominations rather than as revitalising forces. The only exception was the growth of Methodists, Baptists and Churches of Christ along with a substantial number of Chinese Buddhists during the time of the Gold Rushes and through the late nineteenth century. But even these were largely local replicas of English and American organisations, and they were swamped by the extent of mainstream denominational development from the mid-nineteenth century through to World War I. The Chinese were driven out, or largely assimilated, by the early twentieth century.

Subsequent attempts to colonise Australian religion have had to deal with this procrustean bed of a religious institution (Bouma 1998a). As I explained above, by Australia’s ‘religious institution’ I mean the set of norms about religion, meaning and life that had emerged among free and convict Australians between 1788 and 1840. As Australians sought legitimacy in the years following 1840, not only were English family organisational forms adopted but also English religious organisations, although these were grafted on to already established Australian religious and family institutions.

Early penal and colonial experiences of Europeans transplanted to Australia also shaped the expectations held about the efficacy and proximity
of God, the transcendent. Swanson (1960) makes the case that experiences with social structure shape the forms of theologies characteristic of a society. I have applied this approach to twentieth-century changes in Australian concepts of God and relations with the transcendent (Bouma 1996, 1999). Swanson found that a hierarchically organised society was associated with monotheism; societies with multiple, but independent, centres of authority tended to have polytheistic theologies. People use aspects of social structure to provide images of things and beings that are believed to be beyond their sight, beyond human sensing and concepts.

Taking Swanson’s approach involves asking about how the early experiences of convicts cast on the shores of Australia shaped their beliefs about and concepts of the transcendent. While Americans seem to have an immediate sense of the presence of God, for Australians, God is more distant – I suppose, at least as far away as London is from Sydney. The centre of imperial authority was a long way away and only partially effective in exercising control, providing the necessities of life and observing the behaviour of convict and colonist alike. Such experiences correlate with the sense I detect among Australians that God is distant, able to be got around and, while useful for desperate last-minute appeals, not quite relevant to daily life. The influences and effects of Australia having long had an absent ultimate authority in political, economic, social and cultural life can be seen in the distant, indistinct, low-expectation relationship with the transcendent that I have come to consider characteristic of Australia’s religious and spiritual life.

A society’s religious institution will also structure who mediates relationships with the transcendent. Is access to the transcendent direct or mediated through experts, professionals, designated functionaries? Is access governed by state apparatus, a parallel set of organisations or a completely separate order? For indigenous Australians access was primarily social, mediated by socially and culturally designated people: elders and special functionaries. For convicts and colonists access was direct through prayer and mediated by a state-imposed set of functionaries: chaplains and clergy. While individual access was allowed, fully legitimate access was only through state clergy. That social institutions are not fully determining, but rather indicative, is seen in the extra-legal provision of religious services to Catholics in the early days of convict settlement and the final extension of legitimacy to Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists and others by 1840.
Comparing religious institutions

Australia’s religious institution is distinctive in no small part because of its origins in late eighteenth-century British and Irish religious life. Its uniqueness becomes clearer when the Australian religious institution is compared with those of some other nations that are close to Australia in many ways yet quite different in their religious origins.

In contrast with Australia, the foundational American religious institution and religious organisations were also imported from England but at a different time and more selectively. First, in the seventeenth century was England torn apart by religious dissension and conflict. Religion was very much alive and part of the public and private everyday life. People were expected to be religious and to make choices among non-trivial religious options. These traits continue to characterise the USA, where people are expected to have a religion of their choice and to participate in its organisations.

Second, those who established the English colonies in the New World were drawn from a specific and relatively small subset of English and Scottish society: the Dissenters. The first and tone-setting European permanent settlements in the New World of the seventeenth century were sectarian, Calvinistic and theocratic. Their substantial and decimating hardships in journeying to a hostile physical and social environment in the New World were sacralised and celebrated in religious imagery and theologised by very active clerics who identified with, and participated in, the lot of the people. These dissenting religious groups were intensely competitive and maintained a high degree of tension with the established British order. The patterns of expectation about religion and spirituality enforced by these groups set the tone in the USA and established its religious institution. They set a ‘high demand’ quality to its religious institution, one still reflected in its relatively high rate of religious participation, financial contribution and belief, even though it is a highly industrialised and highly educated country (Finke & Stark 1992). Later, during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the American working class was relatively large and substantially Irish Catholic, which supported a religious institutional norm of high participation and financial giving in that society. While the denominational mix of the USA has changed over the centuries, it retains a comparatively
sectarian ecclesiastical environment along with comparatively high rates of participation and financial giving (Finke & Stark 1992). Immigrants to the USA, including Black slaves coming as unwilling immigrants, have adopted these norms of high rates of attendance and levels of giving.

Canada provides another contrast with Australia. While both were British colonies and continue to have the English monarch as head of state, they are quite different in their religious and spiritual life. First, French Canada was a maritime colony established in the seventeenth century by pre-revolutionary French royalist settlers whose national and religious identities were tightly bound together by involvement in a religious organisation that, upon the dissolution of ties to France following the French Revolution, took the place of both state and church and dominated family, education and health until into the twentieth century. This conservative Catholic and royalist orientation continued to shape Québécois political and social thought through much of twentieth-century Canada.

On the other hand, while there was an English presence in Canada before this time, English Canada as a society was essentially founded in the early nineteenth century by United Empire Loyalists and other immigrants from the USA who had fought against the Colonial Army in the American Revolution and had rejected the Dissenter religious institution and organisation that dominated what came to be the USA. They migrated to those parts of Canada that later became the provinces of Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. They appealed to England to send religious organisations and personnel to re-establish the Church of England. Some appealed to the Church of Scotland and Presbyterian groups to establish a new religious institution heavily influenced by Scottish attitudes and values. Both were fiercely loyal to their European sources and their associated religious organisations. In the end a Presbyterian and Methodist Protestant ethos was more dominant among English-speaking Canadians than Church of England orientations.

Canada continues to have two major streams in its religious institution: French and English, both of which are conservative with respect to family values, both concerned to seek social justice and fair play, but each taking quite different approaches to the roles of individuals and governments in building a society.

New Zealand is different again. Before significant European settlement the Reverend Marsden – known in Australia as the ‘whipping parson’ due
to his dual role as a cleric and magistrate and his reputation for sentencing miscreants to the lash—had led a mission to the Maoris and succeeded in converting large numbers to Christianity in the form of the Church of England. The Church of England in New Zealand thus started as a Maori church. Later, following the wars of the mid-nineteenth century, this Maori Christianity was colonised by English-dominated religious organisations as the Pakeha settlers came and established their own Catholic, Presbyterian and Anglican religious organisations. This period of colonisation in New Zealand was later than Australia by several decades and the religious organisations brought with the colonists at mid-century reflected the now-revitalised Victorian Anglican and Presbyterian churches and revivalist Methodism. This history has produced at least two separate strands of culture, religious practice and spirituality: Pakeha and Maori. This difference has dominated New Zealand until the recent arrival of large numbers of Pacific Island people, which has challenged this biculturalism.

**Pre-1947 Australian religion and spirituality**

The origins of post-1788 Australia have set the pattern for a distinctive Australian religion and spirituality: low to moderate levels of participation in organised forms of religion and spirituality, individual responsibility, distrust of organisations—especially those associated with the Crown—and the expectation that formal religion will be organised by professionals for ordinary people while they must tend to their own spirituality. Drawing on my immersion in the study of Australia’s religious and spiritual life and of the ways Australians make sense of their lives for more than twenty-five years, I am prepared to delineate a few of the elemental characteristics of Australian religion. The following is an attempt to focus on foundational and persistent characteristics and not to be misled by some incidentals or some of the accidental features of Australian religion and spirituality.

Australian religion and spirituality are characterised by:

- a serious but light touch in dealing with religion;
- a serious shyness of ‘high temperature’ and ‘high demand’ religion. Australians are wary of enthusiasm in religion;
• a serious wariness of imported, mass culture products, including spiritual and religious ones;
• a serious distancing from authoritarian leaders, persons promoting sacred causes, and sacrifice for principle;
• a serious commitment to living, to enjoying what is here and now; not so much a commitment to hedonism but to life, a life not worth sacrificing for the future;
• a serious openness to the experiences of others, but a suspicion of high-minded oratory and empty form. Some mistake this for an allergy to ritual, but I argue that it is an antipathy to empty formality;
• a serious mateship grounded in shared experience of the natural, human, social or demonic forces that destroy, demean and kill;
• a serious tolerance of difference flowing from a commitment to seeking a fair go for everyone and keeping an even keel. One way of interpreting the anti-clericalism of early Australia is to see it as part of the general tendency to live and let live coupled with an antipathy to ideology, imposed order and the top-down imposition of culture, meaning and purpose. One outcome of this has been a tolerance for diversity in religion. While this may seem to be contradicted by the sectarian conflict that did occur in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is critical to realise that this conflict was kept from spilling over into the rest of life by a religious institution – a set of expectations about the way religious groups are supposed to relate with each other – that was and is intolerant of sectarian conflict. This can be seen in the ways in which early communities were prepared to work and give to help establish church buildings but were not fussed, beyond Protestant vs Catholic sectarian squabbles, as to denomination. Moreover, the Protestant/Catholic divide was as much about class and ethnicity as anything religious. Thus, while Manning Clark talks of a Protestant Establishment, this is correct but only so far as hegemonic culture is concerned. A rich diversity of religious groups was early established as various forms of evangelical Christianity sought followers and more denominations associated with ethnic origins were founded;
• a serious readiness for humour, the ability to laugh at oneself, one’s situation, one’s culture, one’s dearest joy, hope and treasure. This laughter is different from that associated with ‘taking the mickey out’ of someone and is more a device for the protection of the sacred than an expression of
Qualities

faith. In this context it is helpful to recall that humour is one of Berger’s signs of the transcendent (Berger 1968);

- a serious quiet reverence, a deliberate silence, including comfort with an inarticulate awe and a serious distaste for glib wordiness;
- a serious wariness and intolerance of the ‘gate-keepers’, the ‘straighteners’ and ‘God’s police’: those who become the guardians of purity, who give and withhold access to the status of decency;
- a preference to ‘live and let live’ tolerance grounded in mutual respect as opposed to enforcing one group’s viewpoint on others as a primary mode of acceptable inter-religious group relations. While there has been a history of sectarian rivalry, it has always been decried and kept to rather low levels. The effect of the ecumenical movement among Christians in the twentieth century was to confirm this orientation and set the basis for its extension to interfaith relations in the twenty-first. Those who want newly arrived Australians to behave and think like ‘Australians’ seem more interested in wanting them to calm down, perhaps reduce the intensity of their religious commitments and be themselves, rather than enforcing a particular viewpoint. But then calming down and letting be is a viewpoint reflecting this commitment to tolerance. Australians are intolerant of the intolerant.

These persistent characteristics describe what Australians expect of their religions and spiritualities. Those who seek something else will have a straight uphill battle just to get going and have little chance of becoming dominant. Institutional change is, at best, glacial in its speed and requires a great deal of effort.

Organised religion in Australia

As with most other aspects of life, religion and spirituality becomes not only institutionalised but also organised. Formal organisations emerge from any interacting community as roles and activities become differentiated and specialised. In the case of religion, specialists and formal organisations emerge to take on the responsibility for connecting people with the transcendent, enacting rituals to appeal to the gods and constructing religious meaning properly.
In the process of becoming organised, religious groups take shape, leaders emerge, formal structures and patterns of doing things crystallise, sacred texts are written and interpretations produced, liturgies formalised and training centres established. Once they get going, like other social organisations, religious organisations take on a life of their own. They set their own agendas, and their leaders seek to shape their members and the society that gave them birth. In clarifying what they believe and how they worship, religious organisations may continue to support the social structures that were characteristic of the time of their establishment, or they may discover that they are in tension with the wider community and society. Through interaction with their larger social and cultural environments, religious groups change themselves and have an impact on the development of their contexts.

The Australian religious institution has from the 1840s been a ‘welcomer’ of various forms of organised religion. The Church of England and the Catholics were as much imports as have been the Salvation Army, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, Jews and today Buddhists, Sikhs, Baha’is, Muslims and Hindus.

**Conclusion**

Australia provides a particular context for the conduct of religion and spirituality. Its religious institution has its own describable features that shape the expression of religious and spiritual life. This institutional context is subject to the influences of social and cultural change, and is influenced in turn by the very activities of those groups and persons who work out their religious and spiritual life. It is to this vital dynamic between social institution, social organisations and global historical context that we now turn.
The religious and spiritual life of a society has quantitative dimensions as well as qualitative. The perennial problem is what to measure: attendance, levels of religious identification, levels of financial support given to religious organisations, impact on social policy, visibility of buildings, levels of belief, degree of conformity with declared values and morals, or level of moral tone in a society? Decisions about what to measure reflect basic assumptions about the nature of religious life: where it is found, how it is supposed to be expressed, what is the location of the spiritual in social life. A second basic issue centres on whether to analyse these dimensions at individual, group or societal level. As this is a sociological consideration of Australia’s religious and spiritual life, most of the analysis is deliberately conducted at group and social levels and describes and compares groups within Australia and with others.

Measurement is often focused on organisational aspects of religious involvement: attendance, financial giving or membership. If so, what criteria for frequency of attendance are to apply: weekly as expected by most Christian groups, or seasonal as expected by Buddhists, or some other? Similarly, membership is a term that fits participation in Protestant Christian congregations and Jewish synagogues, but not Catholics, Muslims or Buddhists. Measurement could be of spiritual practices: prayer, meditation or attending retreats. Alternatively, the rational dimensions of the religious and spiritual life – scripture study, attending to sermons, reading devotional material, taking courses, beliefs, and learning – could be measured. Or should the
experiential dimension of religion and spirituality be the focus: occasions of transcendence, awe, sense of the presence of a force greater than self or context?

Three primary types of source are available for the purpose of providing a quantitative analysis of Australian religious and spiritual life: records kept by religious groups, the census and survey research. Each provides helpful information on the changing nature of Australian religious and spiritual life and some of the critical factors driving these changes. The remainder of this chapter will present the changes in Australia’s religious profile and outline their implications for the country’s religious and spiritual life. This chapter mentions a large number of religious groups. Those wanting information about them should consult the Further Reading section at the end of the book.

Demography is the study of changes in the size and composition of a society’s population. Religious demography uses religious identity to examine changes in patterns of the numerical size of religious groups in a society. This demographic analysis of Australia’s religious and spiritual life focuses on changing religious identities, increases in religious diversity, the rise of spirituality and the rise of the Catholic Church and the decline of British Protestant Christianity. Following a socioeconomic examination of major religious groups in Australia and a comparison of Australia with other societies, it concludes with an examination of some information about Australia’s religious and spiritual life derived from surveys.

Religious identity

Australia’s series of now five-yearly censuses provides a moving picture of changes and continuities in its religious life. The Australian census, like those in New Zealand, Canada and recently in Britain, measures one simple dimension of religion: religious identification. From a demographic perspective, a person’s religious identity is taken to be, like other kinds of identity, what they say they are when they are asked who they are. Who are you? I am a male – gender identity, Dutch, American and English – ethnic identity, Australian – national identity, married – marital status identity, Anglican – religious identity, a green – political identity, a Melbourne supporter – sporting identity, and so on. In 2001 the Australian census asked,
‘What is the person’s religion?’ The census provides tick-box categories for those religious groups that accounted for 1 per cent and over of the Australian population in the previous census (see table 3.1 on p. 53). In 2001 these were listed in the order of their numerical size in the 1996 census: Catholic, Anglican (Church of England), Uniting, Presbyterian, Greek Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran, Islam, Buddhist, Other – Please Specify (two lines were provided for recording the response), then No Religion.

Religious identity is not to be confused with other dimensions of a person’s religious and spiritual life. Religious identity is not participation, or membership, or belief, or practice. Just because a person says they have ‘no religion’ does not mean that they are not religious or spiritual. They might even be regular attendees at a church, synagogue, mosque or temple. Some people are simply very private about their religion; others do not consider their spiritual practice to be a religion but more a way of life. Similarly, ticking the box saying that you are an Anglican does not mean that you support the Anglican Church with participation or financial donations, or that you agree with its pronouncements. By nominating a religious identity, a respondent indicates part of their cultural background. Religious identity has been shown to be related to political and social attitudes and behaviour (Bouma & Dixon 1986; Bentley & Hughes 1998; Evans & Kelley 2004).

The emphasis given to religious identity varies from society to society. In the USA, a person is likely to be asked fairly early in a conversation, ‘What church do you go to?’ Such a question is much less likely to come up in an introductory conversation in Australia. The salience of religious identity will also vary among the various subcultures and religious groups of a society. Evangelical Christians and highly involved participants of other religious groups will want to know the religious identity and theological position of people they meet. Buddhists may want to know which stream of Buddhism or teacher a person follows. The several strands of Judaism are reflected in clothing selections that declares the wearer’s more specific religious identity.

The series of Australian census reports on religious identification make it possible to trace the changing religious composition of Australian society. The colonies conducted censuses before Federation, which enable assessments of the quantities of Australia’s religious and spiritual life that reach back to the mid-nineteenth century (Mol 1971, 1985; Phillips 1987). For example, I found it interesting to discover that the percentage of Buddhists...
in Australia in 1891 was 1.2 per cent (Hughes 2004a). It then declined to 0.7 per cent in 1911 and 0.01 per cent in 1931. In 1857 there were 27,288 Buddhists in the Colony of Victoria, compared with 158,006 Anglicans (Phillips 1987: 422). Only in 1981 were Buddhists again of sufficient numbers to be reported in the census at all. In 2001 they reached 1.9 per cent. Muslims demonstrate a similar pattern with 0.9 per cent in 1911, declining to 0.03 in 1933, then rising from 0.17 per cent in 1971 to 1.5 per cent in 2001. Other groups have been remarkably stable: Jews at about 0.44 per cent and the Salvation Army at about 0.43 per cent (data before 2001 from Hughes 1997). I have been particularly interested in analysing the changes in Australia’s religious profile since 1947 as indicators of social and cultural change (Bouma 1983, 1995, 2002; Bouma & Dobson 2005).

Table 3.1 presents the data for Australian religious groups that attract more than 0.4 per cent of the population, or 80,000 persons. Several trends have emerged from a continuous analysis of changes in Australia’s religious profile as revealed in the census: increased religious diversity, a shift away from Protestant groups of British origin, and a dramatic growth of spiritualities and increased numbers of Catholics. Each of these deserves more attention.

**Increased diversity**

The diversity of Australian religious groups has grown along several dimensions: the number of religious groups, the number of religions represented and the range of difference between and within the religious groups. These changes have been produced by two factors: migration and conversion. Immigrants brought to Australia religions or religious groups not previously present, or augmented those religious groups not previously of great strength. Prussian and later German Lutheran immigrants to South Australia are an example of a religious group that deliberately migrated to Australia to escape persecution and to establish Lutheranism here (Breward 1993: 38–39, 46). Immigrants from Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt came to work and stayed to greatly strengthen the pre-existing Muslim groups (Bouma 1994). Dutch immigrants who were religious strengthened the Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church, while those who held more strictly their Calvinist theology formed a new denomination, the Reformed Churches of Australia (Overberg 1981; Bouma 2001). With the Greek immigrants came the Greek Orthodox Church; with Muslims came mosques, and Hindus built temples.
Table 3.1 The size and proportion of selected Australian religious groups in the 1947, 1971, 1996 and 2001 censuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious identification&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>1947 (000s)</th>
<th>1971 (000s)</th>
<th>1996 (000s)</th>
<th>2001 (000s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>2957</td>
<td>3953</td>
<td>3903</td>
<td>3881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>1570</td>
<td>3443</td>
<td>4799</td>
<td>5002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPCRU&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1678</td>
<td>2199</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCG&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Christian</td>
<td>6673</td>
<td>10990</td>
<td>12583</td>
<td>12764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>– –</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>617</td>
<td>911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate description</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>856</td>
<td>2949</td>
<td>2905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>1551</td>
<td>1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>7579</td>
<td>12756</td>
<td>17753</td>
<td>18769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Only those Christian groups larger than 1 per cent and other groups 0.4 per cent and larger in 2001 have been included.

<sup>b</sup> MPCRU combines the data for the Methodist, Presbyterian, Congregational, Reformed and Uniting Churches. The Uniting Church was formed in 1977 in a merger of Congregational, Methodist and about half of the Presbyterians (data from Australian Bureau of Statistics).

<sup>c</sup> OCG – Other Christian Groups less than 1 per cent.

Source: data from Australian Bureau of Statistics reports.
While few comment on it, conversion has also played a role in shaping Australian religious demography. Conversion is often given too heavy a connotation implying an earthshaking redirection in a person’s life occurring as the person changes from being committed to one religious group to another, or to none (Malony & Southard 1992; Rambo 1993). While this sort of conversion does occur, much smaller shifts in religious identification occasioning less dramatic change in a person’s life also occur (Vasi 2004; Bouma, Smith & Vasi 2000).

Shifts in religious identification are a form of conversion. The most numerous of these changes have been the shifts Australians have made from declaring identification with a particular religious group to declaring that they have ‘no religion’. This shift occurred largely from 1947. The initial growth from 0.3 per cent in 1947 to 6.7 per cent in 1971 reflects a change in the way the census ‘religion’ question was asked, which permitted the response of ‘no religion’ to be made. Before that, many just refused to answer the question and were recorded as ‘not stated’. The people making this choice between 1971 and 1996 came largely from members of the Anglican and MCPRU groups who were not taking up the religious identity of their parents. This is indicated by the fact that these two groups have virtually the same numbers between 1971 and 1996 and slip further in numbers from then. The children of those who make the choice to declare that they have ‘no religion’ sustain this religious identity in a way similar to the intergenerational continuity of other religious identities.

While there has been an increase in the percentage of those who say they have no religion, the degree to which this indicates an increase in secularity or irreligion must be tempered by what we know of those who say they have no religion in their responses to surveys. Bouma and Dixon (1986) report that, according to the 1983 Australian Values Study of ‘nones’, 21.2 per cent described themselves as ‘religious persons’, 37.8 per cent prayed ‘occasionally’ or more frequently, while 16.2 per cent said that God was ‘quite’ or ‘very’ important in their lives. What they did not do was attend church. Some of those who say they have ‘no religion’ would fit comfortably in Davie’s category of those who ‘believe but do not belong’ (Davie 1994). Gill (1999) argues that believing without belonging is best seen as a transitional stage on the path to doing neither because of the role of group participation in inculcating, nurturing and celebrating belief and practice.
Another change evident in the data on Australian religious identification from 1947 is that those who choose to participate in a Christian religious group are increasingly likely to choose a local worshipping community on some basis other than denominational loyalties (Kaldor et al. 1999). These changes are reflected in the number whose response is classified as ‘Pentecostal’, ‘other Christian group’, ‘other’ and ‘inadequately described’. While in overall terms these categories are small, they represent some of the most vigorously developing areas of Australian religion and spirituality.

The category ‘not stated’ poses an insurmountable problem of interpretation. Some commentators lump these respondents with those who declare that they have ‘no religion’; however, that practice is not justifiable. According to the data presented in table 3.1, the percentage not responding dropped following the introduction of the ‘no religion’ response, but it did not disappear and has returned to include nearly 10 per cent of the population. Interpreting a non-response poses serious problems and should be avoided. Some people feel that their religion and spirituality are to be kept private. Moreover, some religious groups discourage their members from responding to the census. Given the use of census data by the Nazis to facilitate the Holocaust, some feel uneasy about giving this information.

The increase of migration from countries outside the British Commonwealth has brought people who are unfamiliar with the religious identity question, and in some cases it has taken a few censuses for them to respond to it as their religious communities become aware of the usefulness of accurate census reports in making appeals for social services, representation or other forms of participation in Australian society. Eastern Catholics provide an example. In order to ensure that they show up in the census as a separate group, their bishops have been encouraging them to write in ‘Maronite Catholic’ rather than just ticking the ‘Catholic’ box (Dixon 2005a: 51).

Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus

The increase in Australian religious diversity is further demonstrated in the data presented in tables 3.2 (p. 59) and 3.3 (p. 65), which show the changes in the numbers and percentages of Australians identifying with both major and minor religious groups. In addition to the decline of mainstream Anglican and Protestant groups, Australian identification with other major world religions continues to grow substantially. There are now more Buddhists
than Baptists, more Muslims than Lutherans, more Hindus than Jews, and more than twice as many Sikhs as Quakers. This has radically changed the composition and feel of Australia’s religious and spiritual life. The rates of growth between 1996 and 2001 were large for Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus, mainly because of migration. However, ‘conversion’ to Buddhism and Islam was particularly evident between 1996 and 2001 and may be partly attributed to the fact that in 2001 the Australian Bureau of Statistics introduced a ‘tick box’ for Buddhists and Muslims as each of these groups had grown to more than 1 per cent in the previous census. This may have made it easier for those Australians who were already either Buddhists or Muslims to declare their religious identity than previously.

These changes in religious identity reflect changes in religious communities in Australia. Through a process of religious settlement, religions not previously found in Australia or not found in significant numbers have come either through migration or conversion (Bouma 1994, 1995; Cahill et al. 2004). With the increase in their numbers came the establishment of well-organised communities of Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and other religious groups. These are not just ethnic communities but religious communities focused on religious centres, such as temples, mosques and shrines, and shopping centres catering for not only ethnic foods but also religious supplies and such food as required by religious requirements and schools. The presence of these communities is announced by the domes and minarets of mosques, the dazzling array of temples and shrines, and churches with names that reflect the changing diversity of Australian Christianity. Moreover, these religious structures – like the communities they serve – often stand cheek by jowl with each other and with Christian churches. The communities making up Australia’s multicultural and multifaith society are not geographically or residentially segregated (Bouma & Hughes 2000; Bouma & Dobson 2005) but live in each others’ presence.

**A vista of multifaith Australia**

Stand at the entry to the Cabramatta Leagues Club and look out from the portico. From that vantage point you will see at the street level a Vietnamese Buddhist temple built in a Japanese architectural style. As your eye rises through a dense thicket of gum trees you will notice the minaret and dome of a Turkish mosque. Then, next to the dome, you will see a steeple topped with a cross rising from a Presbyterian church.
Flying over the whole scene is a giant Australian flag maintained by a large nearby shopping centre. The fact that just around the corner are two more Buddhist temples and more churches only puts the final touches on this icon of twenty-first-century Australian religious and spiritual diversity.

Gary Bouma

While changes in religious identity show up in the census, they are also apparent on the streets of Australian cities and towns as some Australians choose to express their religious identity in the way they dress. The following report of a ‘fashion parade’ offered to the public in Melbourne and Sydney provides an example of dressing to express religious identity.

Faith, fashion, food and feminism

On a warm autumn night in Melbourne, in the council chambers of the Richmond Town Hall, about 200 women gather for an evening to celebrate Muslim religion, fashion and food. Called ‘My Dress, My Image, My Choice’, the event is run by Muslim women for non-Muslim women, and they share stories of their faith and their experiences as Muslim women in Australia and show off their often dazzling fashions.

None of the women are models but all could be. Accompanied by the heady dance rhythms of world music, the women move proudly across the room, dressed in outfits designed for home, work, school and leisure. It’s a mix of beauty and elegance. Through this simple yet highly effective format, the women lift the spirits of everyone in the room.

The program aims to demystify Islam and challenge the negative stereotype that equates Islam with terrorism. The women counter this ugly image by promoting beauty, peace and harmony. Funded by the Commonwealth’s Living in Harmony initiative, the fashion parade is the brainchild of the Migrant Information Centre in Melbourne to spread goodwill across religions and cultures. One by one, the women introduce themselves.

They are teachers, scientists, IT consultants, students and mothers, from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, some raised as Muslim, others who have converted to Islam. The women talk about what their faith means to them and about the significance of the Koran in their lives. They explain that while the hijab (or headscarf) is not compulsory, they have chosen to wear it as an act of devotion and worship, an affirmation of their
love for God and pride in their religion. Some also see it as a feminist statement that says: 'Judge me on the basis of my personality and intellect, not on my beauty or body shape.'

The women find it hard to fathom why such a simple piece of cloth seems to generate so much anxiety. And while they feel empowered by wearing the hijab, they acknowledge it’s sometimes difficult to overcome the ignorance and prejudice of a minority of Australians, but not always. One woman tells the delightful story of her first day at work as a primary school teacher in Alice Springs. When she walked into the classroom one little girl pointed excitedly, 'Look, it’s baby Jesus’ mum!' With laughter reverberating round the room, a sumptuous feast of Middle Eastern fare is brought out while the women answer questions from the floor about their religion and their lives.

The evening ends with a parade of wedding gowns, a pageant of vibrant colours, glorious fabrics and dynamic women.

Sylvie Shaw

‘Other religious groups’

The increased diversity in the varieties of the world’s major religions active in Australia is only part of the story of increased diversity. The numbers of Australians identifying with religious groups categorised as ‘Other’ in the census increased by 33.33 per cent between 1996 and 2001. The category ‘Other’ includes a rich diversity of religious groups. Those attracting more than a thousand Australians are listed in table 3.2, but in addition there are many others that attract hundreds of Australians. It must be remembered that people declaring identification with any group amounting to less than 1 per cent in the 1996 census had to make the effort to write in a response rather than just tick one of the boxes offered.

Only two groups listed in table 3.2 as ‘Other’ declined between 1996 and 2001. Those identifying with Aboriginal traditional religion declined by 29 per cent. This figure has varied substantially from census to census partly because the options made available by the census do not relate well to their spirituality. The number of Australians identifying as Satanists also declined by 14 per cent. Since there is no way to link responses between censuses, it is not possible to produce a mobility table to identify patterns of change in religious identification at the level of persons. Hence, it is not possible to tell
Table 3.2 Changes in Australia’s religious profile, 1996–2001: more detail about Other Religious Groups (0.01 per cent and over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(000s)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>(000s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhists</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindus</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jews</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>282</td>
</tr>
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<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal traditional</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha’i</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese religions</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druse</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese religions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature religions</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Paganism</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—Wicca/witchcraft</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satanism</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Scientology</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoroastrians</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Humanists</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>0.01</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
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<td>8.67</td>
<td>1836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate description</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jedi</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National population</td>
<td>17753</td>
<td></td>
<td>18769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: data from Australian Bureau of Statistics reports 1996, 2005
where those who identified as Satanists in 1996 recorded their responses in 2001.

Other world religions in Australia

The rest of the groups listed as ‘other’ enjoyed growth at varying degrees. Included in ‘Other’ because of their comparatively small numbers are three groups often listed as major world religions: Baha’i, Sikhism and Zoroastrians. Sikhs find their origins in India. The Baha’i community in Australia grows steadily and substantially. This group was founded in the mid-nineteenth century in Persia, suffered significant persecution and has a well-established global network of organisations that promote their own faith as well as interfaith understanding (MacEoin 1997). Zoroastrians, also known as Parsis after the extensive Zoroastrian community in India, were founded by the prophet Zarathustra in Persia around 600 BCE. Chinese religions in Australia include those who wrote that they were Confucian, Taoist or engaged in ancestor worship. The Druse emerged from Muslim origins in the eleventh century and practise a form of mysticism. They are growing through migration from the Middle East. They do not seek converts. Specifically Japanese religions in Australia include Shinto and other new religious groups listed below.

New religious movements

The reorganisation of the reporting of religious identification for the 1996 census has permitted a more detailed consideration of the growth and place of new religious movements in Australia (ABS 1996). All religions were once new religious movements. Each generation produces a range of new religious movements, some of which continue to exist in the next generation, and some emerge as major movements. The early nineteenth century is well known as a time of religious ferment, producing among others the Church of Latter Day Saints (often called Mormons) and the Baha’i faith, both of which suffered severe persecution shortly after their foundation before emerging as major religious groups. Since the nineteenth century the Church of Latter Day Saints has moved from being a repressed sectarian group largely located in the USA to being a major religious group increasingly seen as a significant worldwide denomination within Christianity (Finke & Stark 1992: 242; Stark 1996).
The late twentieth century spawned its full share of new religious movements, Scientology for example, and some of these groups have reached sufficient size to be reported in the Australian census, for example, Mahikari and Tenrikyo, which are Japanese new religious movements growing in popularity worldwide (Bouma, Smith & Vasi 2000; Clarke 2006).

Nature religions

‘Nature religions’ draw their strength and inspiration from aspects of the natural environment and include animism, naturism, paganism, pantheism, witchcraft (or Wicca), shamanism, voodoo and a host of other new religious movements and spiritualities (Harvey 1997; Hume 1997; Tacey 2003). This category of religious groups has enjoyed high growth rates particularly since the 1980s. In 1947 the entire category of ‘Other’ attracted the responses of 4,000, or 0.1 per cent of Australians; by 1971 this had risen to 14,000, but still 0.1 per cent of the population. From the 1996 census it is possible to track these small but often quite vibrant groups. By 1996 the ‘Other’ category had grown to 69,000, or 0.39 per cent of Australians, and by 2001 it had grown to 92,000 or 0.5 per cent. Within this category, nature religions account for 23,000 or about a quarter, enjoying a 130 per cent growth in the five years between 1996 and 2001. Witchcraft alone grew by 373.5 per cent.

The rise of spirituality

The growth of new religious movements and nature religions represents in some ways one of the growing edges of Australian religion and spirituality along with Pentecostal Christianity, Islam and Buddhism. That this is a significant growth area is attested to by a surprising finding in the 2001 census: the dramatic rise in the number of Australians who wrote something down that related more to spirituality than to particular organised religious groups. Their responses were allocated to the categories ‘religious belief, not further defined’ or ‘inadequately described’. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1996: 29), these categories are ‘used to code responses which cannot be allocated to a category at any level of the classification’. They are reported together in table 3.2 as ‘Inadequately Described’. A list of the type of response categorised here runs to nineteen pages, single spaced, or a thousand entries. In 1996 the responses of 54,000 or 0.31 per cent of
Australians were coded to this category. However, in 2001, 352,000 responses were coded to it, which represents 1.88 per cent of the population, about the same number as Buddhists and more than Lutherans or Baptists. The growth rate was a staggering 551.9 per cent. I was supplied a copy of the ‘line counts’ of the 2001 census in order to analyse the implications of these written-in responses for Australia’s religious and spiritual life. Census regulations do not permit giving the numbers associated with these counts, but general categorical indications are permitted.

An examination of the responses to the religious identity question that Australians actually wrote down, as opposed to just ticking a box, suggests that many were giving a response that reflected their spirituality rather than their religious affiliation. This is in keeping with the anecdotal accounts of Australians saying that they are not religious but they are ‘spiritual’. Examples of such responses include: ‘other’; that is, I have a religion or spirituality but it is other than the categories listed. This is extremely minimalist but squares with the notion that Australian religion can best be characterised as ‘a shy hope in the heart’. Many of the responses written in involved the word ‘spiritual’. Other responses include ‘all’, ‘eclectic’, ‘my own’, ‘karma’, ‘universal’, ‘Celtic’ and ‘reconciliation’.

In the 2001 census 71,000 Australians responded to the ‘religion question’ by writing in Jedi, Jeddist, Jedism, Jedi Spiritualist, Skywalker, Jedi Knight, May the Force be with you, the Source, or other responses linked to the Star Wars movies. At the time many commentators jested, and the initial official response of the ABS was to condemn the respondents for trivialising the census. There was a movement in the United Kingdom to respond in this way, which may have influenced some Australian respondents.

However, there is another way of looking at these responses. I agree with Barron (2003) that these cinema-based religious responses are grounded in exceptionally popular movies that have developed a well-structured cosmology and ethical system, and should be treated as spiritual responses. The Jedi legends establish a universal interstellar order and address problems of the origins, effects and solutions to evil as located both in persons and in systems. The Star Wars films have created a well-crafted myth involving larger-than-life characters representing good and evil in a dramatic moral contest set beyond this time. In this contest evil is never fully vanquished, yet good wins out enabling a form of cosmic optimism: the Universe is
ultimately friendly and ‘the Force’ is with you. Self-sacrifice for the good of others and society is legitimated and celebrated, and evil is shown to be ultimately banal. Rituals related to this religious system may include seeing the movies over and over at home or in theatres, discussing key elements and blessing others with ‘May the Force be with you’. All the elements of spirituality are here, and most of those commonly associated with a religion (Staub 2005).

In addition to these *Star Wars*–related responses, there were also Trekkies, or Star Trekkers. A similar argument could be developed around the *Star Trek* series and I expect to find quite a number of ‘Hobbits’, Followers of the Ring and other *Lord of the Rings*–related spiritualities reflected in responses to the 2006 census. A website proudly proclaims that Matrixism is a religion (www.geocities.com/matrixism2069/). The evidence on age and religious participation suggests that young people are much more likely to be exposed to *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings* films than to Sunday School. In any case ‘Jeddist’ and movie-related responses were only 20 per cent of these written-in ‘spiritual’ entries.

**Multiple religious identities**

An increase in religious diversity at the group or societal level could occur without much effect on individuals so long as the several religious groups were kept from interacting and each enforced strict standards of singular religious identity. Neither of these approaches to maintaining singular religious identity currently works in Australia. Some individuals have begun to be involved in multiple religious groups, adopting beliefs and practices from a range of religions and spiritualities. The designers of the Australian census presuppose that religious identities must be mutually exclusive (ABS 2005). Given these religious institutional norms about religious identity, and given that they are in a sense ‘enforced’ by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, an Australian who claimed more than one identity would be viewed as at least different and a bit strange. Moreover many theories of conversion assumed that religious identities change only through major religious transformations (Vasi 2004). However, there is evidence to challenge these assumptions and to locate them squarely in passing modernity.
There are several indications of the passing of singularity in religious identity in the ‘line counts’ from the 2001 census. Responses such as ‘multidenominational’, ‘Christian Jew’, ‘Goth Jedi’, ‘Buddhist Christian’, ‘Judeo Christian’, ‘Anglican Jewish’, ‘Anglican SDA’, ‘Celtic Catholic’, ‘Christian Aboriginal dreaming’, ‘Hindu Muslim’, ‘Hindu Sikh’ and ‘Catholic Orthodox’ clearly express plural religious identity. While the total is fewer than a thousand, there are still some who wish to indicate more than one identity in the census. I have not been able to discover what happened if someone ticked two boxes, for example Buddhist and Catholic. My research among Vietnamese Buddhists in Melbourne revealed that some considered themselves to be Buddhists and Catholics (Bouma 1997). Many see no conflict between being Christian and reading regularly their star signs. However, those combining Jewish and Christian identities may be either indicating a multiple religious identity or, what is more likely, they may be part of one of the several Christian groups who present themselves as ‘Jews’ to Jews in order to convert them to Christianity.

As a result of migration and conversion Australia has become demographically a religiously plural society. Note that ‘plural’ in this sense simply means diverse and is to be distinguished from pluralism, which is a set of ideas or ideologies about plurality adopting positions on whether it is desirable, problematic, a threat or a promise (Beckford 2003: 73–102). It now takes more groups to include half the population than it did in 1947. The list of religious groups Australians call their own is much longer, and the degree of difference is greater than it was in 1947. We live in a religiously diverse society with substantial religious communities of quite different faith groups. There are also Australians who participate in and identify with more than one religious group.

It is also true that as a result of migration and, to a lesser degree, due to conversion most of Australia’s religious groups are more ethnically diverse than they were in 1947. This is true of Australian Catholics who were distinctly Irish until the post-1947 waves of migration brought Italian, Maltese, Yugoslav, Polish, German, Dutch, Hungarian, Baltic, Lebanese, Indian and Sri Lankan Catholics to Australia. The challenge this diversity posed to the previously Irish-dominated church is well documented (Pittarello 1980; Lewins 1978; Dixon 2005a). Anglicans and Uniting too are now more ethnically diverse. Australian Muslims trace their origins to more than sixty-five nations.
Table 3.3 Changes in Australia’s religious profile, 1996–2001: more detail about Christian groups (groups comprising 0.1 per cent and over)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(000s)</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>(000s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>3 903</td>
<td>21.99</td>
<td>3 881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>295</td>
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<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brethren</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witnesses</td>
<td>83</td>
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<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latter Day Saints</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
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<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriental Christian</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>195</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presbyterian/Reformed</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day</td>
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<td>0.30</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>1 335</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>1 249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Christian</td>
<td>12 566</td>
<td>70.89</td>
<td>12 749</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>17 753</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>18 769</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: data from Australian Bureau of Statistics reports 1996, 2005

Decline of British protestantism

Not only are there more religious groups and more Christian groups, there has also been a marked decline of Anglicans and other Protestant groups that had their origins in Britain: Presbyterians, Methodists, Brethren and Congregationalists. Table 3.3 presents a more detailed analysis of Christian religious groups with more than 0.1 per cent of the population, or about 20,000 persons. These data make it possible to see and understand the changes affecting Australian Christianity.
While the total number identifying with a Christian group grew by 1.44 per cent between 1996 and 2001, the percentage declined from 70.55 per cent to 68.00 per cent. This decline is partly due to the fact that the Christian portion of the population grew at a slower rate than the nation’s population (1.44 per cent compared with the overall population rate of growth of 5.7 per cent), and partly due to the more rapid growth of other religious groups, as shown in table 3.2. But the internal differences between the growth rates of Christian groups is quite revealing. Those groups growing most rapidly are ‘Other Christian’, ‘Oriental Christian’, Pentecostal and Latter Day Saints. The ‘Other Christian’ category includes many independent congregations and small groups of congregations. Some of these provide a charismatic worship style and conservative, family-oriented ethos. In this they are similar to the Pentecostals. Others are not Pentecostal but focused on particular teachings, such as Christadelphians, Liberal Catholic Church, World Wide Church of God, Moral Rearmament, Messianic Jews and Metropolitan Community Churches. The Latter Day Saints have been steadily growing around the world at about 10 to 20 per cent per decade (Stark 1996). Their growth is largely due to intense recruitment of families into a highly structured and high-demand religious society. They do not provide a charismatic worship style and have much greater hierarchical organisational structure and congregational stability than Pentecostal groups. The ‘Oriental Christian’ group consists of groups of ancient denominations that originate in the Middle East: Armenian Apostolic Church, Coptic Orthodox Church and Syrian (Jacobite) Church. These groups have been growing as a result of immigration.

Those Christian groups declining most rapidly have been the Churches of Christ (–8.25 per cent) and the Brethren (–12.28). Some of the Churches of Christ loss has been due to mega-churches established by former Churches of Christ pastors who left to establish non-denominational groups. Where Churches of Christ congregations maintain a traditional and more cerebral style of worship, they have suffered declines. The Brethren are a small denomination with an ageing profile, which suggests they may be disappearing; however, the intensity of commitment in this evangelical group has been the key to its persistence to this point. Intermediate but continuing decline has been the story for Presbyterians and Reformed (–5.57 per cent), Uniting Church (–6.46 per cent), Salvation Army (–3.67 per cent) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (–2.81 per cent). The Anglicans experienced only a small decline.
This was unpredicted as they had been declining by about 2 percentage points per census for many years. The Uniting Church has been in steady decline since its formation in 1976 and, with the Presbyterians and Anglicans, represents the waning of British Protestantism. Their declines parallel those of similar groups in the USA, Canada and New Zealand.

Australian Presbyterians have responded to this situation with a radical shift towards the conservative evangelical part of the Christian spectrum and have made alliances with similar groups in the USA. Some Presbyterian congregations have also adopted a more energetic and contemporary worship style. Whether this will halt the decline is not yet clear. Following many years of decline, Anglicans held their ground between 1996 and 2001. A number of Anglican parishes, following the lead of Sydney diocese, are pursuing high-demand, conservative evangelical approaches with some charismatic features. Several of these parishes have become mega-churches with Sunday attendances in the thousands (Connell 2005). It is not clear whether this approach among Anglicans is the only factor in staying the decline. Anecdotal evidence and findings from the National Church Life Survey (Bellamy & Kaldor 2002: 7) indicate that Anglican mega-churches have a much higher proportion of young people than more traditional Anglican parishes.

The net result of these demographic changes affecting Australian Christian groups is a decline in the power and influence of those groups that were strong in the twentieth century – Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists – as well as other smaller but influential Protestant groups such as Baptists, Churches of Christ and Congregationalists. These groups had their origins in British Christianity and came to Australia primarily from 1840. Their age profiles (Bouma & Hughes 1998) suggest that they are moving from asking ‘Will our children have faith?’ to ‘Will our faith have children?’ since they have effectively lost two generations and are in the process of losing a third.

Catholic growth

Australian Catholics have grown more numerous consistently from 1947 until the 2001 census to become the largest religious group in Australia. It is not only about a quarter larger than the next largest, Anglicans, it is also well organised at federal, state and local levels and has the wealth of many religious orders and a system of schools that continues to attract more pupils as parents look for a more disciplined and values-based education for their children (Dixon 2005a). While some orders are seriously ageing and looking tired,
others are bringing new life and energy to twenty-first-century Catholicism. The bishops are mostly Australian and ethnically diverse (Dixon 2005a).

From 1947 to 1971 the Australian Catholic population grew rapidly from 20 per cent to 27 per cent of the population, largely through the reception of immigrants, but since then, according to the 2001 census, they have slipped slightly. Catholics have become much more ethnically diverse since 1947 with the arrival of large numbers of Italian, Vietnamese and Philippine immigrants. This has stretched the capacity of the Irish-dominated ecclesial structure to respond. There is also evidence of declining participation among Catholics. The reaction of the hierarchy has been to re-emphasise the distinctiveness of Catholicism, to heighten the boundaries and to be more demanding. While there have been some small increases in the numbers preparing for ordination to the priesthood, there is a substantial shortage of priests, which will only get worse unless there is a dramatic turnaround in the current trend. Importing priests from overseas may provide some relief, but this practice would bring to the Catholics the problems faced by other churches that depend on imported clergy.

Other demographic dimensions

By linking the responses people make to the ‘religion’ question to their responses to other questions on the census, it is possible to build profiles of religious groups along such dimensions as age, occupation, income, education and family. One of the best sources of statistical information on specific religious groups in Australia is *Australia’s Religious Communities: A Multimedia Exploration* (Hughes 2004a). What follows are diagrams constructed using data from the 2001 census that compare major religious groups in Australia.

**Age and gender**

The data presented in figure 3.1 indicate that there are substantial differences in the age structures of major religious groups in Australia. Christians and Jews have higher proportions of persons over 64 years of age, whereas Hindus and Muslims have more under 15. Buddhists and Hindus have the highest proportion aged 15–64.
Over the years Christian groups have become older (Hughes 2004a). The cause of this ageing is simply the failure to replace members who are dying with recruits who are either born to members or incorporated at earlier ages. This partly reflects the radical decline in the birthrate of Australians generally and middle-class Australians in particular. On the other hand, such groups as Buddhists, Muslims and Hindus are youthful because many of them have more recently migrated to Australia and immigrant populations tend to have more youthful age profiles. Pentecostals and Baptists are more youthful because they are more attractive to youth.

**Education**

The Christian group is so large that it will usually be quite similar to the ‘all’ category, which includes all who responded to the census. But in the case of education Christians have a slightly smaller proportion with postgraduate qualifications and more who are below degree status. The data from the 2001 census presented in figure 3.2 (p. 70) demonstrate that Hindus and Jews have the highest proportion of those with postgraduate qualifications and are the only two groups with more people with bachelors degrees than no degree. Muslims lead Buddhists and those declaring no religion in the proportion of persons with postgraduate qualifications.
**Income and occupation**

Buddhists and Muslims have the highest proportions with lower incomes. This reflects the fact that many are recent immigrants to Australia. Hindus have a high proportion of highest incomes while Jews present a distribution that is high in both lower and highest income ranges. Those declaring no religion have the second highest proportion of persons in the highest income bracket (see figure 3.3).

The religious differences in occupation presented in figure 3.4 indicate that Jews are strongly represented among managers and professionals, whereas Muslims are quite evenly distributed across the categories. Buddhists and Muslims have the highest proportion in the production, transport and labourers category. Christians match the national distribution.

**Family**

The census data on religious differences in marital status presented in figure 3.5 (p. 72) indicate that those declaring no religion are the least likely to be married, Hindus the most likely. Buddhists and those with no religion have the highest proportion of divorced or separated persons, while Christians come in at the national average. Muslims are the least likely to be widowed.
**Figure 3.3** The income distribution of major religious groups in Australia


**Figure 3.4** The occupation distribution of major religious groups in Australia

There is a propensity for those who identify with a religious group to marry another person from that group. This varies among groups with the Muslims having the highest rate of in-marriage (91.9 per cent), Pentecostals (87.1 per cent), Jews high at 80 per cent and the Uniting (40 per cent) and Presbyterian and Reformed (39 per cent) churches among the lowest. Of those declaring no religion, 67.5 per cent had partners who also declared no religion (Hughes 2004a).

**Demographic implications for the future**

This demographic analysis of Australia’s religious and spiritual life clearly indicates that religion is not a characteristic of the poor but of the educated middle classes. While the theories of Marx led many social theorists to expect religion to be particularly the activity of the poor, who were seen to be seeking in the next life rewards denied to them in this, such is not the case in Australia. Participation in formally organised religion requires a level of material and social resources not characteristic of the poor. Australia’s
rising middle class of 1830–80 found formally organised religion – churches and synagogues – helpful in staking middle-class claims, promoting the values and expectations of the middle class and monitoring decency. This pattern remained the case through much of the twentieth century. The role of the Catholic Church in the economic rise of its members is a story that has not been told, but is clearly there. Far from hindering social mobility, participation in Catholic education has been a key factor in the preparation of many for full participation in twenty-first-century urban middle-class life.

However, while the participation declines of the 1960s and 1970s fuelled the claims of secularisation theorists that religion was dead and gone, this was not the case. Migration brought people who were more religious than they would have been had they stayed where they were raised. Their religions were new to Australia or promoted rapid growth in religions that had previously attracted few adherents. However, retaining the children and grandchildren of these immigrants has proven to be a major challenge. The adults may have found social solidarity with other immigrants and assistance in settling into Australia as well as a context that used their mother tongue. One Reformed pastor claimed that the ‘coffee and speculaas was as important as, if not more than, the sermon’ for these immigrants. The next generation speaks English and is less interested in maintaining ‘old ways’. Catholics appear to have been more successful in retention, probably due to the wider array of organisational support provided to their people: schools, welfare agencies, religious orders, clubs and societies, mid-week opportunities for Mass, prayer and study in addition to weekly worship.

Moreover, the old middle class is being taken over by a new and different middle class – a middle class that is much more ethnically and religiously diverse (Megalogenis 2003: 7–49). Not only have the Anglo-Celts not replaced themselves through birth but also the children they did produce have not risen in great numbers to fill the ranks of the middle and upper classes. In their place have come new recruits to the middle class who, like most other rising aspirational groups, will produce substantial numbers who seek comfort, legitimation and an ethical framework through participation in religious groups. They are also having children and forming families. But they are not populating the old forms, being more
likely to go to non-denominational, Pentecostal and mega-churches (Kaldor et al. 1999: 13–33). Quintessential Australian examples include Hillsong in Sydney, St Hillary’s in Melbourne, Generation in the Gold Coast and Paradise in Adelaide (Connell 2005).

**National comparisons**

Comparing Australia with other societies reveals differences in religious profile that suggest the presence of wider trends. Census and other demographic data permit comparisons of the religious profiles of societies. Table 3.4 presents the data from Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Australia is significantly different from the USA. Australia reports about 21 per cent Anglicans whereas the USA has fewer than 2 per cent Episcopalians, the identity by which Anglicans are known there. On the other hand, the USA reports more than 20 per cent Pentecostals, while Australia has just over 1 per cent. These demographic differences are indicative of cultural differences. American presidents since Jimmy Carter have all claimed to be ‘born-again Christians’. This is something I seriously doubt we will ever hear in Australia. The USA has myriad small denominations and independent congregations whereas Australia has far fewer.

The data presented in table 3.4 make it clear that Australia’s religious demography is rather like that of Canada and New Zealand in ethnic composition. They share a common primary European origin and similar patterns of nineteenth- and twentieth-century migration. However, closer comparisons reveal that each has a different predominant group. Anglicans are much more numerous in Australia and New Zealand than in Canada, where Catholics predominate. Catholics are more numerous in Australia and Canada than in New Zealand, where people are much more likely to identify as Presbyterians. Both Australia and Canada formed Uniting or United churches, but New Zealand did not. Canada reports 1.1 per cent Jews, nearly three times the proportion in Australia, whereas New Zealand trails at 0.2 per cent. Australia has nearly three times as many Orthodox as Canada whereas New Zealand’s Orthodox population is barely detectable. On the other hand, New Zealand leads in the proportion of Hindus: 1.1 per cent. These countries also differ in the nature of their indigenous populations: Inuit and Indian in Canada, Maori in New Zealand and Aboriginal in Australia. Canada and
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<td>10 508 186</td>
<td>12 755 638</td>
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<td>24 083 495</td>
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<sup>a</sup> 1945 in Canada and New Zealand.

<sup>b</sup> Eastern (Australia and New Zealand); including Eastern (Canada) 1981 and 1991.

<sup>c</sup> ‘Union’ including Uniting in New Zealand; ‘United’ in Canada.

Source: Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics census reports; Canada, Statistics Canada reports; New Zealand, Department of Statistics
Australia have significant Muslim populations whereas New Zealand does not.

The United Kingdom included a religion item in its census for the first time in 2000. Unfortunately it does not report subgroups of Christians, who comprise 71.8 per cent of the population, but does give percentages for Muslims at 2.8 per cent, Hindus at 1 per cent, Sikhs at 0.8 per cent and Buddhists at 0.3 per cent (www.statistics.gov.uk). The United Kingdom proportion of Muslims is higher than that of Canada, Australia and New Zealand. However, Muslims in Canada, similar to the United Kingdom, have primarily emigrated from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh whereas the primary sources of Australian Muslims have been Turkey, Lebanon and Egypt. The United Kingdom also reports higher proportions of Hindus than Canada and Australia and about the same as New Zealand. The United Kingdom is also home to many Black Christian congregations that trace their origins to the Caribbean and which are not represented in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

**Religion and spirituality in social surveys**

International comparative social surveys provide evidence for locating Australia’s religious and spiritual life in a range of other societies. Evans and Kelley (2004: 38) concluded that ‘Religion is still important in Australia’ and that ‘levels of belief have not changed greatly in the last 20 years’. The National Social Science Survey (NSSS) and the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) provide basic information on Australian religious and spiritual life. The NSSS provides random national samples useful for broad sweep generalisations about Australia, and the NCLS provides detailed information about church attendees.

Neither of these data sources is able to provide reliable data about small religious groups as any group smaller than 2 per cent of the population will not generate meaningful sample sizes in a random sample of 2,000, which is larger than most sample surveys of Australians. This means that national sample survey data will not include useful information about Muslims, Buddhists, Lutherans, Baptists, Jews, Hindus and other small but lively religious groups. This leads to a misleading view of the dominance of a few
major Christian groups. The fact that the NCLS includes many but not all Christian groups, and, of those groups, only respondents who attend, means that while it can give impressive detail on selected issues for church attendees, it is silent about other religious groups and those who did not attend during the time the study was conducted.

Declines in participation

While Evans and Kelley argue that religion is alive and well in Australia, they point out that claimed rates of church attendance have halved ‘between the early 1980s and the early years of the new century’ (2004: 36). They ask whether the comparatively high rates of belief and attendance following World War II represent a ‘normal’ level or reflect a post-war revival following which we have moved back towards the historic norm for Australia (2004: 35). They also question whether these variations have anything to do with religion or, following the argument of Putnam (2000: 254), to shifts in the way social capital is produced. The latter appears to be more likely the case, given that most other voluntary associations from service clubs, to lodges, to the Boy Scouts seem to follow similar participation trajectories through the twentieth century. This observation demonstrates again the critical importance of comparative studies. Most studies of religious belief and participation are ahistorical and non-comparative. Many explanations of religious decline apply only to religion, often blaming leadership and the rise of secularity for the decline. However, if other voluntary organisations are sharing the same experience, a wider explanation is called for.

Comparisons between religious participation rates in the 1950s and 1960s with those in the beginning of the twenty-first century need to be interpreted carefully. The range of leisure activity choices available now as opposed to then has increased dramatically. Churches are not the primary local social centres they once were when they provided dances, socials, tennis and other occasions for people to meet. With the rise of other opportunities people have gone elsewhere. Moreover, schools, and particularly church-related private schools, demand an enormous amount of weekend time of their pupils, in effect competing with churches for that scarcest of commodities – time. The competitive environment of the churches not only includes a rich diversity of religious and spiritual offerings but also a wealth of other forms of entertainment, amusement and education.
Who attends church?

There is survey data on church attendance, but not on mosque, synagogue or temple attendance; therefore the following analyses apply only to church attendance. According to the best source of data on church attendees (Kaldor et al. 1999: 10), people attend church in order to worship and learn more about their faith in study groups. Other aspects of church involvement explored included ‘providing wider community care’, ‘reaching the unchurched’ and ‘sharing the Eucharist’. Not surprisingly, attendees of denominations whose worship focuses on the Eucharist – Catholics, Anglicans, Lutherans – valued sharing in the Eucharist, whereas those attending more evangelical denominations – Assemblies of God, Christian City Churches and Pentecostals – valued ‘reaching the unchurched’. Regular church attendees form a distinct section of the Australian population. Attendees are older – 34 per cent were over 60 compared with 21 per cent of the total population in 1996 – and only 9 per cent were aged between 20 and 29 compared with 19 per cent of the population in 1996. Church attendees are also more likely to be female: 61 per cent are female compared with 51 per cent of the population. Church attendees tend to be better educated, 19 per cent having a university degree compared with 10 per cent of the population (Kaldor et al. 1999: 14–19). According to the Australian Community Survey, Australians born in non-English-speaking countries were more likely (33 per cent) to claim to attend church frequently than those born in Australia (19 per cent) and those born in English-speaking countries (17 per cent) (Kaldor et al. 1999: 22).

While church attendance has usually been associated with Sunday mornings, there is a much wider pattern of attendance timing now. This is in part due to the repeal of legislation reserving Sundays for non-work activities, including church and family. With shopping available 24/7 along with sport and entertainment opportunities crowding the weekends, time for religious and spiritual activities has been dispersed through the weekends and week. According to Dixon and Bond (2004: 3), attendance at Catholic Masses is evenly spread across the weekend with about 15 per cent attending at each of Saturday evening, Sunday before 9am, Sunday 9–10 am, late Sunday morning and Sunday evening. Another 25 per cent ‘often attend different Masses’. Sunday evening Masses attract a higher proportion of people aged 15–29, while Sunday morning is preferred by the over sixties. Sunday evenings were
preferred by those with more education and those preferring a more contemporary style. This Catholic pattern is also found among Pentecostal and evangelical mega-churches.

**Retention rates**

Evans and Kelley also find differences in what I have described as the ‘retention rates’ of Australian Christian denominations (Bouma 1980). A retention rate measures the ability of a group to keep participating as an adult someone who was born into the group, attended as a child or was converted to it. The population of any group is a function of inputs: births, new joiners and converts, minus departures: deaths and departures. A retention rate is an excellent indicator of health. A low retention rate will lead to the ageing of an organisation and ultimately to its withering away. A high retention rate leads to organisational health as people from all generations are present and active in it. Young people have the example of those just a bit older than themselves, and older members have both the assurance that the organisation will continue and thus is worth their effort. They also have the challenge of the questions and issues raised by younger members. This tension keeps an organisation vital whereas ageing causes rigidity, reduced capacity to respond creatively and death.

Evans and Kelley provide some telling data on the retention rates of Australian churches. ‘Among those raised in the Anglican Church, barely 40 per cent remained . . . 6 per cent switched to other Protestant churches, 3 per cent converted to Catholicism’, but 21 per cent became ‘nominal Christians’ and 21 per cent became explicitly irreligious (2004: 48). Other Protestants showed similar retention rates. British Protestant Christianity lost nearly half of those who described themselves as having been raised in their congregations. In contrast, 64 per cent of those raised Catholics remained Catholic in adulthood, and 80 per cent of those raised in Orthodox churches remained Orthodox. Whether this is due to differences related to the organisation and teachings of these groups, their patterns of migration or to timing of the impact of trends is unclear. Evans and Kelley report that ‘becoming unchurched is not at all a matter of Christian belief, nor of socialisation, nor of friendship within the congregation, nor of habit’ (2004: 51), thus undermining most of the usual explanations. Children and young people were only ‘a little more likely than older people to say they have “no religion”’ and gender made no difference. Education played a complex role.
The better educated were more likely to attend, a little less likely to believe and less likely to become nominal Christians.

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**Being Greek almost always means being Orthodox**

They say that Melbournian Greeks are more Greek than Grecian Greeks. This is not too much of an exaggeration: the children and grandchildren of Greek immigrants are surprisingly Hellenic: we love our Greek food; we are usually very conversant and literate in Greek – having attended both ‘Greek school’ and primary and secondary school; we amass in the thousands when the country’s sporting teams do well on the international stage; we can dance traditional Greek dances – and very well, mind you. And, of course, Greek Australians are almost always going to be Greek Orthodox – this is assumed to be the case. When one Greek Australian meets another, the presumption is that they are both Orthodox. The presumption is that they will both attend their local Greek Orthodox churches during Easter and baptise their children in the Church.

Why is that the case? Why do the offspring of Greeks remain thoroughly Greek – and thoroughly Greek Orthodox? One likely reason is that our parents passionately hold on to their Hellenism and want to instil it in us. In a sense, they cling on to Greece – more specifically, the Greece of the mid-twentieth century – and have shaped their progeny according to the morals and customs of that age. Melbourne’s Greek community could almost be figured as a community somewhat frozen in time. To be sure, Australia’s more liberal mainstream culture is rubbing off on us, making us less Hellenic – or less traditionally Hellenic. But even with our Australianisation and de-Hellenisation, Greek Australians remain very Greek – and very Greek Orthodox.

Mark Manolopoulos

The NCLS studies of church attendees in 1991 and 1996 provide data on its website that assess the ‘inflow’ and ‘outflow’ for each participating church (www.ncls.org.au). They distinguish three kinds of inflow: ‘switchers in’ are those who join and who were members elsewhere before; ‘newcomers’ are people who are new to church life; and ‘new 15–19 years old’, which they equate to births. Outflow categories include ‘switchers out’: those who joined other churches; ‘drifted out’: those who just ceased to attend; and ‘deaths’. The overall pattern for the churches included in their study – Anglicans,
Catholics, Uniting, Baptist, Presbyterian, Reformed, Lutheran and many smaller Protestant groups – included the following: of those attending in 1996, 14 per cent had ‘switched in’, 7 per cent were ‘newcomers’ and 6 per cent were ‘new 15–19 years old’. At the outflow end, of those who had attended in 1991, 14 per cent had ‘switched out’, 10 per cent had ‘drifted out’ and 7 per cent had died. The result was a decline of 2 per cent. But the closer analysis allows a diagnosis of where the failure to retain occurs. Switching was neutral: as many in as out. More people died than were ‘born’ into member families. But the largest losses occurred as people just drifted away.

Comparing denominations is instructive. Between 1991 and 1996 Anglicans suffered a 5 per cent loss of attendees, according to the NCLS. They lost more switchers (7 per cent in vs 8 per cent out) and had more drift away than there were newcomers (9 per cent vs 8 per cent). But the greatest loss was due to deaths: 8 per cent vs 5 per cent ‘births’. Anglicans are a seriously ageing group (Bouma & Hughes 1998). The Uniting Church showed a similar pattern. By way of contrast, Pentecostal churches grew by 10 per cent between 1991 and 1996. Switchers in were 28 per cent, switchers out only 15 per cent. However, 17 per cent drifted out, while 10 per cent were newcomers. Those who were new 15–19 years were 8 per cent, and only 2 per cent died. This is a young and growing church. There is a great fluidity of attendees: many in and many out, but few deaths. Once a group begins to age it is difficult to turn things around. Young people who walk into a congregation of which half is older than 60 will not feel that it is their scene. Some suburban congregations have a more balanced age distribution and are thriving.

Another approach to determining the retention rate of a religious group is to ask people what their religious identification was when they were children and what it is now (Bouma & Mason 1995; Evans & Kelley 2004). Evans and Kelley (2004: 48) report that 64 per cent of Catholics report being Catholic as children and at the time of the survey. Fifteen per cent of those raised Catholic now declare no religion, while 19 per cent have become nominal Christians; that is, they identify but do not attend. As noted earlier, the Orthodox had the highest retention rate of 80 per cent. For Anglicans, the pattern is bleak: only 40 per cent of those raised Anglican report being Anglican now, while 32 per cent have shifted to nominal and 19 per cent claimed to have no religion. However, the traffic is not all one way: only
46 per cent of those raised nominal Christian remain nominal. Indeed 30 per cent shifted from nominal to full participation in Catholic, Anglican and ‘Other Protestant’ churches about equally. The ‘no religion’ category had a retention rate of 77 per cent with 11 per cent shifting to fuller participation in a Christian group and 12 per cent shifting to nominal Christian.

There has been a substantial debate about what shapes an organisation’s retention rate (Kelley 1972; Bouma 1980). There is little question that in the last half of the twentieth century, conservative churches – those with strict standards of membership, belief and moral conduct along with the widest range of programs designed to increase and apply faith – have had higher retention rates. The success of Mormons is largely due to the ability of this group to retain as adult members more of those who were born to members of the church. While mega-churches have the capacity to attract members, their capacity to retain them is not yet clear (Bibby & Brinkerhoff 1983). The data reported above from the NCLS on Pentecostal retention rates points to a level of circulation that raises issues about their retention rates. On the other hand, it is not all circulation: some religious groups are better at attracting people back to church or attracting those not previously associated with churches. Whether viewed at the level of the person or the religious group, association with churches and probably synagogues, mosques and temples is fluid.

**Normal levels of religious practice**

Different societies have different ‘normal’ levels of religious belief and practice (Bouma 1998b). In terms of their ‘worldwide sample’ described as ‘providing good coverage of the developed world and a few from the developing world’, Evans and Kelley conclude that ‘Australians have views very similar to the rest of the world’ (2004: 55). International comparative studies confirm this by demonstrating that in terms of the prevalence of Christian beliefs, some societies – ‘the Philippines, the USA, Poland and Northern Ireland’ – occupy ‘the devout end of the continuum, and East Germany, Denmark and Sweden, and Japan [are] at the secular end. Australia is in the middle…with New Zealand, Canada and Switzerland’ (Evans & Kelley 2004: 61). They also conclude that ‘the causes of religious belief lie largely in the family: from devout, church-going families come devout, church-going children’ (Evans & Kelley 2004: 61). Further, they conclude that the USA is exceptional. One of the recurrent themes in this study of Australian religious and spiritual
life is that the USA is not to be taken as the standard, even if some religious leaders and social analysts seem to do so (Warner 1993; Davie 2002; Bouma 2003a).

Evans and Kelley (2004: 272–275) also demonstrate that religious belief and church attendance have consequences. One of the clearest is for volunteer work. First, Australians rate highly in the percentage who participate in volunteer work: 41 per cent, the third highest, just below the Philippines (55 per cent) and New Zealand (45 per cent) and just above the USA (40 per cent) and Cyprus (36 per cent) but well ahead of Sweden (27 per cent), the UK (24 per cent), Ireland (23 per cent), Denmark (11 per cent) and Austria (8 per cent). In the case of volunteering it is not religious belief so much as participation that makes the difference. There were also no denominational differences. Education increased volunteering but income had no impact.

**Impact of belief and attendance**

There is another dimension to the quantitative analysis of Australian religion and spirituality: the assessment of their impact on other aspects of Australian life. One way this dimension is assessed is through studies of the relationship of religious identification, belief or practice with attitudes towards salient issues such as social justice, political preferences or ethical problems. Christian denominations differ substantially in the opinions of their members on attitudes towards various groups in Australia, gender roles in the family and society, abortion and homosexuality (Bouma & Dixon 1986; Bentley & Hughes 1998). Evans and Kelley (2004) present a detailed analysis of the association of differences in religious belief to attitudes towards current moral and political issues such as when an embryo is human, the use of foetal tissue in research, evolution vs creation, abortion, homosexuality and the marriage of gay couples. In general, the stronger the religious belief, the more often the person attends church, and the more devout the person’s family, the more conservative will be the position the person takes on these issues. However, the fact that belief, denomination, attendance and family background have different impacts on each issue indicates that they are separate factors to be considered. Religious belief, participation and denomination are far from inconsequential in Australian life.
Conclusion

A quantitative approach to the study of Australia’s religious and spiritual life provides evidence that parallels and in a sense confirms some of the conclusions drawn in the description of its qualities in chapter 2. Australia’s religious and spiritual life is alive and well: a substantial majority of Australians continue to identify with a religious group, and spirituality is on the rise. This approach also reveals that Australia’s religious and spiritual life is changing. It is becoming more diverse, less tied to formal organisations. There are new players in the field as religious groups representing a wider range of religions attract Australian participants. The census enables the description of the ethnic, income, education and family composition of religious groups. Survey research opens other quantitative windows on Australia’s religious and spiritual life, which allows an examination of the retention rates of different groups and the impact of religious belief on other attitudes. Finally, when compared with other societies, Australia has its own level of religious identification and practice – not as high as the USA but not as low as Britain or Sweden.
An examination of both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of Australia’s religious and spiritual life shows that they have a healthy future. While continuities of practice will remain, there will be many changes. The degree of change will reflect the continued influence of the Australian religious institution, the impact of changes in Australian culture and social structure and the responses of Australian religious groups to each other and their changing situation. At the opening of the twenty-first century several cultural factors are changing the way Australians are religious and the way they give expression to their spirituality.

The cultural shift from rationality to experience

A cultural macro-trend from the rational to the experiential and emotional as the dominant forms of authority is shaping the ways Australians express their spirituality. This shift in emphasis has been emerging for a long time. The transition is far from absolute since each of the three forms of authority and transcendence – tradition, reason and experience/emotion – plays a role in any period of history. But it is also true that in each era one form will be more dominant.

To exercise authority is to appeal to some transcendent principle or arbiter to legitimate decisions, policy and action. In the exercise of traditional authority appeal is made to position – ‘she is the queen’, ‘he is the
pope’ or ‘she is the vice-chancellor’ – and therefore has the authority to act, declare what is to be believed and must be obeyed. While we each appeal to authority to defend our views and legitimate our actions, this form of authority slowly gave way to appeals to reason following the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation, which increased in strength through the Enlightenment (Bouma 1991, 1992; Walls 1997: 92–105).

The Age of Reason is the label given in the history of philosophy to the high-water mark of rationality and often refers to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, reason continued as the primary basis of authority in Western social and cultural life until the mid-twentieth century (Gilbert 1980: 2–40, 63–65). Since then the emphasis on experience and feelings has increasingly taken the ascendancy in social and personal life. This transition has clear consequences for the forms religions take, which forms of spirituality are appealing, which religious groups are declining and how religious communities are organised. We live in post-rational times.

The Age of Reason emerged in reaction to forms of society that emphasised traditional authority structures and legitimacy based on position (Migliore 1991; Gilbert 1980: 63–66). Kings ruled by divine right and wielded unquestionable authority over temporal affairs while bishops ruled by divine right and exercised unquestionable authority over spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs. Each type of authority shapes the way people relate to each other, to leaders, to the transcendent and to God. The form of worship characteristic of traditional authority emphasised the distance between humans and God, between the ordinary and the divine, the everyday and the religious. In this authority system the duty of the believer was to accept the grace of God as dispensed by the clergy and not to question the authority of those placed over them by God. Hope was grounded in the certainty of the authority vested in the clergy and bishops by the formularies of the church. Bishops and kings ruled by ‘divine right’, in the place of God with the authority of God. For example, even today official documents issued by the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, such as the licences given to clergy, begin with the declaration ‘I, [name], By Divine Right, Archbishop of Melbourne . . .’.

The familiar form of traditional authority is still found in Roman Catholicism, Orthodox churches and some forms of Anglican worship. The focus is on the Eucharist in which participants receive spiritual nourishment in
a mysterious way through eating and drinking consecrated bread and wine that they receive as the body and blood of Christ. As traditionally conducted the Eucharist involves experience of encountering the mystery of God in the sacrament, exposure to rational discourse in the sermon, and acknowledgement of the hierarchical authority of the clergy. However, in keeping with a reliance on traditional authority, the last element has come to take primacy in settling any debate about faith and morals. In the Eucharist the sacrificial benefit of Jesus’ Passion and death are bequeathed to the recipient through the agency of the priest under the authority of the bishop.

The architecture associated with this ‘traditional’ approach to authority and worship not only develops the sense of distance between the worshipper and the holy but also enables worshippers to move towards and from the focal sacred point: the altar. The posture of reception is kneeling with hands reaching out to receive a physical representation of the presence of God. Great cathedrals were built to inspire awe in God. They were also architecturally designed to make clear not only the distinction but also the moral and physical distance between the ordinary person and the clergy and – even further away – the bishop. Beyond them all was the beckoning light of the world beyond lifting the eye to the promised hope. The music is often provided by a choir, themselves at a distance from the worshippers as the choir is seen as an earthly representation of the heavenly host of angels offering divine music to God on behalf of the worshippers. The type of religious organisation usually associated with this form of authority is hierarchical with bishops – including popes and archbishops – exercising control over a specified region and providing ministry through clergy, who are entirely beholden to the bishop for their position and livelihood.

The form of authority that took shape in protest against traditional authority vested by organisations in their representatives was based on reason (Gilbert 1980: 2–40, 63–65). Appeals to reason became the way to undermine the power of bishops, princes and kings. Reason was deemed to be superior to regal and episcopal authority (Armstrong 1993). If a request was unreasonable, or an edict declared unreasonable, a citizen could disobey, resist and ultimately overthrow unfair monarchs and bishops. The appeal to reason was foundational to the American and French revolutions. The American Declaration of Independence begins with the statement: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among
these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.’ The French Revolution overthrew a divine right monarch in the name of Egalité, Fraternité et Liberté. These self-evident and universal virtues could be realised by people who were guided by reason and who refused to be limited by what they did not understand, who opposed what was not just, and who established legal systems to protect citizens from the state and to limit the exercise of state power. These legal systems were based on reason, which was shown to be powerful in its ability to unlock the secrets of the universe and provide the basis for establishing laws that reflected those rules and regularities foundational to all order in nature and society. Because of being grounded in reason these laws had greater authority than the person, the organisation, the bishop and the monarch.

This shift to reason from traditional authority was foundational to the emergence of modern societies. In an earlier time this shift lay behind the arguments and activities of the Protestant Reformation (Gilbert 1980: 63–66). Theologies become sets of reasoned propositions flowing from first assumptions to statements about the nature of humanity and our relationship to God, a god who was ultimately rational and hence understandable, rather than ultimately mysterious as had been the position of the previous era (Armstrong 1993). In the Age of Reason, God was seen as a law-giver, providing the structure to all of life through rules and regulations that everything from stars to the smallest thing, including humans, had to follow. God was rational and made reasonable demands of creation. Theology had to stand the canons of reason, and mystical expression was viewed with suspicion. Indeed this approach to knowledge contained and controlled God through reason with some forms acting as though reason was god, and the law greater than God, by declaring that God could not, or at least would not, violate the laws of nature. In such a system the creature owes the creator obedience. The central feature of worship is the sermon with the implication that religious buildings and furnishings were to be constructed so as to restrain movement of people in order to promote the hearing of the word. Music is no longer addressed primarily to God by a small group but becomes an expression of the whole congregation and is used in part to instil belief via theologically correct hymns. The posture of reception in the rational approach to God is sitting and hearing. The chief duty of the believer is to receive and believe correct theology and avoid heresy.
The Presbyterian and Congregational churches represent the high-water mark of rational Protestantism. The form of ecclesiastical governance associated with this form of authority is a regional council usually elected by clergy and people. This council, varyingly called a synod, presbytery, classis or assembly, is the final arbiter of theological and other disputes. The regional council usually also owns the property and hires and fires the clergy.

The religious life of European Australia, along with the rest of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was very much dominated by rational Protestant Christianity. According to British law, the English monarch must be a Protestant, and one of the roles ascribed to the monarch is to stand at the head of the Church of England. Doing one’s duty was the core virtue during this period of the religious and spiritual life of the empire. These duties included accepting the doctrines of the church and supporting the established order as expressed in royalty, the governor-general and the prime minister.

However, a major cultural change has been in the making for some time. Cultural changes of this magnitude show early signs long before they become the dominant form in a society. Moreover, as we have seen, earlier forms do not die out completely, nor are currently dominant forms without their instances throughout history. This is a matter of shifting emphases. The reliance on experience for authority has emerged as the dominant form of authority. This first became noticeable from the mid-twentieth century and is in full force in the twenty-first. Early instances can be seen in German and Scandinavian Pietist movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in English and American Methodism and other groups that find their origins in the Great Awakening of the late eighteenth century. The philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher developed the theological and philosophical foundations of this approach to faith, religion and spirituality at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He argued that ‘true religion is sense and taste for the infinite’ and that the common human experience of absolute dependence is the origin of religion (Bowker 2005: 519).

The ultimate source of authority according to the experiential approach is to be found in the individual’s experience, senses and feelings. This approach to authority is essential to empirical science, which asks that we trust our senses and that we focus on what we can see, touch, hear and feel in order to learn about the universe we live in. The ethical expression of this authority
can be stated: ‘If it feels right, do it’; ‘If you sense that it is OK, it is OK’. Certainly if it does not feel right, do not do it. Trust your feelings; trust what your body is telling you. Attend to the inward working of the spirit; listen to the small voice within.

The Western cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s centred on reactions against the domination of reason-based duty, against the head-dominated, cold, calculating qualities of the rational. From the perspective of experiential authority, reason was judged to be too cold. While experience led to an appreciation of diversity, the demands of reason seemed to lead to the fruitless search for the one best form of everything from statecraft to sex, from family to assembling automobiles, from child-rearing to worshipping God. Moreover, the focus on reason promoted wordiness, verbal excess as opposed to awe, silence and reflection. The rise of Buddhism in Australia reflects this seeking for the mystical and experiential encounter with the more-than-everyday life.

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**Tibetan Buddhists in Melbourne**

At 7.30am a minibus pulls up outside the Mechanics Institute in one of Melbourne’s beachside townships. Out piles a group of Tibetan monks. They have arrived to conduct morning meditation, and dozens of locals are waiting for them. The monks hail from the Gyuto monastery in northern India and for the past ten years have been travelling through outback and suburban Australia bringing their religion, ritual, philosophy and wonderful harmonic chanting to the lives of ordinary Australians.

For their visit the hall has been transformed into a place of worship and reverence. Brightly coloured bunting and splendid tapestries adorn the walls; prayer flags fly across the ceiling; an altar replaces the stage, framed by vivid fabrics and finely formed butter sculptures depicting the eight auspicious symbols. An image of the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet, hangs above the altar.

The monks have been invited here to create a sacred sand mandala. Mandalas are metaphors for life, and the monks spend every day of their visit intricately crafting these elaborate spiritual ‘artworks’ with fine grains of coloured sand. The mandala is the main feature of the monks’ visit and, as the work evolves, the visitors are caught up in the ritual of its creation.

Each morning begins with meditation. The monks sit in front of the altar in the lotus position. One monk known as the chant master begins chanting a low sonorous
note, then the other monks join in. For the next hour the visitors, not all of whom are Buddhist, are transported on the rhythms of the chanting of ancient scriptures. Prayer and meditation meet. With the deep harmonic sound resonating through their body, participants are encouraged to clear their minds of worldly attachments and open their hearts to compassionate and selfless love for all living beings.

In part it is this philosophy of living peacefully with others and the planet that attracts Australians and other Westerners to Tibetan Buddhism. They are drawn to the stillness and outward simplicity of the religion, its lack of dogma, its foundation of tolerance, non-violence and ethics, and its clear explanation and understanding of life’s suffering. Often they seek out Buddhism after some personal trauma or turmoil or as a result of their disillusionment with materialistic culture. In the rituals and performances of the Gyuto monks, through practices like meditation, through the teachings (dharma) of the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist teachers, they find what really matters in life. And while most of those interested in Tibetan Buddhism used to be middle-aged middle-class women, practitioners are now much more diverse.

At the end of the week the monks dissolve their sand mandala and funnel the fine grains of sand into a ritual vase. Then, to the sound of long, low blasts on Tibetan horns, crashing cymbals and banging drums, the monks, resplendent in their maroon robes and yellow hats, lead a procession to the beach not far away. Men, women, children and a few dogs follow behind. With prayers and symbolic acts, the sand is emptied into the sea as an offering to the local spirits of the water and is washed away on the tide.

Sylvie Shaw

We are now witnessing a reaction against the merely verbal and the rise of demands for open, participative, experiential religion. The rise of Pentecostal Christianity and New Age religious groups provides the strongest evidence of the impact of this major cultural change on Australia’s religious and spiritual life. The search for experiential grace, the quest to feel saved, to be whole, to experience ecstasy, in short, to feel right, is very strong and is met in these groups. Pentecostal Christianity, which has had its most recent origins among American working classes and oppressed minority groups, is now widely accepted by middle-class groups. Pentecostal Christianity and many of the New Age religious groups are religions of self-help, offering success theologies, focused on wholeness for the person and requiring emotional honesty rather than intellectual rigour – celebration, not cerebration.
The flavour of this experiential and feeling-grounded religiosity is given in the following description of Star Wars spirituality. In the 2001 census 71,000 Australians nominated some Star Wars–related response when asked to declare their religion. Many have scoffed at the idea of Star Wars and other science-fiction or cinema-based spiritualities, yet others (Barron 2003; Staub 2005) take them seriously, arguing that they offer a consistent cosmology, ethical framework and mythic consideration of the nature and destiny of the universe.

**Star Wars spirituality**

The Star Wars epic is now complete. Seventy-one thousand Australians responded to the 2001 census in ways that reflect association with characters from Star Wars: Jedi Knight, Jeddist, Sith Lord and others. The repeated spiritual theme of the Star Wars movies is ‘Trust your feelings’. Amid the plotting and scheming of each of the movies and again in The Revenge of the Sith, Obi Wan Kenobi is asked by Yoda, ‘What do your feelings tell you?’ and ‘What are you feeling, now?’ He was told to ‘Sense the Force’ and ‘Follow the Force’. Solutions are not found in reason – thinking things through – but through emotional congruity and sensitivity. The interconnection of each with all provides a sensible web, which, if the strivings of self and anxiety of achievement are set aside, the person can trust their feelings to lead them, where others fall and fail. Neither are solutions to be found in strength, power or technology, but in tuning in to one’s feelings and being open to sensing those of others. Remember how Luke Skywalker had to learn to use the weapons of the Jedi – following feelings, intuition, being one with the Force? While rage and ambition may sharpen the attack of the Sith, the fully trained Jedi warrior is clear of these dark emotional forces that warp the capacity to be attuned to the feeling dimension with the Force itself.

Gary Bouma

The Pentecostal movement that is sweeping the world today is the clear-est organisational representation of experiential and emotional authority in Christianity (Martin 2002; Anderson 2004). From an experiential/emotional perspective, the duty of the follower is to feel the grace of God, to feel saved, spirit-filled and full of joy. Indeed it can be said that the shift has been from an emphasis on orthodoxy – correct belief – to orthopassy – correct feelings.
The architecture associated with this form of authority is the mega-church, which has a large platform accommodating a musical ensemble that plays a form of contemporary popular gospel music. The sermon will be designed to elicit emotions and will be facilitated by multimedia images projected on to large screens. Music is congregational, expressive, often involving full body movements and hand-waving. Ecstatic utterance and exuberant expression of faith, trust and joy are encouraged and, in the large numbers accommodated in mega-churches, can become infectious. The form of ecclesiastical organisation characteristically found in Pentecostal assemblies is independent congregations governed by an elected or appointed board that owns the property and hires and fires the clergy. The degree to which the board is controlled by a charismatic clergy or by elected representatives of the congregation varies from case to case.

The rise of Pentecostal forms of Christianity has led to the emergence of a new basis for assessing the ‘correctness’ of the religiosity of a group or person. The form of religion associated with traditional authority focused on rituals, such as the conduct of the Eucharist or the Mass. The celebrant and those participating, including the congregation, had roles set for them in the prayer books or missals. The critical issue centred on correct practice: doing things in the right order, in the right manner, with hands held this way and facing that way and bowing at this point. The search was for orthopraxy – correct practice. Orthopraxy pleased God; getting it wrong displeased God and those who judged these things on earth. With the shift to rational forms of spirituality and worship, the focus shifted to correct belief – having orthodox theology. Creeds and canons were established, but whatever was written or said was assessed for its orthodoxy, and heresy trials were conducted to determine whether a sermon or publication was correct. Bishops would declare that a book published by a Catholic scholar was nihil obstat – nothing obstructs publication. Pentecostal forms of Christianity demand another form of correctness: correct feelings. It is not acceptable to express unhappiness in a Pentecostal assembly. Sadness, grief and guilt are but momentary transitional feelings on the way to ecstasy and praise. Pentecostal forms of Christianity do not demand orthopraxy or orthodoxy so much as orthopassy.

The following case study gives a picture of one form that experiential religion takes.
Pentecostal prayer and praise

It is six o’clock on a cool Saturday night in Sydney but, inside, the church service is just heating up. With rock music thumping, and worshippers jumping, the pastor implores the followers to open their hearts to God. Pounding rock music and animated preaching are the foundation of this Christian Community Revival Church, a charismatic evangelical Christian church in an outer suburb as yet without a permanent home. But the hall is packed to the rafters with young people, from teens to twenties, from ‘Anglo’ to Asian, their voices and hands raised in praise and adoration. The production is slick, well crafted and professional. There are no outward signs that this is a church service rather than a rock concert: no crosses, no altar, no religious attire and no denominational logos. With the band, the singers and the preachers all dressed in jeans, only the song lyrics appearing over the live video on the giant screen behind the stage signal the religiosity of the occasion. The venue pumps with high energy from the start, but the pace changes from bouncy pop to pulsating anthem rock, as worshippers are urged to come forward and make a commitment to transform their lives through Jesus Christ.

When Guy Sebastian won Australian Idol in 2004 many young people became interested in Pentecostal Christianity from interviews with Guy in which he talked about his deep connection with the Paradise Church in South Australia. And while this church does not credit Guy’s popularity directly with the growing interest among young people in charismatic worship, they acknowledge that he has played a major role in promoting evangelical Christianity among Australian youth.

Interest in attending this church spreads by word of mouth and personal invitation, and once young people experience the dynamism of the service, they want to return. Along with congregations from the Paradise Church in Adelaide and Hillsong Church in Sydney, which attract thousands of parishioners each week, every year more than 20,000 young people attend the annual conferences in one of the capital cities. The church deliberately targets 14–25-year-olds with its particular mix of energetic experiential worship and preaching that moves people towards self-transcendence and self-transformation. The intention is to inspire through emotionally engaged worship and use this energy to transform people.

Gary Bouma
Implications of cultural change

The transition from rationality to experientialism has profound implications for Australia’s religious and spiritual life. Those denominations of Christianity that developed a rational approach to the exclusion of tradition and emotion, such as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Uniting and the Reformed, are experiencing rapid declines in membership and attendance. Presbyterians and Anglicans who were largely rational Protestants, with the noteworthy exception of liturgical Anglicans (Hilliard 1994), attracted large congregations and held much social and political power in Australia up to the 1960s, but this is no longer the case. Catholics have increased their presence, but this is largely due to migration. The fact that Pentecostal Australians are beginning to assert their influence in a variety of ways reflects this transition in ways we will discuss later. Where formerly powerful rational Protestant groups continue to attract a following, they will usually have adopted certain aspects of Pentecostalism, which are often referred to as charismatic movements, within existing denominations. Where successful, these usually lead to the establishment of mega-churches as separate congregations within the denomination.

Impact on the churches

The transition from rational to experiential authority has radically altered the Australian religious landscape by changing both the relative position and the internal operation of the churches. The Catholic Church has been reformed and re-reformed as Vatican II opened the hierarchy to the influence of reason-based arguments in a way not previously seen, while maintaining a strictly traditional authority structure. It has lost many clergy and religious – most in order to marry – and recruitment fell off in part due to the removal of clergy and religious from a position of moral superiority by Vatican II (Schoenherr & Greeley 1974; Schoenherr & Sorenson 1982; Hoge, Shields & Verdeck 1988). In a sense the traditional structure ceased to ‘feel right’ for many, who then left. On the other hand, there is nothing more experiential than a well-conducted Eucharist. The Catholic Church has maintained a higher degree of balance in the tension between the three forms of authority while always retaining traditional authority as its primary and ultimate mode. This retention of more of the three forms of authority within the
one religious organisation has been one of the continuing strengths of the Catholic Church whereas Protestant groups tend to focus more narrowly on one dimension. The Catholic pattern of large parish churches built in association with parochial schools has been an effective strategy for coping with fluctuations of suburban demographic composition and the mobilisation of resources required to sustain parish life.

Formerly prominent Australian churches of British origin – Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and others – had moved to institute rational authority as the ultimate base for their worship and governance (Gilbert 1980). Some from these groups vigorously contest the transition. For example, the Rt Revd Dr Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, wrote in the Guardian (16 July 2005, p. 25) defending the value of reason over against feelings: ‘Reason is in short supply right now, and that is always dangerous. Reason is on the side of the angels. When someone says in a debate, “What I feel is . . .”, the chair should intervene. What people feel is neither here nor there in a debate. What matters is what they think . . .’ He was arguing for greater clarity in the debate about female bishops. Unfortunately, reason does not clarify this issue. Reason presupposes starting points and moves from assumptions, and much of this is based on feelings and experience or, in this case, the lack of it. But his defence is characteristic of those who hold to reason as the solution to the issues of the world, and he holds forth its promise.

The cultural shift from reason to experience undermined more radically their raison d’être, with the result that community-based churches, focused on preaching and with congregations in the 1950s of about 200 people, are being replaced by three forms of congregation. First, mega-churches, with congregations in the thousands, have emerged. They offer a much more emotionally charged worship style, draw people from a much wider geographic area and provide a wide diversity of religious and social services tailored according to social characteristics of participants: age, gender, family stage, and level of induction into the faith.

Second, there remain the small dwindling shells of neighbourhood churches struggling to attract congregations between thirty and eighty members, unable to pay their bills and ageing at a rate that will see most closed in the next twenty years. With these closures, the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Uniting experiment with establishing English village–type
parishes in the suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney will have been shown to have failed to provide a sustainable strategy for organised spiritual life in part because of the shift from rational to experiential authority and in part because these suburbs have yet to develop the demographically diverse population required for sustained village life. Rather, these suburbs are going through age cycles that leave churches at the end of the cycle with elderly congregations that do not appeal to young families who – when they do come – look in and feel that this is not their scene and move on.

Finally, the third form of twenty-first-century religious congregation are house churches, private chapels and informal forms of worship and spirituality that are less reliant on the formal organisations of churches, synagogues, temples or mosques for their expression and maintenance. While some of these informal gatherings are sponsored by formally organised religious groups, many are not and spring up as people who are disaffected by religious organisation seek some form of group context in which to share their stories, explore their experiences and find mutual support for their views of the transcendent. They also appeal to those who are looking for a low-demand way back to things religious and spiritual.

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**Wellspring**

_Friends of mine who have been completely disconnected from the church but are of a vague Christian background recently reported that they had become part of a group of about a dozen people who meet periodically in each other’s homes to keep some time of quiet, to discuss issues, to pray and to share a meal. They meet by arrangement, not at fixed intervals, but about eight times a year. Some reading is proposed for each meeting. They have spent time going through The Bible as a Novel. Participants found this helpful as they could identify the origin of phrases they had heard, or stories they knew, but had not known they were from the Bible. My friends had explored a few churches, enjoyed what they encountered, but either did not feel it was their scene or were unable to relate to the demand for weekly participation. Church participation also presupposed much knowledge and experience they did not have. The group they meet with is supported by a group called Wellspring, which has branches in major cities and offers a wide range of spirituality, counselling and consulting services._

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Gary Bouma
Some describe the transition to the experiential as privatisation. While the move to meeting in homes and attending to the feelings of persons may be described as private, there are also public dimensions and consequences to this form of religious authority. This is not the relegation to the private of the once public by the market or by the forces of secularisation. It is a shift in the zone of the production of religious goods and services as well as the zone of consumption. It is a turning away from one form of organisation of the religious market – a form that has been dominant since the mid-nineteenth century, a form dominated by religious professionals and hierarchy. These changes, of course, like many of the changes affecting religious life, are not limited to the religious sphere since health industries and other service economies are likewise being transformed by do-it-yourself approaches.

Religious belief and spiritual practices do not seem to be disappearing from Australians (Evans & Kelley 2004), but participation in formal religious services certainly is declining. Meditation, spirituality, yoga, body-building and self work, both with obvious religious trappings and without, seem to be attracting large numbers (Tacey 2003). The focus in these activities again is not on propositional theology but on providing an experience, enabling direct connection with the transcendent and feeling in touch with self, other and the universe.

Impact on clergy

Contemporary forms of spirituality are often conducted without specialist professionals. This reflects a cultural trend away from reliance on patriarchal professionalism and the rational to the authority of the self, feelings and experience. It also reflects the movement away from subservience to system and hierarchy and towards personal agency. We live in post-professional times. There is no more awe and unquestioning submission before the white lab-coated or ecclesiastically dressed professional. The professions are grounded in the rational, they know the rules as they pertain to certain areas of life and, for a fee, they will tell you what to do and what is good for you. The professions are the high priestly cadres of the Age of Reason. Now ‘do it yourself’ medicine, religion, self-development and accounting have become widespread and increasingly popular. Some of us are eager for the day of DIY law: the law seems the last profession to retain its absolute professional authority. Now, however, there is
a great distrust of the professional, the one who knows what is good for you and is likely to enforce their will by doing unto you what is good for you according to their understanding without consultation. The consumer has begun to ask, ‘What is he hiding?’ and ‘How is he misusing his power?’ The use of the masculine is deliberate as this model of professional practice is a form of patriarchy that disempowers the other and is grounded in disrespect for the other. Increasingly consumers are saying, ‘I don’t need this, I will do it myself’ or seeking an alternative source for what they need.

This trend to self-reliance and increasing wariness of professionals poses a great problem for clergy. They are no longer valued or respected for their position alone. Nor is their education, although often excellent, widely respected as it was until recently either not certified or conducted outside university structures and the subject matter not as respected as the sciences. Catholic clergy have usually been educated to a substantially higher level than Protestant clergy, whose professional preparation in the British Commonwealth is usually at the level of a primary school teacher. Few Protestant clergy are respected for their ability to make real a sense of the presence of God.

However, today people seek direct encounter with the transcendent. They want to experience the numinous and the presence of God. Many forms of spirituality promise that each person can do this by themselves through meditation or some other spiritual exercise. The role of the new spiritual professional is not to produce lifelong dependency on the professional but self-capacity to engage the beyond. People are not convinced that clergy can or are willing to help them do this. The way religious professionals conduct their practice today must be more engaged and give ample evidence that they are experiencing what those who seek their help wish to experience. Their service must be grounded in experiential authority. This has profound implications for ministry and ministry training, but most religious groups are a long way from taking this on board.

Further undermining trust in clergy is the fact that we value what we pay for, and clergy in the British Commonwealth have not learned to charge. If we get it for nothing, it must be suspect. There is a tension between commercial values and the provision at low cost or no cost of any service, including spiritual direction, providing encounters with God or devising liturgical marking of events and meaningful interpretation of life.
Spirituality and cultural change

Implications for theology

The transition to experiential authority has considerable implications for the way we think about God, for theology and for the way we imagine God. Under the previously dominant mode, reason and law prevailed and God was seen as a distant law-giver, one who laid down the rules – the basic propositions – and all else was a logical consequence. Failure to follow the rules was law-breaking and God, the law-giver, was well within his – yes, it is a patriarchal theology – rights to punish. According to the substitutionary atonement theory held by evangelical Anglicans in Sydney and other evangelical groups, the only way out was a legal pardon won through the sacrifice of God’s son.

Today a theology that does not feel right is doomed and, like it or not, it does not feel right to see God as having to punish his son instead of us. Such behaviour is seen as emotionally immature and is unacceptable as it does not make emotional sense. In its place come feel-good theologies that insist that God wants you to be rich and good-looking and to live in a large house with all the latest gadgets and appointments. God as the great ‘know-it-all’ is not the God in demand today. Rather people seek the God who has experienced it all, who has been where I am going and who knows what it feels like because God has been through it. Whereas previously our ideas and images of God had to conform to the theological precepts of the church, now theologies must be emotionally satisfying and produce joyful members who give generously to the church. While these changes and tensions are perhaps more obvious in Protestant churches and the Catholic Church retains a greater balance, the cultural shift colours the thinking throughout.

Post-secular times

During the latter days of the predominance of reason in the last half of the twentieth century, it looked as if secularity would drive all religion into oblivion through the advances of science and intense critical rational reflection on the mysteries of the spiritual life. Now with the rise of the experiential and emotional bases of authority, secularity has given way to a great wash of spirituality, including religious revitalisation in places where it was least expected and various forms of global fundamentalism (Berger 1999; Thomas 2005; Martin 2005). Spirituality is basically openness to the more-than, the transcendental; being open to the beyond-us, the beyond within
us, the beyond around us. Spirituality is everywhere. Look at the bookshops selling crystals, Celtic runes and amulets, books on astrology and offering holistic massage, therapeutic oils and candles – everywhere there are candles. Candles and incense have escaped the sanctuaries of churches and are found in homes, offices, celebrations and private inner sanctums. To see the post-secular nature of the early twenty-first century look at the personal growth ads, offers for meditation, inner growth, the boom in the numbers saying they are Buddhists. Look also at the movies: *Star Wars*, *Sixth Sense*, *Dogma*, *Ghosts*, *Matrix*, *Holy Smoke* and the Harry Potter series, to say nothing of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien intended his work to be profoundly religious but without being tied to any official or recognisable religion. George Lucas clearly intends the spiritual cosmology of the *Star Wars* movies to be central. These and other movies develop ideas and images of powers beyond those normally encountered in daily life, issues of commitment and morality, problems of redemption, reconciliation and restoration to community; and questions of the future, purpose and destiny of humanity and the universe.

Fundamentalism and revitalised religious life is also characteristic of post-secularity. While some see these as attempts to return to an earlier time, they are usually very much contemporary and forward-looking religious movements. Religious revitalisation occurs when those within existing groups begin to intensify their practice and belief following a period of comparative laxity in practice and ethics. Islam has been experiencing a time of revitalisation. Even in Australia, more Muslim women wear religiously identifying dress today than ten or twenty years ago. This is more evident among younger women as the current generation of young Muslim adults set themselves off against what they perceive as lax parents (Bouma 1994; Bouma, Daw & Munawar 2001: 66–72; Yasmeen 2001). Within Christianity religious revitalisation can be seen in the rise of the Christian Right in the USA, in the spread and growth of Pentecostal forms of Christianity and in the rise of Catholic groups such as Opus Dei. The rhetoric of revitalisation movements usually includes a high level of tension with the wider society, which is seen as immoral and corrupt, and tension with officials of existing religious organisations within the religious tradition who are accused of having sold out to the secular and immoral wider society and of having abandoned the central precepts and traditions of the religion. Members and leaders are subject to scrutiny as each strives for purity and condemns those judged to
be lax, heretical or inadequate in their conformity to the newly heightened standards.

These high-demand religious groups exercise great control over their members, developing quite intensely interacting communities that can be self-isolating from the world around them (Antoun 2001). This isolation is partly due to their insistence on separation from the world to promote purity, partly due to the rejection they experience from those whom they condemn as inadequate or beyond the moral pale and who in turn judge members of revitalised groups as excessive, extreme or worse, and partly due to the sheer demand on the time of participants, which make it nearly impossible for members to sustain relationships outside the religious group. One of the consequences of this isolation is a growing distance between the religious group and the wider world; with the distance comes mutual ignorance and fear; with the distance usual social interaction declines, leading to an increase in the likelihood of inappropriate interactions: public condemnations, legislative repression and violence. The violence may emanate from within the group and be directed against some offending aspect of the larger society: abortion clinics, homosexuals or casinos. Suicide bombers often have been trained, equipped and motivated by intense, isolated and fundamentalist offshoots of Islam. On the other hand, the violence may emanate from the larger society and be directed against the religious group, as in the case of Waco, attacks on the family, religiously based vilification and harassment.

Fundamentalism is not so much a return to ‘that old-time religion’ as it is a distinctly postmodern and post-secular form of religious revitalisation characterised by an intense focus on what is declared to be a simple literal reading of the sacred text, which is then applied simplistically to life (Antoun 2001). Fundamentalism seems to be quite ‘modern’ and rational with its intense focus on text. However, the way this is communicated and applied uses leading-edge technology and forms of religious organisation that are much more twenty-first century, riding the waves of globalisation and much more fluid than the rigid hierarchies and bureaucracies of modernity and the Age of Reason.

Post-book times

One of the key drivers in the cultural shift from reliance on authority founded on reason to experiential forms of authority has been the transition from
the print media of communication to electronic forms: radio, television, computer, Internet and video. Print was essential to rational authority. The invention of the printing press shifted the knowledge industry from monasteries focused on copying to universities focused on the production and transmission of, and commentary on, knowledge. Laws, theologies, creeds and prayer books could be printed and read by the ‘gatekeepers’ of society. Literacy was power when most could not read but were told it was ‘in the book’ by clergy, lawyers and political leaders. Printing led to the standardisation of worship formulae, rites and even sermons. Clergy could be directed to use the printed formularies and none other.

With industrialisation print media became mass media as newspapers, magazines and inexpensive books put this form of communication into the hands of the masses. This, coupled with increasingly universal education, introduced the peak of the Age of Reason: 1850 to 1950. People going to churches would have taken their own copies or would be given Bibles and hymnbooks. Sermons and theological debates were printed in the daily press. Heresy trials were held in order to give public displays of taking correct theological thinking seriously. Given that thinking cannot be observed, what was attended to, monitored and enforced was the correctness of what appeared in print. Truth was seen as fixed, eternal and printed.

With the rise of electronic media of communication through the twentieth century, the skills and patterns of communication associated with print have been bypassed. Audio and video presentations are more experiential and less verbal. The imagery used changes and develops in more fluid ways and, once in printed books and papers, the images remained fixed. Children have been raised primarily on electronic media since the early 1960s. Most churches that have not changed with the media revolution appear to be losing members. Pentecostal forms of religion have had little difficulty adopting the styles and technology of the new media. In this context truth becomes more of an experience. Experience gives rise to an internally held trusting basis for hope, rather than something external that is appropriated through a rational affirmation.

Many of the current debates within religious organisations relate to this major transition from print media to electronic media of communication. Some groups seem to have sacralised print and seek to exclude other media. Immigrant communities use both print and electronic media in a variety of ways. Electronic media make it possible to keep in touch with a transnational
community with a relatively small Australian base. Staying in communication with religious developments in the home country may help to keep some diasporic communities religiously fluid. On the other hand, religious groups that rely on text find the electronic media a challenge to maintaining orthodox teaching.

**Conclusion**

Religion and spirituality operate in a cultural context. Many religious leaders today find that profound cultural changes in the nature of authority and the expectations of religion and spirituality challenge their assumptions about their roles. People trained in the 1960s and 1970s have had to reinvent themselves to engage a much different world, use different technology to engage people and appeal to a different form of authority if they are to engage at all. Many institutions that train clergy still produce graduates suited to a society and culture that has now passed for more than a quarter-century. Most religious organisations continue with structures that were established in the mid-nineteenth century, singing hymns of the same era and pushing agendas set long ago.

The pace of change is bewildering and the scope of change such as to leave no comfortable place to hide. However, religious organisations are responding to this situation in a variety of ways. Some are reactionary, others retreat, but many are creatively rising to the challenge. Meanwhile spiritualities burgeon.
The place of religion in Australian society has changed dramatically since World War II. In 1947 religion and religiously organised spirituality could be said to have been central, vertically integrated and well articulated with the state. This social location continued through the 1950s and into the 1960s, but during the 1970s and increasingly into the 1990s, religion became distanced, marginalised, disengaged from the state and privatised. A key set of events marking this transition includes the role of the churches in opposing Australian involvement in the war in Vietnam, the sexual revolution and the introduction, first, of Saturday afternoon and Sunday trading and then 24/7 trading. While some analysts predicted with confidence the ultimate demise of religion (Gilbert 1980; Bruce 1996, 2003), that has in fact not been the case (Berger 1999; Davie 2002; Martin 2005). As the twenty-first century unfolds religion is clearly influential, and spirituality is seen to be uncontrolled and energetic (Thomas 2005; Appleby 2000). Religious groups find ways to influence social policy, involve a different set of players, are horizontally diffuse rather than vertically integrated and still perform public events, but they must share with groups once dismissed as irrelevant. The most spectacular event marking this transition was the destruction of the Twin Towers and the attack on the Pentagon on September 11, 2001 followed by the War on Terror and the Bali bombings.

Several substantial shifts in the organisation and composition of Australian society have had a major impact on the religious and spiritual life of Australia. These include a further disentangling of religion and the state
following the demise of the British Empire, the rise of a consumer society, becoming a multifaith society, the demise of the nuclear family as the norm, the decline of patriarchy and the emergence of new forms of social capital. These structural changes will be unpacked and analysed to develop a rich sense of the way religion and spirituality are developing in contemporary Australia.

Further disentangling church and state

While religion or, more appropriately, church and state are separated constitutionally in Australia, their relationship has been intimate, mutually supportive and complex. The fact that the relationships between churches and states in Western societies are highly varied becomes clear when cross-national comparisons are made (Lyons & Van Die 2000). Indeed the variety in what passes for separation suggests that it is more appropriate to speak of the relationships between them and the limitations placed on those relationships. As a result of post-war changes in its relationship with the United Kingdom, Australia has become a post-empire, post-colonial and post-national society in ways that affect some Australian religious groups profoundly and others incidentally. The demise of Christendom, the passing of Empire and the changing economic relationships between Australia and the rest of the world have affected the way religious organisations relate to the state.

Post-empire times

For those younger than 50 the British Empire is a thing of history, costume dramas and little contemporary relevance. It is quite another matter for Australians of Anglo-Celtic origins who are older than 50 – the ones who still can be found in suburban English village–type Anglican and Uniting churches. When I arrived in Australia in 1979 I was stunned by the reality still accorded to the Empire by people I encountered and worked with. I would point out that since its withdrawal from Singapore in the 1960s Britain had turned its back on Australia and was busy joining Europe. The demise of the Empire was undermining the basis of their position in Australian society, and some of these Australians were in denial. During this transition, some churches provided comfort to these views by offering inexpensive private
clubs where the myths of the English Empire could be maintained and providing a collective support network of nostalgia for the former realities that underlie the Britain that has now for many become a giant theme park.

The demise of Empire has affected the place of religion in Australian society. Anglicans and Presbyterians were Establishment churches; if not formally established, then at least linked more closely to the monarchy and the Empire because of their establishment in Britain. In the 1960s and 1970s the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne was headed by an English archbishop, the Most Revd Sir Frank Woods, and key parishes had English vicars. This association with power, legitimacy and monarchy made these churches particularly attractive to those who wanted to associate with power, who wanted legitimacy for power and wealth, who wanted ties with Empire or a place to keep alive their memories of prominence, influence and grandeur. Of course other Australians were sectarian and anti-Establishment, keeping alive the myths and orientations of the Dissenter, Non-conformist and Puritan traditions of Britain. This was attractive to those who wanted opposition, who wanted to legitimise their protest and who wanted to disassociate with power. With the demise of Empire, both have lost their drawing power by association – or dissociation – with Empire. Anglicans, who comprised nearly 50 per cent of the population in 1947, have lost many who identified with the Church of England for these reasons. The sectarians no longer rail against the evils of Britain and have become purveyors of a religious style that emanates from the American empire.

Even Catholics lose some of the strength of their Irish-grounded oppositional identity as sufferers of the British Empire. For Catholics, the Empire was a foreign force that at first excluded them from legal participation in society and later shored up a Protestant view of the world and Australia, since the monarch is officially Protestant. It was also related to ideologies and practices that limited Catholic legitimacy in Australian society. The demise of Empire coincided with the rise to both legitimacy and significance of the Catholic Church. So long as Anglicans and Presbyterians could tie themselves directly to the Empire they had a form of state legitimacy that might not have had the force of establishment in the constitutional sense but provided some of the benefits of establishment in Australia. The demise of Empire removes that advantage and levels the playing field.

Moreover, Catholics who previously had to make their way in the shadow of this Empire advantage may well have developed a more robust and more
genuinely Australian religious organisation that is better equipped to address the Australian scene. For Catholics and other groups this change was at best liberation from second-class citizenship as being not quite British. But this is not trivial. In the times of Empire, it could be said that the ‘default’ religion was the Church of England and was often referred to as the ‘C of E’. This response would have been accepted by anyone who asked for your religion, for example on admission to hospital, on enlistment in the armed forces or responding to the census. With the passing of this association of religion and the state there is no longer a ‘default’ setting for religion. Religious identity has become a matter that requires thought.

The demise of Empire has also had a major impact on Australian imagery used to think of God. One thing that was so noticeable to me in moving from the USA to a part of the Empire was how much more the regal qualities of God – King of Kings, Lord of Lords and Prince of Princes – took on a different kind of actuality with the realities of the House of Windsor and the pomp and circumstance of English court and parliamentary life providing readily available examples on the media and in the flesh. In Australia, Anglican bishops are enthroned by divine right and with regal ritual, courtly retinues and loyal vassals. These images mean different things in the republican USA, where no one thinks of God as the President of Presidents or the Senator of Senators.

These images are shifting in Australia as the Empire recedes in the mind and as republican sentiments gain popular assent. As Empire recedes, as the Queen ages and as we move towards being a republic, our imagery for God changes. In times of change the images become unstable and some cling to old ways. As a result of these changes the images of God become less powerful but more friendly; less distant but more related; less far away and more at hand (Bouma 1999: 12–22). Again this will be more true for those religious groups formerly more closely tied to Britain. Meanwhile Catholic imagery retains a great deal of monarchical flavour given its internal organisational structure. The passing of secular experience that supports those images may weaken them.

Post-colonial times

While related to living in post-Empire times, living in post-colonial times presents its own challenges. Post-colonial Australia has dropped its economic ties and cultural dependencies following the severance of political
dependency on Britain. In so doing Australia has become post-Empire and post-colonial. Only reluctantly did Australians let go the apron strings that tied them to Britain. Indeed some were cut for Australia, as the government took until the early 1940s to accept the legislation that established the British Commonwealth of Nations and turned the member states into independent nations. Following the second abandonment of Singapore, as the last royalists age and die out, as Britain becomes more and more a great theme park with ‘real’ castles and cathedrals charging admission to all, and as Australia moves to develop increasing ties with Asia – when permitted to do so – Australia may become more culturally and religiously independent. These changes certainly provide the opportunity to do so. The challenge is whether Australia will become more spiritually independent and mature. There is always the possibility of selling out completely to the USA, but that is unlikely. Post-colonial Australia is looking for and developing models of cultural independence.

As Australia severs the ties with the British realm and becomes structurally, economically and culturally more independent, Australians are forced to take responsibility for themselves rather than having a colonial overlord to blame, to run to in times of crisis and from whom to seek approval. The challenges of religious and spiritual independence are great, and the demand to take responsibility for their own cultural, spiritual and religious lives may be frightening to some. No external force is setting the rules. No external force is telling Australians who they are and where they fit. This may lead to a quest for indigeneity in spirituality. There will certainly be less dependence on foreign head-office influence and control. There will be less kowtowing to sources of tradition and much tension between tradition and innovation. The desire for tradition represents a longing for a former time when London was the source of culture, meaning and religious practice as well as the arbiters of the decent, acceptable and truly worthy. While Australian Catholics have been largely free from seeking the approval of the British, they have their own empire with a head office and their own issues of local variation and official positions. Having more experience in dealing with these tensions, Catholics may be able to offer assistance and models to those groups who find this a new situation.

As Australia becomes more independent there will be calls to declare the nature of Australian spirituality in a new and recognisably different voice (Pearson 2004). This may lead to a temptation to cultural theft; having
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stolen their land, now some religious innovators attempt to take elements of Aboriginal spirituality to ‘indigenise’ their worship. Borrowing from other great spiritualities, including those of Australian Aboriginals, can be seen as a sign of insecurity in a religious culture cut loose from its umbilical cord and required to be responsible for itself (Rolls 1998). On the other hand, religions and spirituality have always borrowed from each other and shared myths, rituals and techniques.

To live in post-colonial times means that Australians must find their own spiritual voice and mine the depths of their religious traditions bringing forward, renewing and revitalising what can be in the process of forging a new expression of its spirituality. Colonial societies are prevented from developing cultural and spiritual maturity due to the imposition of the colonising power’s culture and to the tendency to adopt for local use standards, outlooks and understandings not of their own. The call to cultural and spiritual maturity, including taking responsibility for self, nation and culture, scares some who seek the comfort of a refuge in the past and blow hot wind into the empty husks of the symbols of the colonial power. The offer of maturity sends others into frenzies of experimentation. For most the ‘shy hope in the heart’ developed during European Australia’s first time of enforced local self-responsibility, from 1788 to about 1840, continues to pulse and inform the ordinary, the daily, and to ennoble the efforts to decency, compassion and carefulness that are the deep spiritual counterpoint to the ethos of the beach.

Post-national times

Just as Australia moves from being a colony, through a commonwealth to an independent nation state, nation states as a social phenomenon are changing and, in the eyes of some, seem to be withering away. The nation state was an invention of seventeenth-century Europe in the break-up of the Holy Roman Empire and the emergence of self-governing local principalities (Thomas 2005). The nation state was seen as an entity of government, responsible to itself and usually to God, but sharply bounded from other nation states. The ethics of a just war are grounded in the sanctity and self-responsibility of the nation state. The government of nation states controlled all aspects of life within their boundaries, including the provision and regulation of the religious life of the state. The one established church crowned the monarch, prayed in and for the legislative assemblies, legitimated the decisions of the
state, blessed its armaments in war and buried its heroic dead in glorious ceremonies, echoes of which can be seen in England and the remnants of the Church of England. Modernity was characterised by the strong nation state, which controlled its own economy and managed its relations with other states on the basis of power and intrigue to secure its ends in international relations. Many of them managed extensive empires of dependent, semi-independent and vassal states. The USA continues in this mould, while other empires have waned and fallen apart.

But now the nation state is itself changing as the capacity of nations to manage their own internal affairs has been significantly eroded by the global movement of ideas, capital and people. Globalisation is not internationalisation. Empires were examples of internationalisation where the products, culture or people of one nation state dominate others, or where some products, ideas and people are seen in many different countries. ‘Globalisation’ refers to a level of interaction, activity and development that transcends the national, that occurs almost without reference to the national and that often – although unintentionally – undermines the national. National economies rise and fall in response to global events, global economic decisions and global corporations. Many global corporations have greater internal economies than those of most nation states. The global movement of people has made border maintenance a serious issue. Electronic media and the Internet have placed the global movement of ideas beyond the scope of the control of a nation, further eroding boundaries and any sense of national efficacy.

Given the realities of the global movement and development of ideas, capital and people, the idea that even a nation as geographically isolated as Australia can control its internal economy is risible. Australia is absolutely dependent on the world market for the sale of primary products: coal, wool and wheat. Following seven decades of enforced ‘White Australia’ immigration policy, the ethnic mix of Australia has been changed beyond recognition bringing significant communities of Asian, Middle Eastern and African immigrants to our cities and towns. With them came religious communities not previously strong in Australia but which now eclipse some of Australia’s former standard-brand Christian groups as Buddhists outnumber Baptists and Muslims outnumber Lutherans. The protestations of the current government that ‘Australia will determine who comes to our shores’ echo the desire to re-establish powers long since gone. Just when Australia is called
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on to be responsible for its own cultural and spiritual life, it is flooded with ideas, images, practices, religions and spiritualities from every corner of the globe. Early attempts to regulate religion by the state were brought to nought. These included trying to make illegal the practice of Scientology, accuse the Ananda Marga of terrorism and raid the homes of a group called ‘the Family’.

Australia is not alone in this. No nation state controls its borders absolutely. People come and go. The Internet is widely available, and attempts to regulate or sanitise it are decreasingly successful. It took thirty years for television to achieve global reach – broadband made it in three years. Multinational corporations are often much more powerful than nations and religions, attract a higher calibre of leadership and pay that leadership annual salaries that seem to approach the national debt of small nations. The realities of globalisation have significantly eroded the capacity of nation states to do the very things they were established to do: control their boundaries, manage their citizens, develop their own culture and defend themselves against unwanted invasion. The events of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing War on Terror further erode any sense of the security or inviolability of the boundaries of a nation state.

In modernity churches provided services to national governments, such as legitimation for policies, socialising citizens to obey and respect the government and in general acting as sources of support. This was also true for those nations of the Muslim world, but it took different forms. While most world religions have always had a global orientation that transcends the local and national, during modernity many formed significant local alliances and organisational links with the nation state of the countries where they were either a majority or had sufficient power or influence to forge such arrangements. These ties to particular states are being eroded by the global movement of religious ideas, practices and personnel. Abdurrahman Wahid, former President of Indonesia, complains about the Arabisation of Indonesian Islam. Osama bin Laden disregards national boundaries and operates from nowhere in an attempt to reshape the expression and form of Islam everywhere. Pentecostal Christianity moves throughout the globe less as a missionary movement with roots in particular sending nations like nineteenth- and twentieth-century missionaries but more as a global movement lacking a head office. While trends and changes within Catholicism focus on Rome, they are less and less likely to be grounded in particular nations but to take the form of global movements. The move to reform
radically the Anglican churches of the world into evangelical assemblies may have strong centres of support in various nations, but it is not driven by groups based in particular nations so much as by a transnational global association of persons and extra-ecclesial organisations. Similarly the spread of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity across the globe has less to do with national and international organisations than with the transnational and global networks of missionaries and their supporting congregations (Anderson 2004).

Further eroding the nation state are the eruptions of significant local movements that usually involve groups whose national or ethnic identity was submerged, repressed or threatened with violent ‘cleansing’: Basques, Kurds, Palestinians. There are even Scots and Welsh nationalisms. In Australia, indigenous people and communities are not only insisting on the recognition of their land rights but also increasingly demanding the respect for and recognition of their independent cultural and identity rights along with the recognition of the many nations, societies and cultures that the West has lumped together under the label ‘Aboriginal’. Australian multicultural policies and the continuing interaction between immigrants and those who remained in their places of origin have served to maintain local instances of culture, some of them religious, that in an earlier time would have been subsumed into an Australian cultural amalgam. This localisation of cultural variation, often with transnational links with other groups around the world, happens without reference to or in resistance to the homogenising efforts of nation states (Beyer 1994).

A consumerist society

Australia has been transformed by the emergence of a vigorous consumer economy that is more ready to provide for the whims of the consumer than the infrastructure needs of its citizens and economy. The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed the end of Saturday noon closing of grocery stores, butchers and greengrocers. The weekend had been sacred, not only for religious activities but also for sport and family life. With first weekend trading, then round-the-clock opening of many significant commercial venues, sport, religion and family have lost their protected time and compete with many other activities from entertainment to shopping.
The rise of consumer activities and consumer values has crowded the social space once set aside for religion, sport and leisure. Indeed for many shopping has become a form of leisure. Retail therapy has taken the place of a variety of other forms of leisure.

Moreover, economic change is radically altering the familiar landscapes of our lives as suburbs are bulldozed to make room for McMansions; old corporations are sold, plundered and spat out; schools and universities are deliberately under-funded to push them towards privatisation of education; familiar career paths no longer exist; and now it is even necessary to qualify to be unemployed. With all of this our social and cultural foundations and expectations are eroded. Values of caring and compassion are eroded by competition and consumerism changing the way we relate to each other and to organisations. Road rage takes the place of giving way and cooperation on the roads; corporate greed brings down businesses we relied on; and the essentials of life—education, food and dignity—are sold to the highest bidder with little regard for the long-term investment required to provide them. The local grounding and development of our faith lay in organisations that are now shown to be vulnerable to economic rationalism and the wrecking ball of change. The collapse of corporate values, or at least the exposure of their profound lack, has rocked the confidence of Australians. As a result we no longer trust government, church, school and courts the way we once did. The World Values Surveys revealed significant reductions between 1983 and 1995 in the confidence Australians place in social organisations that are supposed to serve them:

- 17 per cent trust the press, down from 28 per cent
- 24 per cent trust the unions, down only 1 per cent
- 37 per cent trust the churches, down from 56 per cent
- 26 per cent trust the Federal Government, down from 56 per cent
- 34 per cent trust the legal system, down from 62 per cent
- 66 per cent trust the armed forces, down only 1 per cent
- 75 per cent trust the police, down from 81 per cent.

The big losers, losing more than 10 percentage points, were the Federal Government (down 30 points), the legal system (down 28 points), the churches (down 19 points) and the press (down 11 points). This is a massive change. Gender, being religious and church attendance made virtually no
difference to our levels of trusting. The least trusting were the middle-aged. This erosion of trust is not trivial as it will undermine our trust in each other and in God. While such a situation may enforce self-reliance, the erosion of relationships of trust has ramifications for the whole system, and such erosion is not easily repaired. It cannot be overcome with pious platitudes about trusting God when all else fails. Our images of trust in God derive from our experiences with trustable relationships with others: parents, siblings, mates, officials, clergy and politicians. If you want to peddle trust in God you must provide a trustworthy community. This cannot be done by a church that focuses on bottom-line economic issues, abuses those who seek its comfort as well as those who offer their talents to its service and which violates their trust. This loss of trust probably extends to welfare agencies tarnished by paternalism, patriarchalism and association with the Stolen Generation. It extends to those who are supposed to care but who cannot fit you into their case management system.

Australia has become a multifaith society

The social changes resulting from migration and religious conversion have transformed Australia into a multifaith society. This change has consequences for the ways religious groups imagine themselves and relate to others. First, where once there was a near monopoly on religious legitimacy – British Protestant Christianity – there is now a plurality of legitimate religious organisation providing a variety of religious services. We have seen that there is a greater diversity of Christian groups as well as a much greater diversity of religious groups and spiritualities drawn from around the globe. No one of these can claim to have primary legitimacy in the minds and hearts of Australians. Neither can secularity, as it too has come to be viewed as one option among others that are open to be selected. Moreover, selecting is seen as more open, less permanent and allowably plural. While it was possible to speak of mainstream religion in the middle of the twentieth century, any attempt to do so now merely reflects the attempt of some groups to represent themselves as the norm. Instead, religious diversity has become the new normal situation in Australian society.

Most sociologies of religion do not deal with religious diversity. Beckford (2004: 73ff) usefully reviews the approaches to religious diversity.
He clarifies the distinction between plurality – the fact of diversity – and pluralism – ideologies for or against diversity. Much of the social theory of the late twentieth century presupposed that a society would have one religion and that religion provided order and stability and legitimated the status quo. This very much reflects the role religion did play in many European states and in the USA. These assumptions have been greatly challenged both by the fact of increased diversity and by a rising current of acceptance for religious diversity, including ideologies of multiculturalism. The fact of religious plurality and the rise of discourses of acceptance of religious diversity have radically changed the social context and social location of both religious organisations and individuals who are religious and spiritual (Bouma 1997; Wuthnow 2005). Religious organisations have to share with others in ways they did not; social policy designers and implementers have to become accustomed to multiple religious viewpoints demanding to be heard. Similarly, the organisers of civic events need to attend to requests for representation from a much wider range of groups.

**Having to share**

The emergence of a multifaith society requires religious groups and providers of spirituality to share a social space once dominated by one group. No longer do groups have to define themselves over against the ‘standard and accepted model’: British Anglicanism. Indeed, doing so would be seen as quaint at best, if not silly. Why bother? Stand on your own turf, declare your position and get on with it. This is a different social context that requires each group to take responsibility for itself.

This sharing can be seen in the way civic events now require a variety of religious groups to be on the platform. This change was evident in the gatherings convened to respond to the events of September 11, 2001 and the Port Arthur massacre. There was a reluctance to hold them in Anglican cathedrals, although some were. The Melbourne event to mark September 11 was held in the Rod Laver Tennis Centre, and each of nine major groups was given five minutes each in which to present some music and say something. State funerals will become increasingly awkward. It will not be long before one will be held in a mega-church claiming no denomination but being explicitly Christian. Of course their facilities hold more people than most cathedrals, they have better sound systems and, what is more, they are more
likely to have parking. The infrastructure offered will be appealing, but the hard-edged Christianity will be dividing.

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**A community accord**

The State of Victoria has taken steps to promote interfaith harmony. In addition to passing legislation that makes religious vilification illegal, the State Commissioner for Multicultural Affairs, George Lekakis, has produced a Community Accord document which enables community organisations to declare that they will promote harmony and mutual respect among the various communities and organisations that make up Victoria. It has been signed by hundreds of community groups, religious groups, corporations and agencies, many of whom proudly display framed copies in their reception areas.

The Community Accord is a prime example of how the state views the role of community organisations, including religion. They are to cooperate with each other, promote dominant values and seek the common good. For example the Community Accord asks community groups to:

- respect all ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic communities
- promote respect for diversity across our communities
- seek opportunities to work together to reaffirm our similarities as human beings and the fundamental principles that unite us as Victorians
- advocate for the elimination of racial and religious intolerance
- reject all forms of racial and religious vilification, violence, harassment and unlawful discrimination.

The building of networks of communication between religious groups so that both leaders and participants have friends of other faiths is essential to understanding and respect. The fact of signing this accord, usually in the presence of people from many backgrounds, has served to build this cultural and social basis for harmony and productive cooperation.

Gary Bouma

The rise of diversity in the form of the presence of many religious groups in a community brings with it opportunities for interaction, cooperation, competition and conflict (Wuthnow 2005). These need to be managed to
promote harmony and social cohesion. Stark and Finke (2000) argue that religious plurality and competition also lead to an increase in religious vitality. Religious monopolies, they claim, become lazy in recruiting and training members as well as lax in enforcing their views and ethics. The presence of other and competing groups requires a higher investment in religious belonging. This takes the form of higher levels of individual commitment, better service provision and overall a healthier religious life. A debate rages about this proposition.

The rise of religious diversity also has an impact on personal religion and spirituality. There is no longer a single world view, one way of seeing things. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this increased diversity took the form of multiple forms of Christianity finding official acceptance in many Western societies, but in the twenty-first century it is the official recognition and acceptance of various forms of a wide variety of religions: denominations of Christianity, varieties of Buddhism, several expressions of Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Baha’i, Judaism and others. In a religiously plural society the ‘sacred canopy’ described by Berger (1967) is no longer singular and all-embracing, becoming at best an umbrella. There is no single ultimate transcendent, no theology that wraps all others together into one, no commonly held theological criteria by which to judge among the religious and spiritual offerings. This violates the rational presuppositions of modernity and leaves some feeling insecure (Berger 1999).

Post-ecumenical times

The goals of twentieth-century ecumenism were to reduce intra-Christian conflict and promote unity. This great religious movement reduced competition among various Christian denominations (Gillman 1988; Breward 1993: 201–202, 213). Some of the motivation to cooperate rather than compete emerged on the mission field as the absurdity of each European and American denomination tried to replicate itself in distant lands. The global traveller still encounters the architectural remains of these efforts in the Dutch, English, German, American and Spanish architecture of churches built by missionaries. Beyond architecture, the religious groups established often spent as much effort trying to convert people from other Christian groups as they did trying to convert those of other faiths. The ecumenical movement tried to overcome this competition and to reduce the hostility often found in interchurch relations.
However, ecumenism was essentially a liberal Protestant modern ideal. It certainly never included all Christian groups. Officially, Catholics were wary, continuing to insist that they were the true church. At the local level many interchurch associations were formed, usually among neighbouring parishes. These had the active support of clergy and served to increase the knowledge each group had of the others and to take the heat out of what had occasionally been rather rancorous sectarian rivalry. More conservative Protestant groups continued and still continue to insist that their take on the Christian message is the only correct one and that the defects in those of others render their salvation dubious. Protestant liberalism focused on shared beliefs and concerns, particularly issues of social justice. In doing so, ecumenism showed itself to be a modern project in that uniformity was the goal. It was an advanced form of rational culture and relied on careful rational interpretation of sacred texts to overcome variations in biblical interpretation and theological difference. If everyone became alike, or at least like us, there would be no differences that counted, that mattered, that made a difference, and peace would ensue.

The ecumenical movement was Protestant in that it was non-sacramental in worship and non-episcopal in ecclesiastical organisation. One of the goals of the movement was the reunification of the various divided strands of Protestantism into one organisational structure. In Australia this took place in the formation of the Uniting Church through an amalgamation of most Methodists, nearly all Congregationalists and about half of the Presbyterians. With the demise of liberal Protestantism, this dream foundered. However, this does not imply a return to the sectarian conflicts of an earlier time (Hogan 1987).

In a post-ecumenical age, difference is no longer an evil, a danger or a threat to be overcome. Difference becomes more than just tolerated. Difference is becoming valued for itself. Now God is seen as creating and embracing diversity. Difference is no longer post-Fall evidence of human evil but essential to the orders of Creation. The image of the tower of Babel (Genesis 11: 1–9) is revisioned to indicate God’s displeasure at human unity, preferring diversity. This shows the impact of cultural change on our images of who God is and how God relates to us. God is relationship, and relationship requires difference, diversity and otherness. God creates and loves diversity. No longer is there a need for coercive uniformity such as inquisitions, heresy trials or excommunications.
The challenge for the twenty-first century is to understand, practise and extend the inclusivity of God’s love across lifestyles, across religious forms and across divisions and differences not yet apparent to us. The great historic trend has been to wider and wider inclusivity associated with pockets of resistance. While back eddies of resistance are always there and some fundamentalist groups cause havoc while they do exist, few exclusivist, purity-seeking religious organisations exist for long (Berger 1999: 11–14). Inclusivity persists, exclusivity dies. One reason for this is found in the fact that an exclusivity that denies or obliterates difference does not persist because it takes too much effort to repress difference; persistence requires compromise with purity. Mao’s Cultural Revolution is an example of a secular exclusivist movement that caused great damage but did not persist. At another level, diversity itself is vital to sustainability as it provides the fertile ground for the generation of new ideas and approaches required to meet the challenges of change. Cultural diversity appears to be as important to cultural vitality and sustainability as biodiversity is to life itself.

There will be competition, but the character of the competition will largely be among players who respect each other but who offer alternative approaches and styles. Religious competition will become rather like competing restaurants; each restaurant offers food, but there will be some variation in nutritional quality and some variation in the form of delivery. It is accepted that each feeds and only in the rarest exception poisons its customers. Pursuing this analogy, the question that has arisen with great force since September 11, 2001 is: do some religious groups produce social indigestion or even provide toxic food?

In a multifaith context there will always be those religious groups that claim to be the only correct, healthy, successful, right or God-approved ones. There will also be a revival of the importance of religious badging: wearing insignia, identifying clothes or other indicators of the religious group of a person and the degree of their intensity of belief and participation. These include wearing WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) jewellery or other logos, the skull cap for Jewish males and some form of headdress or covering for Muslim women. With migration and revitalisation the public identification of religious orientation has increased.

Most of this competition is good-natured. Indeed the fault lines along which competition occurs have changed. It was once Protestant vs Catholic (Hogan 1987; Megalogenis 2003). But now it is more likely to be religious vs
non-religious or between people of faith vs those who claim no faith. There is now more competition within religious groups between those who are more intense in their commitment and participation vs those who are more laid-back. Both of these competitions reflect a situation that is emerging in this post-ecumenical era: the rise of intense religious loyalties due to religious revitalisation on the one hand and the demise of totalising identities, including religious commitment, on the other. Finally, there is some competition and conflict between Christians and Muslims, and serious problems arise when one group seeks to impose its views on the rest, at times ‘for their own good’. The ways Australia manages this competition among religiously diverse groups is considered in chapter 6 in a discussion of the rules of the game for competing religions and spiritualities.

Critical changes in the social structure of Australia

In addition to cultural changes, particularly the shift from rational to experiential bases of authority, several changes in Australia’s social structure are also working to change the context for the expression of spirituality and the production and consumption of religious goods and services. These changes can be summed up and labelled by saying that Australians live in post-family times, post-patriarchal times and times characterised by different forms of social cohesion and social capital.

Post-family times

The relationship between religious groups and the family is complex and changing. Many Australian religious groups liken themselves to families and promote what they call ‘family values’. However, this is occurring at a time when several trends are reshaping the Australian family. De Vaus (2004) reports that as of the 2001 census the nuclear family comprising mother, father and at least one of their children describes 28.2 per cent of Australia’s households. Fewer than half of Australians – 43.7 per cent – live in a household comprising a heterosexual couple and dependent children (Hughes 2004a: 10). If one were to insist that mother and father be married to each other and never to have been married before and that the children be their children, as opposed to the child of one of them, these percentages drop further. While 19.7 per cent of Australians live as couples without
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children, 11.3 per cent live in single-parent arrangements and 9.1 per cent of Australians live alone. Since the 1950s the nuclear family myth has replaced the nuclear family reality.

The form of the family has been changing over the centuries. Until the early decades of the twentieth century it was not uncommon for households to be made up of a number of families, including owners of the house, servant families and relatives who were living in the house. The modern family did not shrink to the nuclear family until the time of World War I (Gilding 1991). The nuclear family as a reality reached its peak in the 1950s. Since the 1960s it has been changing again. Marriage rates have declined from 1950s highs, fertility rates have plummeted to lower than replacement levels and divorce rates have increased from the 1950s, levelling off in the 1990s (Trewin 2001: 194–196, 175). Australia’s religious leaders have decried these changes as departures from God’s kingdom, reflecting advanced wilfulness of the sinful and a loss of family values (Porter 1996). They often claim that divorce is easy. However, it is now clear that divorce is not usually an indication of a rejection of marriage or of the desire to be single. Marriage is desired; indeed the standards are high and the expectations have become impossible to meet such that it should not be surprising that many couples fail to reach them.

One of the most profoundly influential changes in Australia’s social structure is reflected in the fact that the median age at first marriage for males is older than 30. This is up from 23 in 1980 (Tiffen & Gittins 2004: 190). This means that most young Australians now spend their twenties completing their education, commencing a career and travelling. However, unlike thirty years ago, getting married, establishing a family, buying a house and reaching what would have been taken to be adulthood is deferred until after they have turned 30. The making and accepting of a lasting relationship is not experienced by most before they are nearly 30. This has resulted in a continued fall in fertility rates and a rise in infertile coupling (Trewin 2001: 195; Tiffen & Gittins 2004: 192). More and more couples are childless, whether they intended to be or not. There is also a radical division between the poor who have children in their teens and parent in their twenties and the advantaged who parent in their thirties and forties (Megalogenis 2003: 7–48).

While some see this shift to late marriage as a responsible response to economic change, over-population and starvation, it raises ethical, theological
and missiological issues for religious groups. The churches have been totally unprepared for delayed marriage. Their sexual ethics are predicated on marriage in the late teens, which, given the comparatively later onset of sexual maturity in earlier times, required a relatively short period of abstinence. Such an ethic is hardly likely to suit a generation that does not marry until they are 30. While already long overdue, a new sexual ethic is needed, but I do not like the chances of the churches producing one, given their age structures. Moreover, the churches cannot tolerate honesty in this area since they are still being awkward about masturbation, to say nothing of other aspects of adolescent sexuality or of the sexuality of those in transition from one marriage to another or of those not called to heterosexual intimacy and partnering, to say absolutely nothing of the sexuality of seniors and those in assisted accommodation (Porter 1996; Bates 2004). Since the 1960s non-procreative, or recreational, sex has become the norm for Australians, married or single, but the churches have not accepted this. Church leaders rush in where they have no exposure, no experience and no risk. What kind of context can churches offer to young people who want to explore the ethical dimensions of their relationships in a post-marriage age? Some offer ‘Love Waits’ seminars and elaborate systems to record promises to refrain from sex before marriage. Others try to offer open forums to explore these issues but find that conservative clergy and laity oppose them, demanding that the old myth be re-presented as the answer to current dilemmas. Most young people ignore the lot.

The family will continue to change. Just as the reality of the postponement of marriage finally hits religious groups, those who did delay their marriages and having babies until they are in their mid-thirties are now starting families. A mini baby boom occurred in 2004–05 as more babies were born than in any year since 1990. A delay in marriage will produce a decline in fertility, but eventually many couples, although older, will get around to having babies. The issues facing religious groups include: will they also seek a religious context for their family life? Where will they go to seek a religious and spiritual dimension for their lives as families? The answers to these questions will be found in where these people choose to live. They have been living in small inner-city flats, but as they enter the child-raising phase of their lives, they may well move to the suburbs. This is a major change with implications for housing preferences, shopping preferences and choices about religion and spirituality. Will established churches
full of grey heads appeal to these nearly middle-aged but youth-oriented parents? Will these people seek mega-churches? Many churches have begun being more strict about whom they will baptise and insist that sponsors and parents be regular church attendees before seeking baptism. Such policies are likely to alienate a couple who, upon the birth of a child – increasingly after some difficulty, given their own age – begin to seek a religious and spiritual dimension to life only to be told they are not good enough. Such policies also fly in the face of the values and expectations of a consumerist society.

Then there is the debate about gay/lesbian marriage (McGillion 2005; Bates 2004). Lest anyone think this is just going to go away, we can expect a rise in gay and lesbian pair bonding as a result of delayed marriage and increased social acceptance of alternative forms of household and family (Evans & Kelley 2004). Some argue against marrying gays and lesbians because they do not intend to have children. However, the same should then apply to marrying any people who do not intend to have children or who cannot have children. This would apply to about a third of marriages. However, raising children is no longer what marriage is about, at least not primarily. People marrying today are seeking intimacy, sharing life between a pair bond. But this is precisely what gays and lesbians who seek to marry are already doing. In the light of this, religious groups should apply the same criteria to all seeking marriage and proceed with gay marriages.

In promoting worship of God and building a Christian community many churches continue to use family images (Hughes 2005). These images are powerful in that they are grounded in a fairly widely held view that the family is the basic unit of a society in which two adults form a lifelong commitment that provides a nurturing context for rearing the next generation. However, are family images still good, attractive and suitable to large segments of the population? They may be for those who inhabit the McMansions of affluent suburbs and who seek to realise a 1950s myth. Part of the appeal of mega-churches is the perpetuation of this myth, filling it with religious meaning and gathering people of like mind. But how does this myth fare with the under thirties, the elderly, the intentionally childless or those whose family experience has been negative? For those who have families, this imagery may help them feel good about their decisions. But for a large proportion of the population, the imagery and emphasis is off-putting, either by praising what they do not have or by condemning whom they are (Oswald 2001).
Recruitment to any social organisation, especially voluntary associations like churches, synagogues, mosques and temples, is much more difficult when the family takes on a wider diversity of forms. Sons, if they exist, do not follow fathers into club membership, and daughters are often career-minded, leaving them no time to donate to charitable organisations, let alone have families. The rise of the proportion of the population living alone challenges the membership drives of the Masonic lodge, sports associations and Rotary clubs as much as it does religious groups. All Australian voluntary associations face the challenge of organising and marketing themselves to be present, available and attractive for a much wider range of people than earlier forms of their organisations. The changes often take the form of being with rather than directing, offering context for exploring questions rather than declaring the answers, allowing the member to take charge of the mode and extent of participation rather than dictating the terms of membership. For religious groups this means being present and available to people who are seeking ways to grow, to be with them in their spiritual development, to offer contexts for them to explore and take charge of their own path and journey where they can tell their stories and be heard, understood and accepted.

**Post-patriarchal times**

Finally, we live in a post-patriarchal society. Patriarchy is dead among the under forties in most organisations in Australia. However, the church, like the military, continues to be a patriarchal organisation (Piggin 1996: 203–221; O’Brien 2002; McGillion 2005). Some groups respond to this reality by radically re-legitimising patriarchy with theological innovations such as ‘headship theology’. These include American evangelical Christian groups like the Southern Baptist Convention, which is the largest Protestant denomination in the USA, Promise Keepers, the Presbyterian Church of Australia and Sydney Anglicans (McGillion 2005: 50, 116–117). This continuing and renewing patriarchal orientation has led to and may well continue to lead to some ugly court battles as the church refuses to learn from the experience of other organisations (Piggin 1996: 203–221). To speak the language of the under forties or fifties requires inclusive language. Using exclusive and alienating language when referring to race, gender and sexuality is associated with the passing order of patriarchal potentates, who are still powerful as they
control substantial capital but are in substantial decline. Many institutions of exclusion are being replaced with institutions of inclusion.

**New forms of social capital and cohesion**

At a recent conference a speaker referred to newspapers as social glue that holds a society together. He then went on to point out that a major capital city broadsheet had the same circulation as it had twenty years ago. That sounds familiar. He may have meant that it had the same number of subscribers and sales in 2004 as 1984. Unwittingly, he may have also meant that they were largely the same people. The same could be said about the Anglican Church of Australia, which about four million Australians have identified with since 1966. Given the advancing age structure of the Anglican Church described in chapter 3, they may well be very much the same persons. A visit to a performance of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra or the ballet and opera will reveal ageing subscribers and greying audiences. Religious organisations such as churches, mosques and synagogues are not alone in being transformed by changes in the way people seek to meet others, to form groups of friends or to find entertainment. Memberships of Masonic lodges, political parties and unions have also been in decline. Putnam (2000) describes the rise from 1890 and the sharp decline since 1960 in personal investment in these forms of what he calls social capital.

While the decline in those organisations that facilitated certain forms of social capital – churches, youth groups, clubs, lodges and service organisations – is easily seen, it is much more difficult to discern where and how social capital and networks are now produced by young people. Some assume that the net social capital currently produced is less than before, yet that assumption presumes they know what to measure both then and now and have measures for it. New research is needed to describe the networks of relationships that hold together the lives of young people today.

**Conclusion**

The social location of religious organisations in Australian society has changed dramatically from being associated with the powerful, decision-making bodies and trend-setters. They are no longer central and pervasive but have become more marginal and private. No wonder many religious
leaders today find their social context so challenging and confronting. The pace of change has increased. People trained in the 1960s and 1970s have had to reinvent themselves to engage a much different world, use different technology to effect that engagement and appeal to a different form of authority if they are to engage at all. Many clergy training institutions are still producing graduates suited to a society and culture that has now been past for more than a quarter-century. Most religious organisations continue with structures that were established in the mid-nineteenth century, singing hymns of the same era and pushing agendas set long ago.

Given the changing cultural context of Australia’s religious and spiritual life and the changing social location of religious organisations, chapters 6 and 7 explore the ways religious groups are responding to these changes and how new or different forms of spirituality emerge in these contexts.
The emerging picture of Australia’s religious and spiritual life shows continued vitality coupled with substantial change caused by cultural processes and changes in its social location. The religious and spiritual responses to these changes can be examined under four basic processes: religious revitalisation, fundamentalisation, innovation and marginalisation. These processes are often examined separately, rather than being seen as a complex of overlapping, interacting and, at times, contradictory processes. Marginalisation will be examined in this chapter and the more innovative responses in chapter 7.

One response to social and cultural change has been for churches – many of them once in the mainstream – to become marginalised. The marginalisation of organised religion is one of the themes in the secularisation literature (Beckford 2003: 30–71; Bruce 1996; Martin 2005). As religion has moved, or been moved, to the sidelines, it has also become a private matter for individuals to decide whether and to what degree they should be involved. Societies and governments came to take less interest in the patterns and forms of the religious observance of their citizens. Much has been made of the marginalisation and privatisation of religion in the last two hundred years with the rise of secular society (Martin 1978; Gilbert 1980; Millikan 1981; Wilson 1966, 1982; Wilson 1983). This discussion has largely focused on once-major Protestant denominations and Anglicans, but has some application to Catholics as well.
The move to the margins

Marginalisation is a complex process that involves both active pushing of the churches out of centres of power and the churches’ willing withdrawal to a narrower range of involvement. In part this is a process of differentiation whereby elements of a society once joined together to provide services are separated into autonomous domains. Thus education is hived off to the schools, entertainment to the new media, health to physicians and hospitals, and religion to the churches. While these churches were once involved in all aspects of social life, both as providers and initiators of services and as a source of social critique, they have largely narrowed their concern to the family. The reasons for this narrowing of focus as a major part of the marginalisation process are outlined in this section using Australian, American and European examples of these changes in the position of the church in society.

This marginalisation can be seen to suit the interests of many church leaders and entrenched ecclesiastical interests. The church has cooperated in its own marginalisation, finding a position on the edges of society more comfortable and less risky than a more demanding central position. The benefits of marginalisation to the church include the opportunity to criticise without having to take seriously the implications of the critique for itself, the opportunity to maintain doctrinal and ethical purity untouched by the realities of intellectual and moral life in its community, and the opportunity to maintain existing structures of power and control. The different paths to the margins of society taken by formerly established churches and by denominations and sects are compared.

Since at least the beginning of the nineteenth century and increasingly through the twentieth the place of what was mainstream Christian religion in Western culture and society has become increasingly marginalised and privatised. The churches have become less directly involved in the affairs of state, the definition and production of public culture, the development of social policy, the formation of opinion and the assessment of information. While some of those in the church bewail this marginal position, many others appear blissfully comfortable on the margins, happy to maintain their positions within the church while the rest of the world goes by. Unwilling to invest the required energy and take the attendant risks, the church
and particularly church leaders have in a variety of ways allowed and even sanctified their own marginalisation.

There is little argument that before the nineteenth century religious organisations were more central to European societies. Archbishops, cardinals and leaders of Protestant denominations had positions of power, influence and respect. Their influence was at times greater than that of the head of state or monarch. They held valued positions in courtly society, and career mobility of elites between government and church was not uncommon. Indeed the church, the government and the military were tools the state used to legitimate and achieve its ends. In the domain of culture, the church was a major patron of the arts and definer of what was acceptable and worthy. Religious themes dominated the arts from sculpture to music. Some areas of musical theatre were suppressed or limited by church leaders while others were encouraged. The shaping influence of church hierarchy was not questioned.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century the state churches of England, Holland, the USA and France had begun to be marginalised. In France and the USA this had resulted from secular republican revolutions that brought in constitutional declarations separating church and state. In the case of France it was also a violently anticlerical revolution. In the USA the revolution was not anticlerical, although it was against the established church; there were many Protestant alternatives available. This removal of the benefits of the established church fed usefully into the religious revitalisation that followed in the early nineteenth century (Finke & Stark 1992). In England and Holland the established churches had become otiose and comfortable in the hands of the wealthy and powerful. As ‘churches’ – as opposed to ‘sects’ in the church–sect continuum – they presumed that all citizens were members by baptism; hence listening to the needs of the people or attempting to relate the faith to their lives were unnecessary efforts or, in the case of predestinarian Protestants, best left in the hands of God. As the church was established and part of the courtly elite, it was easy to believe that it was influential because church leaders were associated with other leaders of society or were relatives of the powerful.

The movements of reform and revitalisation that cut across most Christian churches in Europe and some in the USA during the 1820–40 period can be seen as a reaction against this comfortable church. The church had
become so identified with the powerful that it was less able to minister to the whole society and culture. Its position of privilege blinded it to the needs of others and deafened it to the plight of the poor and outcast. Churches had become so identified with one subgroup of their societies that they could not understand other subgroups or communicate with them. These movements of reform and revitalisation include the afscheiding and doeleantie in Holland, as well as the Tractarians and evangelicals in the Church of England and the nineteenth-century movements to re-Catholicise Europe. The Catholic revitalisation movements often had the effect of re-establishing the church and gaining what had the appearance of a highly influential church within the society. In these cases, particularly Austria, Spain, Italy and Ireland, the marginalisation was not so much from the machinery of the state as it was from the intellectual and social developments of the nineteenth century, as evidenced in the papal responses to social change in the publication of a list of social theories and policies that were declared un-Catholic. Among Protestant and Anglican churches there were those who tried in varying ways to call the established church back to attending to the religious needs of those overlooked by existing structures and to being a witness within its sociocultural milieu.

Regardless of liturgical or theological orientation, these new movements had a renewed view of the church as a powerful force within society. The church was to be a force to be used to bring in the kingdom of God on earth. The social issues of concern early in the nineteenth century included extending the franchise, ending slavery, improving the treatment of convicts, ameliorating child labour conditions and redressing the blight of urban poverty. The approaches to these problems included individual good works and working to get the government – now accurately perceived to be at some distance from these church groups – to enact legislation to address the issues. Achieving legislative success often required forming temporary alliances with others who were not motivated by the same religious convictions and being in opposition to others who shared the same denominational identification. At times direct opposition to the policies of the established church and its officers was seen as necessary.

Whatever the view of the new heaven and the new earth, the perspective from which this vision was developed was in fact not so much from within the society as it was increasingly from the margins of both the society and at times of the established ecclesiastical structures of the day. The newer
denominations and those trying within mainstream groups usually saw the world from a sectarian viewpoint; that is, they saw themselves as being over and against the world in which they were located and not an integral part of it. They had the truth and the correct view of the truth and knew how to apply that truth. But, in most cases, they were minorities and as such they spoke from the sidelines.

For some of these groups or movements, the inclusivity of the church had been left behind for the increased insistence on purity of the sect. The notion of the whole of the community being part of the one church, taking part in the production and application of the vision of the meaning of the Gospel within that community, had been abandoned. That grand vision of diversity included under the umbrella of overarching organisational unity was no longer possible. Theological orthodoxy demanded a singular and narrower view. The modern project of a single meta-narrative was no longer sustainable by a single religious organisation that represented the whole community. Instead small enclaves of ‘truth’ declared themselves to be the only true church, each teaching the only true version of the faith, each declaring their own vision as the only perspective, which led to driving out the dissident. This pattern of church and society relationship found its theological expression and legitimation in ‘remnant theology’.

‘Orthodoxy’ in the sense that came to be dominant in the nineteenth century, particularly among evangelical Anglicans, the Presbyterians and the Reformed churches, led to increasingly divided ecclesiastical organisations as disagreement over fine points of theology led to schism, charges of heresy and increasing sectarian conflict. One of the comforts of marginalisation is the ability to focus intently on fine points of theology. Only on the margin is it possible to raise issues that are not issues of the larger society to a high degree of salience and make them tests of membership within a small faith community. The current debate in the Catholic Church about the use of gluten-free wafers in the Mass is a case in point. Some communicants who are allergic to wheat had requested that gluten-free wafers be used. In this case, a matter that could hardly be at the forefront of the minds of Australians is considered in great pastoral, theological and sacramental depth: can the full sacramental presence of God in Christ occur if other than wheat breads are used? The decision was no. As religious groups insisted on their right to set their own agendas, the agendas set took them increasingly to the margins of society and culture.
Similarly the movement of liturgical revitalisation among, for example, the Oxford Movement in the Church of England, by focusing on orthopraxy turned the church back on itself rather than out into the world. Such issues as the proper way to hold one’s hands while celebrating the Eucharist, how broad the borders of lace should be or how many times to genuflect, like fine points of Calvinist theology, concern only the elite of religious virtuosi (Weber 1963: 162–163). Once again, as with the inward focus of those insisting on orthodoxy, the concerns of the liturgical revitalisation movement had the effect of withdrawing to the margin. While the evangelicals seemed to address the larger society, it was mostly in the kind of condemnation that legitimates the life-denying lifestyle choices made by these groups. The orthopraxy discussions in evangelical groups tended to focus on purity and who is more righteous than whom (Piggin 1996). Moreover, the forays into the world engaged in both by those seeking orthodoxy and by those seeking orthopraxy had the sole purpose of taking people out of the world and encapsulating them in the inward-looking isolated communities of faith. The primary aim of the evangelical movement is to gather people out of society and into the church, not to engage the world or to engage in attempts to shape the world from which they seek to draw people (Martin 1999: 40).

Unable to dictate to the state what the educational policies would be, in the late nineteenth century the churches – large and small, churchly and sectarian – engaged in a massive worldwide school building campaign (Hogan 1987: 83–100; Sturrock 2005). Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed and other schools were built (O’Farrell 1977). In the USA many of the secondary schools established at this time became liberal arts colleges later. Once again the movement was to withdraw and become pure. Unable to dominate the cultural landscape by defining the moral and religious education of the people, the church withdrew into the isolated comfort of separate organisations with reduced, controlled and managed relations with its sociocultural milieu.

Most of the nineteenth-century efforts of religious groups to shape the society of which they were a part resulted less in social change than in the increased marginalisation of the church. The economic changes of industrialisation went ahead with little comment from the church, except largely to bless the changes as part of necessary progress and to continue to preach the work ethic. The structure of family life began its change to its contemporary
shape without the church noticing, except to condemn what it did not understand.

Cut off from those who were being sent to do the dirty work, the church glorified the activities of empires on the one hand and blessed the carnage on the other. As the nineteenth century progressed, the role of the church shifted from that of providing chaplains to garrison communities to becoming another part of the imperial process by engaging in mission work that imposed the religion in addition to the economic systems and interests of the imperial powers. In the USA most of the churches continued well into the nineteenth century their legitimation of slavery and well until the middle of the twentieth century the oppression of Blacks and the suppression of unions and continued blessing the military–industrial complex. Similar views are recorded in Australian churches (Lawton 2002: 196–199).

Meanwhile towards the end of the nineteenth century, serious efforts at social engineering and the ameliorisation of social ills were increasingly motivated and carried out by such groups as unions and organised pressure groups, which were either overtly hostile towards the churches or which drew their motivation and vision of the good society from Marxism or secular humanism. These groups initially grew out of direct involvement in the lives of people. That secular humanism can be seen as a form of detranscendentalised Christianity is only to underscore the point that, while some of the Christian ethos had become part of the dominant culture, the organised church was not. The church was not involved in the lives of people in society. The forces that were finally effective in bringing in child labour legislation, female labour acts, the eight-hour day, increased safety in the workplace and the provisions of the welfare state were not the religious leaders, who were often in opposition, but stridently secular labour leaders and anticlerical socialists.

Given that the mainstream churches no longer had the power to remake society according to their images of the kingdom of God on earth, in their attempts to exercise some influence they focused on the control of individual human behaviour rather than on society and increasingly retreated to the private sphere, specifically focusing their concern on the family. The churches increasingly became associated with the values and mores of polite, suburban, middle-class society. Rather than being associated with a broad spectrum of society, they became narrowly focused on one sector, the nuclear family. Throughout the twentieth century, the churches increasingly imaged
themselves as a family and have taken the family as the last bastion of their influence in society.

Since World War II the mainstream churches have seen themselves as the true supporter of the family, which it describes as the most essential or fundamental unit in society. The churches take their images of what the family is supposed to be largely from late feudal and early capitalist family structures: patriarchal, closed and nuclear (Shorter 1975). They read these images back into their interpretation of scripture, seeing nuclear families where there were none, in their sacralisation and legitimation of this now passé but ecclesiastically normative image of the family.

In their own press and in public debates the selective focus of the churches can be seen in the way church leaders wring their hands over increasing divorce rates in particular, but until recently have turned a blind eye to violence and sexual abuse in the family (Nason-Clark 1997). The churches are concerned more with visible structure, order and control within the family than they are for the effects of these structures on the wellbeing of family members. They appear unaware of the changes in the structure of the family following the economic changes that have eroded the economic interdependence that once bound the family and community together, leaving the family united solely by the bonds of intimate attachment and, if there are any, some concern for children. In place of the positive economic interdependence of the late feudal and early capitalist family, the churches seek to develop artificial economic ties to bind the family by promoting the economic, social and emotional dependency of wife and children on the male wage earner. The overriding concern is for duty, a hangover from the duty-driven Edwardian marriage, where one was supposed to stick it out regardless of how miserable and unloving the family became, with the partners retreating, him to his club, basement workshop or shed and her to the kitchen.

Having retreated from or failed to gain access to most areas of life, the churches found themselves limited to the private sphere. While there is some complaint about this, for the most part it suits them, their leaders and their people. As a result, the churches have become a place to celebrate, legitimate and defend middle-class family virtues. For the churches to venture into other areas of life is to go uninvited into spheres of which the churches are ignorant and of which their leaders, from clergy to bishops, have no direct experience. So clergy retreat comfortably into a world of their own creation
and domination (Wilson 1983; Hughes 1989). There is little traffic between the public and the private spheres; few messages get through. Little is learned by each of the other; each views the other with profound suspicion.

The comforts of marginalisation

Several comforts accrue to churches and their leaders being on the margin as opposed to the centre of social life. One such comfort is that the churches are relatively untouched by changes in the public sphere. They can maintain images of how things are supposed to be without facing the challenge of what is. For example, they can maintain the notion that those seeking marriage are virginal applicants for ecclesiastical blessing on their nuptial rite when the majority have been living together before marriage. They can maintain a general ethical stance of equal rights for various groups in society while themselves denying women access to ordination (Hilliard 2002) or relegating the divorced and remarried through formal or informal excommunication to an unresolvable position of impurity.

Another major comfort of being on the margin is the ability to maintain established structures of hierarchy and power with less challenge from the state and public. The churches can engage in employment practices for clergy and teachers in church-controlled schools and agencies that would not be tolerated in any other section of the society, both in terms of sheltering the inept and rejecting the qualified. In Australia, the churches are exempted from equal rights employment legislation. They can and do engage in interview practices that are illegal in other social sectors. Issues of gender, sexuality, marital status, intention to have children, willingness to live apart from spouse and other issues that are not permitted to be included in interviews of job-seekers are routinely included as bishops and others interview candidates for clerical and school appointments. The legitimations the churches use to excuse this departure from the established standards of fairness current in secular society sound more like those made in opposition to the legislation by some employer groups rather than carefully thought-out theological and pastoral considerations.

Failing to be involved in serious interaction with other organisations and communities, the churches, by virtue of their marginalisation, have not been exposed to management techniques, accountability for leadership and more interactive, consultative and cooperative management styles. This isolation allows the maintenance of essentially feudal management structures,
unfair employment practices and patriarchal game-playing. All this serves to maintain the entrenched vested interests of senior career ecclesiastics while impeding the ability of the churches to relate meaningfully with the society in which they are located.

A third comfort of marginality is the ability to maintain a semblance of a high degree of moral purity and detachment. The churches can see themselves as zones of purity, enclaves of the righteous. Not being involved in the decisions made by government, industry and commerce, the churches can think of themselves as untouched by the compromises with the ideal that such decisions necessarily entail. From this lofty position of detached purity, the churches can try to be critical of the decisions of others, but the critique comes out of an uninvolved quarter and, as such, is usually poorly informed about the issues and constraints involved in those decisions. While not having a direct role in decision-making may lead to a kind of ‘objectivity’ in assessing decisions made, it also leads to irrelevance and to the kind of irresponsibility that comes with not being accountable. Essentially this amounts to the ability to critique without being criticised in return; to point the finger without noting the implications for one’s own quarter.

In 1993 Anglican and Catholic bishops argued that they should continue to be exempt from the Equal Opportunity Act so that they could continue to discriminate against certain categories of people who seek employment as clergy or as staff in church-controlled schools, welfare agencies and hospitals. Archbishop Sir Frank Little (Melbourne) was quoted as saying: ‘The principal concern is that the Church’s right to lawful discrimination is sufficiently and properly protected. There is a fundamental right to religious freedom at stake’ (Age, 10 June 1993: 1, 8). The Catholics were particularly concerned to be able to deny employment in their schools to teachers whose lifestyles were at variance with official Roman Catholic teaching, those who lived with a partner without marriage, those who were divorced and remarried, or those whose sexuality was judged unacceptable. This issue was raised again in the discussions with heads of faiths conducted in each capital city as part of a project on religion and cultural diversity in Australia funded by the Department of Immigration and Indigenous and Multicultural Affairs (Cahill et al. 2004).

Being on the margin allows groups the ability to maintain doctrinal orthodoxy and beliefs without the challenge and benefit of interaction with
those who think and believe differently. This isolation may be useful for the preservation of the purity of some beliefs, but it does not assist in the articulation of faith within a given culture. As a result churches may become subcultures unrelated to other groups, espousing an increasingly arcane lore with decreasing relevance to the society in which they are located.

Two patterns of marginalisation

There are two basic patterns in the marginalisation of religious groups. The first is characteristic of those groups that were at one point established or state churches, like the Anglicans, Lutherans, Catholics and, in some cases, Muslims. Moving from a highly influential, powerful monopoly position to the margins is a different process from that by which groups that have never been monopolies arrive at the margin (Swatos 1979).

The marginalisation of monopoly religions

Established religions were essentially monopolies within a given territory, and their monopolies were guarded by the state. In return the state enjoyed the blessing and theological legitimation of the group for its structure, activities and personnel. Religious monopolies, like any other monopoly, are difficult to unseat. However, when the monopoly control of a market is broken by legislation or migration to a state where they are a minority, an organisation structured to function in a monopoly setting finds it difficult to adjust to the new market conditions, often condemning the situation as unfair, inappropriately defined and lacking in refinement. Knowledge of the characteristics of monopoly organisations helps to understand how these organisations react to change both within and without.

The sort of management culture associated with a monopoly is radically different from that of organisations that have to take their environments, both internal and external, seriously. Monopolist patriarchal organisations develop tall hierarchies and top-down information flows. This isolates the leadership from learning about developments in an organisation’s environment. Chiefs are fed highly digested information by their immediate subordinates, who are often more interested in securing their positions than in achieving the goals of the organisation.
Self-preservation is the primary goal at all levels of a monopoly organisation. It seeks to preserve its monopoly by excluding competition rather than by fair competition, for example, the treatment of Scientology by other religious groups in Australia. Those who work and those who manage are more interested in preservation of their positions and achieving career mobility within the structure of the organisation than they are in extending the work of the organisation in the community. They pursue their own goals rather than doing what the organisation is supposed to do. The essential inertia and timidity produced by being a monopoly ensures that the rate of change within the organisation will be less than the rate of change in the organisation’s external environment, rendering it a certainty that the monopoly organisation becomes increasingly out of touch with its markets, clients and consumers.

Given that communication is directed essentially from the top down, the isolation of senior management increases with their duration in the organisation. Monopoly organisations tend to practise internal promotion, thus exacerbating the isolation of senior management from the rest of the organisation and from its markets, clients and consumers.

Monopoly organisations that are service organisations, rather than industrial or economic organisations, tend to become increasingly self-serving. This is one of the central features of the process by which monopoly organisations become marginalised. Considering the maintenance of the organisation and advancing their own careers as paramount, personnel fail to attend to the needs of the client population. As ingrained vested interests become the central concern, organisational change is impeded, and the whole organisation drifts further out of touch with its society.

The marginalisation of denominational and sectarian groups

Non-monopoly religious groups were often marginal in their origins. In a sense all religious movements began from marginal positions. One of the major types of non-monopoly Christian groups is called ‘denominations’. Many denominations had their origins in established religions, like Lutherans and Presbyterians, but which are now one of several acceptable options in a society. Other denominations were once marginal or new religious movements that have become part of the mainstream religious groups in some society, for example Methodists, Baptists and the Church of Latter Day Saints. Denominations tend to see that other religious groups have a
right to exist and that there is no single view on doctrine, the practice of Christian living or the way to conduct worship.

Sects are the second type of non-monopoly religious group. In contrast to denominations, sects tend to view their own approach to belief, practice and worship as being normative for the rest. They see themselves as having the only true perspective. Sects deliberately seek the margin and worry if they should be seen to be acceptable to the larger society. They define themselves over and against the orders of the day. They are pure, orthodox and righteous in comparison with the others. Being on the margin is essential to their self-image and to the way they see themselves operating in the world. It is ironic that sects are most likely to have organisational structures similar to those current in the world in which they were founded and are more likely to keep up with changes.

Denominations can become marginalised if they become increasingly identified with a specific subculture in a population. The subculture may be that of an ethnic group, such as the Dutch Reformed, Scots Presbyterians or Greek Orthodox for Christians. Like sects, their organisational structures are likely to reflect those current in the societies in which they were formed. They are also more likely than monopoly religion to change these structures in order to keep up with the changes in management practices current in society. However, by being related closely to a subsection of society, denominations often maintain closer involvement and are less marginalised than their more ‘churchly’ counterparts.

Mega-churches form their own patterns of marginalisation interspersed with occasional forays into engagement with their social and cultural environments. Some are small cities or villages unto themselves. They have withdrawn from both the city and the suburb, having their own separated existence so that their communication with the wider world is moderated by enormous car parks serving as membranes through which people move between their world and that of the church, or by virtual e-communication via independent television channels, radio stations and CD/DVD. They resemble medieval monasteries being enclosed villages, cut off and protected from the world, offering seclusion from the world and providing care and comfort to those within. They are more likely to direct their giving overseas than into local charities and social services. They view their society as requiring major change and occasionally join others to work towards this change.
Conclusion

The recent history of the mainstream religious groups in Australia has been that of marginalisation. They have moved from a social location of power and direct connection with power to the sidelines. Christendom, the era of ecclesiastical dominance of government, society and culture, has passed. This is the main theme of secularisation as it applies to organised Christianity. If marginalisation were the only story, secularisation could be seen to be well advanced and religion withering away as predicted. However, it is not the only story, and many religious groups and spirituality movements are rising to the challenge of responding to the demand for connection with the transcendent in ways that continue to engage a world they may find hard to understand but are prepared to live in and try to shape.
Chapter Seven

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY RESPOND TO CHANGE

Religion and spirituality are not passive recipients of the effects of social and cultural change. Marginalisation is not the only story. Understanding the role of religion and spirituality in the twenty-first century requires an appreciation of the new vitality of religion that has become increasingly apparent since the mid-1980s. The events of September 11, 2001 brought to the attention of the world the power and vitality of religion. Whatever other causes and meanings may be ascribed to them, these attacks were religiously motivated and aimed to transform the world. At the same time religiously grounded responses to these and other attacks were formed in the USA as the Christian neoconservatives with power bases in mega-churches began to use their influence to shape domestic and foreign policy. The Bali bombings, attacks on consulates and participation with the USA in the War on Terror have brought these issues home to Australia.

This chapter describes ways in which religion and spirituality are active participants that respond to social and cultural change, at times fully cooperating, at others instigating and at still others resisting change. Some of these responses to change reflect deliberate choices, and others emerge from the complex interactions between religious and spiritual life and their social and cultural environments.

These more proactive religious and spiritual responses to change can be examined under three basic processes: religious revitalisation, fundamentalisation and innovation, including changes in theology. While the mainstream churches were being sidelined, other processes were at work.
Religious revitalisation and fundamentalisation were about to change significantly the shape of the religious and its relationship to society (Antoun 2001; Martin 2002; Armstrong 1993). At the same time innovations in spirituality and theology were changing the relationship of persons and groups to the transcendent (Thomas 2005). These processes of religious revitalisation can be detected in Australia.

**Religious revitalisation in Australia**

History is full of examples of religious revitalisation and reform (Armstrong 1993; Walls 1997). Monastic orders go through cycles of enthusiastic formation, to routinised practice that can become perfunctory, to laxity in discipline, which may be followed by a call to return to basic principles, renewed discipline and renewal. The early nineteenth century in Europe, Britain and the USA saw movements of revitalisation that gave birth to such groups as the Churches of Christ (Chapman 1973), the Church of Latter Day Saints (Otterson 1988; Church of Latter Day Saints 1997; Davies 2003), and many others.

In several early nineteenth-century cases of religious revitalisation some rebelled against the otiose, liberal and too tolerant state churches of their nations. In Britain the Oxford Movement sought to reintroduce liturgical practices that had been set aside in the time of the Protestant Reformation, encouraging the Anglican Church to renew itself by reclaiming its Catholic heritage. At the same time Evangelicals brought new life into the Anglican Church and the non-conformists by their insistence on personal salvation and active reaching out to those not otherwise touched by the church. Each group introduced a style of worship and music related to its mode of being church: grand hymns ‘ancient and modern’ that drew on the rich treasures of the past for the Oxford Movement; engaging and personally challenging hymns and gospel songs for the Evangelicals. Each of these movements in its own way revitalised the Anglican Church and non-conformists, which grew in attendance substantially through the nineteenth century (Gill 2003; Curthoys 2002; Dickey 2002). On the continent, there were Protestant revitalisations in Germany, Scandinavia and Holland. There was also a major move to re-Catholicise Europe following the excesses of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars. Thus, while individual religious groups go
through cycles of enthusiasm, routinisation and revitalisation, there are also periods of history when religious renewal involves many groups at the same time.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rise of New Religious Movements (NRMs) as beliefs and practices associated with Asia began to appeal to Westerners (Clarke 2006; Hunt 2003). These NRMs often involved a great deal of creative adaptation of beliefs and at times the creation of quite novel groups (Beckford 1985; Robbins 1988). Out of the spiritual experimentation and fermentation of these decades have grown such groups as Scientology, the Children of God, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness and the Unification Church. Each of these groups has had to forge their way against substantial opposition, and some continue to face resistance today, particularly in Europe, but not in Australia (Beckford 1985; Richardson 2004a; Boyle & Sheen 1997).

A wave of religious revitalisation can be seen to be working in most of the world today (Thomas 2005; Berger 1999). This regeneration is most obvious in Muslim countries where more liberal regimes have been ousted and intensely religious ones established in their place. Iran threw out the Shah in 1979 and entered a period of Islamic renewal. Mosque attendance is increasing in many parts of the world, and many Muslims are asking in new ways what it means to live as a Muslim in the twenty-first century (Rauf 2004). Much of this revitalisation involves mainstream groups in these countries and appears extreme only to those accustomed to more quiescent forms of religious life. At the same time the Protestant Right in the USA began to move to increased dominance as the centre of gravity of that country’s Protestant religious and spiritual life moved from the liberal ecumenical north-eastern states to the South and Texas (Sifton 2003). The dominance of Presbyterian, Methodist, Episcopal and Congregational denominations from 1820 lasted until the 1960s when it passed to Southern Baptist and other evangelical Protestant groups (Finke & Stark 1992). During this same period Pentecostal movements burgeoned in Africa, Latin America and Asia (Anderson 2004; Martin 2002, 2005). Pentecostal Christian movements are challenging formerly mainstream groups throughout the world and bringing much more energised forms of worship and active outreach.

Australia’s religious and spiritual life can be seen to be emerging from an extended period of liberalisation. Through the twentieth century most
religious groups relaxed their demands on parishioners in the hope of attracting more and being more relevant. They also softened their rivalry with each other as the ecumenical movement brought increased peace and harmony. Now Australia appears to be headed into a period of renewal. Among Protestants, Pentecostal groups are growing in numbers and have more youthful congregations. While much of Catholic growth has been due to migration, there are also signs of revitalisation in this sector, which attracts more than a quarter of Australians (Dixon 2005a). Today, many Australian religious groups are re-examining their core beliefs and declaring their distinctiveness, sometimes harshly, like Sydney-side Anglicans, and at other times simply firmly and confidently. A prime example of the latter is Cardinal George Pell, who is clear about the distinctiveness of the Catholic Church. However, he asserts this with the kind of confidence that leaves space for other religious groups to hold other views and for those of other faiths to have a legitimate and valued place. This is in great contrast to the harsher condemnations emerging from some smaller Pentecostal groups and Sydney evangelical Anglicans (McGillion 2005). However, both can be seen as instances of Australian religious revitalisation.

When I claim that I can detect a rejuvenation of Australia’s religious and spiritual life, some counter that this cannot be so since they do not see queues forming outside the churches they know. They are probably looking in the wrong places as mega-churches attract an increasing proportion of Protestant attendees and as Buddhists and Muslims grow as a percentage of the population. For example, I first encountered signs of this renewal in the faith stories recounted by Muslim interviewees who participated in my study of the role of mosques in Muslim settlement in Australia (Bouma 1994).

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**From night-clubbing to bible-studying – the renewal of Orthodoxy among Greek Australian youth**

During the early 1990s when my friends and I were in our early twenties, a strange thing happened. Previously, our lives mirrored the fun-loving, street-cruising, girl-chasing lifestyles depicted in iconic movies and shows like Saturday Night Fever and Happy Days: we loved going to discos (now pretentiously called ‘nightclubs’) and we would dance and drink – party drugs hadn’t yet entered the Australian mainstream – and, yes, we’d look for romance. Back in those days we’d go drag racing or shoot some pool
Responses to change

or meet friends at the shopping centre (back then youth could congregate in public places).

But a strange thing happened. A number of us began a quest for meaning, truth, fulfilment – God. I guess we all had different reasons: the boredom that attaches itself to one-dimensional existence; the death of somebody we knew; and for me, a fascination with near-death and out-of-body experiences. Some of my friends rediscovered Orthodoxy. I wondered how my cool friends could be attracted to this archaic form of belief, but I too was lured by its mystique and majesty. I started attending a Bible-study class, and read the works of modern-day saints. I even kept a few icons and candles on my bedside table – although this aroused some suspicion from my parents: I guess most Greek parents think it’s okay to be religious but not too religious.

But this spiritual search by Greek Australians did not always lead to the doors of the Orthodox Church: some people I knew got into Protestantism, and one close friend of mine became a Jehovah’s Witness. And now? While some friends have committed themselves to Orthodoxy or other denominations, some of us prefer to practise our faith beyond the ekklesias.

Mark Manolopoulos

This renewal of interest in religion and religious identification can also be seen in the increases in the numbers of people wearing religiously identifying clothes or symbols, or even crystals. Young women in their late teens and early twenties, often university students, are choosing to wear Islamic dress – scarves and hijabs. They argue that adopting Islamic dress declares who they are – Muslims – and that they take their religious identity seriously. This was often done to the loud protests of their mothers, to say nothing of some feminist critics. Over the same period I began to notice that there was an increase in the number of yarmulkes or kippas being worn by Jewish university students.

Part of the increase in public displays of religious identification can be explained by the increase in religious diversity. If we are all religiously the same, there is no identity declaration gain in wearing distinctive dress or symbols. In the days of Protestant/Catholic sectarian rivalry (Hogan 1987), signs, symbols and even linguistic differences were apparent to the cognoscenti: crucifixes at the neck, crossing self, writing AMGD (ad maiorem Dei gloriam) on the top of examination papers, carrying a Bible or wearing WWJD (What Would Jesus Do?) jewellery or T-shirts. With the passing of
this religious rivalry in the 1960s and 1970s it seemed that religious difference would disappear along with religion itself, or at least become irrelevant and inconsequential for a person’s life chances: their ability to get a job, education, health services and a partner. However, the rise of religious diversity brought new religious identities and new religious divides in the community. As one’s religion became at least interesting if not consequential, some have chosen to adopt public displays of their religious identity.

Examples of revitalisation in civic rites

Public displays of spirituality and religious sensitivity have also occurred at times of national tragedy. Following the Port Arthur shooting tragedy a nationally televised memorial service was held in St David’s Anglican Cathedral in Hobart as well as other services around the country. The death of Princess Diana triggered a massive outpouring of grief that found expression not only in formal religious services but also in private memorials and spontaneous floral tributes in many places. One such place was in Canberra on the hill overlooking Lake Burley Griffin, a place set aside for an Anglican cathedral that has never been built. In this open space, the Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn had earlier erected three tall poles, linked by some sail cloth, installed a fire pit and declared the space a ‘Place of Gathering’. Gather people did, sharing their grief and leaving floral tributes. Responses like this occurred around Australia. Again, following the events of September 11, 2001, services were held, spontaneous floral memorials laid and a spiritual dimension to grief expressed. In this case these memorial services took on an interfaith flavour, often held in neutral territory – for example the Rod Laver Tennis Centre in Melbourne – and offering expressions of grief from the standpoint of several faith groups, respecting and celebrating difference while joining in common grief.

In a similar way, Anzac Day ceremonies have been transformed from militaristic festivals to days of linking together current feelings of loss and pain with stories of even greater loss and greater pain. They have become gatherings that bind difference into strength through remembering the sacrifices of those, both present and dead, who have struggled and suffered in causes that lacked glory, adequate explanation or full legitimation, to say nothing of often being abject failures. Far from declining in its attraction, Anzac Day ceremonies attract larger and larger crowds of Australians of all ages, ethnic groups and religious identities.
Responses to change

It is the rare person who has never experienced sacrifice in a dubious or not entirely successful cause. Parenting often qualifies, as do attempts to build bridges across the bitter divides in communities, investments in failed relationships and efforts to establish justice, equity and mutual respect. These gatherings are not glorifications of war. Rather they are gatherings of remembrance of those who suffered and died in a cause that even at the time was poorly legitimated, failed to achieve its objectives – but not for want of effort and self-sacrifice – and in itself was no cause for glory. The steadfastness, the mateship, the mutual care and honour characterising the behaviour of the troops is worthy of remembrance and forms the core of the continuing significance of the day. The willingness to sacrifice for others, the remembrance of the pain of such sacrifice and the ever-present need to face the reality of loss and say ‘yes’ to a future in which even more will be called for is the spiritual core of Anzac Day and what draws in the increasing participation of twenty-first-century Australians.

Mega-churches

The revitalisation of Australian religious and spiritual life is also seen in the rise of mega-churches in the suburbs and rural areas (Connell 2005). The social technology of the suburbs is quite different from that of the inner city. The city is for singles, walking, short trips on trams, small communities centred on coffee shops and bistros. Small neighbourhood churches built in these areas when they housed families with children who walked to school now struggle to survive as other outlets and venues offer community, information and entertainment that compete for the time of consumers (Frame 2002). The middle and outer suburbs are quite different. They are family focused and populated by people who are accustomed to travelling longer distances to larger emporia and prepared to shop over a much wider geographic area for all services from education to entertainment, from petrol to spirituality. Housing is larger, parking is expected to be provided and all-hours availability is more usually the case. In this context religious establishments like Hillsong in Sydney and Paradise in Adelaide are not aberrant. Mega-churches fit in right alongside mega-houses, mega-malls, mega-pubs and mega-schools.

This new group of Christian congregations is also spawning its own culture with television programming available on free-to-air channels, via satellite dish, publications distributed through the mega-churches and related
outlets. They have not only shifted away from mainstream religious groups, they have also developed their own media: press, television and radio. Given this it is no wonder that formerly useful measures of religion and spirituality now miss much of the action. It is happening elsewhere.

Following is a case study description of Hillsong, Australia’s best known and (at the time of writing) largest mega-church. This description of origins, aims, staffing and programs gives an excellent picture of a vibrant mega-church at work in Australia.

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### Hillsong

**Organisational history and structure**

From the Hillsong website we learn that this mega-church is based in Sydney suburbs of Baulkham Hills and Waterloo. The Baulkham Hills Hillsong Church Convention Centre is the main venue and seats 3,500. As well as a network of regional services, there are also churches in London, Kiev and Africa. Kiev opened in 1992 and has around 2,000 members. Hillsong has just opened a congregation in Paris (‘Hillsong exports God to the city of love’, Australian, 26 September 2005, p. 7). Hillsong was founded in 1983 by Brian and Bobbie Houston, who are Hillsong’s senior pastors, as Hills Christian Life Centre, and it attracts up to 17,500 participants to the weekend services.

Hillsong’s Mission Statement is: ‘To reach and influence the world by building a large Bible-based church, changing mindsets and empowering people to lead and impact in every sphere of life.’

In addition to pastors and representatives from the community who both support and have integral roles within the church, there is the Hillsong Production Team comprised of musicians, vocalists, dancers, actors ‘who connect with church crowds’, and ‘creative people’ to manage the lighting, audio, video and stage design.

**Networks and services provided by Hillsong**

- **Basic weekend services** include live worship, Bible-based teaching and kids’ programs. They offer deaf signing (Auslan) and Mandarin translation in selected services.
- **Each extension group** (including Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and Spanish communities) is comprised of its own people and offers Connect Group, Hillsong Kids, Community Outreach and Leadership Development programs.
Connect groups are broken down into the following age/life-stage categories: years 6–8 at school; Wildlife – years 9–12; Powerhouse – 18–25 years; Frontline – 26–35 years; Families – couples and solo parents with young children; Adults – married or single men and women. There are also connect groups for men/women, kingdom people, and worship and creative arts.

Hillsong initiatives

- **Hillsong Music Australia** produces albums featuring songs written for the services and other similar music.
- **Hillsong International Leadership College** teaches pastoral leadership, worship, creative arts, pastoral counselling, children’s ministry, television/media courses and ministry skills.
- **Hillsong Emerge Ltd** is the community development arm of the organisation, offering support and programs through medical centres, emergency relief services, drug and alcohol programs and ‘recovery’ and personal development programs. Operated through the following:
  - street teams
  - **Hillsong SAFE** (Sexual Abuse – Freedom and Education)
  - Enterprise Development
  - Health Centre (GPs, psychologists and counsellors)
  - youth services (Hillsong District Youth Services Inc.)
  - children’s community services
  - **Hillsong LIFE** (Living in Freedom and Excellence, courses in self-development, life coaching etc)
  - disaster relief (tsunami, Sudan)
  - Teen Challenge (men 16–28; aims to eliminate destructive habits)
  - **Mercy Ministries** (women 16–28; addresses eating disorders, unplanned pregnancies and develops life skills)
  - **Emerge Centres** (Blacktown and Redfern; aged care and alcohol support)
- **Hillsong** broadcasts a television program to more than 160 countries and throughout Australia.
- Annual conferences here and overseas include **Hillsong Conference**, **Colour Your World Women’s Conference**, **Hillsong Men’s Conference**.

Mega-church Christianity is very much in reaction against the ‘post-family’ aspect of contemporary Western society. They maintain a well-articulated critique of high divorce rates, abortion rates and non-marital sex. They flourish in those suburbs where couples are having babies. For those seeking to establish families and raise their children in the context of lasting intimate relations they not only supply an ideology to support the necessary sacrifices but also provide a social context that fosters healthy families. The theological rhetoric is often patriarchal, arguing for the primacy of the father, stay-at-home mother and obedient children. This patriarchalism is softened by the facts that, first, the lifestyles of these suburbs usually require employment outside the home of both parents and, second, the activities and organisational involvement offered by mega-churches also train and enable the leadership of both women and men. In the USA, where there are many mega-churches, it is possible to find ones that support a diversity of family styles and structures.

There are few family-friendly structures in Australian society. The weekend has been lost to sport and shopping while the schools, particularly the often church-related private schools, demand the presence of students at weekend activities. While both parents are involved in employed work outside the home, work has become less family-friendly, and recent attempts to ameliorate this only provide evidence of the problems families face. Religious groups – churches, mosques, temples and synagogues – provide a sanctuary where families can go and be received as a family, valued as a unit and affirmed in their core values of intimacy, care and compassion. The demographic fact that couples with children constitute about 40 per cent of Australian households limits the appeal of this family-centric approach. It is not a universal ethos, and substantial sections of the Australian population are seeking legitimation for other ways of life.

Mega-church spirituality

Large signs proclaim the existence of and welcome to the Church of Exuberant Life. Helpful signs direct the newcomer to the right section of the car park. Worship Centre to the right, Day Care Centre to the left, Offices and Conference Centre straight ahead. The lot is well lit at night. The ambience is that of a prosperous shopping mall. There are plenty of parking places. If it is really large, there may be buses patrolling
the car park to bring people from their cars to the welcome space of the Worship Centre.

The entrance to the Worship Centre is at ground level, no stairs. There is a wall of glass doors so that what is going on inside the welcome space is evident. There are tables displaying literature: welcome packs, bags of information, where to find help in seeking a job, family counselling, a school for your children. The space is generous and airy, a large atrium several storeys high. It bustles with quiet activity. Greeters are present but do not fall instantly upon the newcomer. Coffee and donuts are available to the right and left.

Large colourful banners proclaim the love of God. Activities on offer are declared by posters and pamphlets. A television plasma monitor shows what is going on inside the worship centre.

When ready, and not before, and certainly not rushed, people make their ways into the worship centre. People come and go at all times. Ample aisles and generous spacing of the seating make it clear that no one is trapped inside. A band is playing on the stage. Large video projections enhance what is going on at the podium. They also display the words to songs and readings from scripture. Colour, eye-catching organisation of material and engaging musical forms are used. The light, video projections and sound is all moderated by the most impressive bank of video and audio controls seen outside a recording studio.

Several songs are sung. The singing is not particularly loud, but the acoustics dampen the voices of the people. Then there is an address developing the themes in the scripture reading. People attend, occasionally indicating agreement, or wishing to underscore the importance of a point by saying amen or alleluia. The choir gives more energy to the singing, and some songs find additional expression in hand movements, clapping and body-waving.

A collection will be taken, often in large plastic buckets. The importance of giving is stressed as is the range of mission activities a gift will support. These include the local ministry, a range of social services provided by the church and an extensive array of overseas mission activities. These will be highlighted by video projection presentations during the singing of a song while the collection is taken.

In some cases healing prayer will be offered in the context of the service. People will be asked to declare their needs, illnesses and concerns. More songs will be sung as the pastors pray over those requesting it. Miracles and healings will be announced as thanks is given for answered prayers.

The service concludes with a blessing and another song. The people depart, and as they go the next wave arrives for the next service, which is designed to attract a
different group of people: baby boomers, or the postmodern set, or youth, or families with young children. As they move through the welcome space, opportunities to pick up more information, ask for assistance, offer to do something for the church or just have a chat over another cup of coffee and a donut are available.

Gary Bouma

Mega-churches might appear to be a new phenomenon, yet they can be compared with major urban churches of the mid-twentieth century. While the number of US congregations with attendances of more than 2,000 has been increasing from about 60 in 1989 to at least 870 in 2005 (Vaughan 2005), such attendances were not uncommon for the ‘Avenue Churches’ of New York City and other major metropolitan congregations of mainstream churches. Moreover, many Catholic parishes in Australia would have had and still have attendances of this order. Catholic parishes historically have been established and organised on principles of size and complexity that are rather closer to those of the mega-church than the local neighbourhood Protestant and Anglican parishes. The current shift has been from the mainstream to the evangelicals among Protestants, and with this shift of congregational resource will come a major shift in influence as the old mainstream churches become less and less able to deliver the goods due to lack of funds and people. Today’s mega-churches are able to mount educational programs for their people that are age-graded and beautifully resourced, use twenty-first-century technology and are less likely to insult the intelligence of Sunday school attendees than the ‘colouring in’ currently offered by many mainstream groups in Australia.

The rise of high-demand religious groups

The revitalisation of Australia’s religious and spiritual life can also be seen in the rise in popularity of high-demand groups that require high levels of commitment and sacrifice. Opus Dei is a high-demand Catholic group that seeks to return the church to strict adherence to traditional dogma and ethics. This group uses a variety of self-discipline activities made widely known in Dan Brown’s hugely popular novel, The Da Vinci Code. For example, Martin Cullen, a supernumerary member of Opus Dei, told his story to Rodney Dalton, who writes for the Australian (Dalton 2005: 11). Cullen is a physician, attends Mass every morning at 6.30, and leads an active social and
sporting life. He works hard and sees work as a way of ‘giving something back to God’. He joined Opus Dei when he was 18. Now 34, he ‘gives financially to Opus Dei to help the organisation spread its message that holiness can be reached in daily life’. New Catholic orders are emerging around the world. They typically call for renewed commitment to Catholic beliefs and practices and attract young adults who seek a more demanding religious involvement than that offered by the more liberal and secularised religious orders, which are in steady decline.

The revitalisation of Catholicism has also been evident in the attention paid to boundaries that separate Catholics from others. This has been done by asserting the core and leaving room for respect for others to go their own way, but insisting that the ways are different. Through the 1990s I had occasion to visit Paris most years. I often would visit Notre Dame de Paris and Sacré Coeur at Montmartre, and often I would be wearing my clerical collar. In 1992 and 1993 I was invited to concelebrate the Mass with other priests in several Catholic churches where I was well known and at Notre Dame, where I was one of a larger group. Such was the openness and welcome given to others at that time. In the early 1990s, when Mass was celebrated at Notre Dame, all were welcome to attend and receive the consecrated host. The Mass was said at the nave altar while the hosts of tourists circulated in the aisles – the sacred reverenced in the middle of life.

By the late 1990s this had changed such that parts of the cathedral were closed during Mass, and visitors were subjected to regular shushing and were periodically asked to be silent or join in the saying of ‘Our Father’ or the ‘Lord’s Prayer’. The most recent change was the fencing-off of the nave during the celebration of Mass and the posting of signs declaring ‘Fidèles catholiques seulement’ – for faithful Catholics only. Also in the early twenty-first century young nuns and brothers began to take significant roles in the worship at Sacré Coeur and at Le Mont St Michel.

While the proponents of Vatican II, liberation theology and Protestant liberals shake their heads in disbelief that their hard-won victories appear to have been undone, they need to attend carefully to the emerging spirituality and commitment in these movements of revitalisation. They may seem to some to be returns to an outmoded era, but they are better seen as current efforts to deal religiously and spiritually with the world they have inherited, a world with imperfections that have hurt them, injustices that have injured them and a context that demands that they earn high salaries to afford the
lifestyle that is presented as ‘expectable’. The baby boomers are becoming grandparents, and 40 per cent of their families will experience divorce and repartnering, rather more like the families of a hundred years ago when death and desertion had similar levels of effect on family stability. But not like the 1950s. People are less likely to be asking for explanations than they are for an experience of the presence of God, the numinous, the transcendent. In this context, images of God the Father, if they communicate at all, mean different things to youth who have been raised in the context of family change, not family stability. Youth are also much more sensitised to the misuse of power in human relationships. For some the use of ‘father’ imagery will evoke images of abuse.

High-demand religious involvement provides one of the sources of liberation available to young people today. It offers them a radical critique of their current condition and a social context of support that sustains a connection with eternal verities, uplifting commitments and reasons to live. Complaints heard from Australian Muslim youth about their leaders being out of touch and keeping them out of the mainstream, while typical of intergenerational clashes, arise from a desire to be seriously Muslim and fully engaged as Australians (Saeed 2003; Kerbaj 2006: 4). Religious participation provides an identity and a well-developed position from which to assess critically the social issues of the day.

Fundamentalisation

Fundamentalism is one kind of religious and spiritual response to the kinds of anxiety and uncertainty people feel when experiencing social and cultural changes (Wuthnow 2005: 159–187). Fundamentalisms focus on ‘the Truth’, usually revealed in scriptures that are to be taken ‘literally’; that is, without nuanced interpretation. God, always male, is seen to speak directly, clearly and imperatively. God’s will is to be done – or else. God is usually depicted as to be feared and angry. The classic source of this orientation is Jonathan Edwards’ famous hellfire and brimstone sermon, ‘Sinners in the hand of an Angry God’ (see www.jonathanedwards.com/sermons/Warnings/sinners.htm). This sits comfortably with the anger felt by those who find themselves in a world out of control and feel uncertainty about key dimensions of life and inability to shape the destiny of children as well as sexual,
material and other excesses rife in the lives of others. In this religious response, God joins them in their anger at this depraved context. In this context of fear and anxiety a fundamentalist religious group offers certainty, clear guidance on the issues of the day and a sanctioning social organisation prepared to establish structures to enforce its view of the world.

Fundamentalisms begin with a strident and trenchant condemnation of the world. Fundamentalists need to create fear and anxiety if they are not already present in order to increase the appeal of the certainties they offer. This condemnation is basically theological and religious. The worst errors are errors of belief and secondarily of lax practice of rituals distinctive to the group. Fundamentalists claim: ‘We are pure, we have the truth, and we know the way forward.’ Fundamentalists argue that purity is precious; that truth is narrow and that it includes propositions that are hard to believe and deeds that are hard to do but are necessary to salvation. The beliefs emphasised depend on the group, but may include belief in miracles and creation in seven 24-hour days and that holiness is achievable through harsh self-discipline or self-inflicted pain. The deeds required include self-sacrifice, high levels of financial giving to the organisation, volunteering for mission work and, at the very extreme, suicide bombing. They also usually believe that only a few will be found acceptable to God for the true path is narrow. While fundamentalists usually set themselves over and against their social and cultural context, their greatest vitriol is saved for those close to them in faith but slightly different in belief or practice.

While fundamentalisms often emerge at times of religious renewal, they are distinguished by higher degrees of tension with the wider world, absolute insistence that their narrow view of the world is the only correct one, that correct belief is the only way to salvation, and that fundamentalists are called by God to do things to and for others for their own good. Indeed, one definition of an extreme fundamentalist is someone who on account of their beliefs would kill you for your own good. Fundamentalisms move in degree to a greater extreme than is usual with religious revitalisation. They condemn all who disagree as damned and who, usually as a result of their disbelief or evil actions, place themselves in positions of a lesser degree of humanity – a lower status they have brought upon themselves precisely because of their wilful resistance to the truth offered to them.

While many are rightly fearful of the potential damage that fundamentalists can wreak upon a society, it is wrong to conflate religious revitalisation
with fundamentalisation or to assume that all fundamentalists are dangerous. The increased energy, particularly the emotional commitment and willingness to participate that is associated with renewal, may be harnessed by those who seek to fundamentalise a religious group, but that is not the only direction in which to channel such energy. As seen above, there is trenchant social and cultural critique behind the appeal of revitalisation movements. These critiques can legitimate political action to secure reform through the usual avenues: political processes, elections, policy debates and protest. Where legitimate avenues for addressing the problems identified are blocked, these religious energies can be harnessed to motivate revolution, violent protest and the killing of self or others.

Fundamentalism and withdrawal from society

A key to understanding fundamentalism is the focus and insistence on purity leading to a condemnation of and withdrawal from the larger society. In seeking purity of doctrine and practice, Antoun (2001: 73ff) points out that there are three basic strategies: ‘avoidance through flight’ from the world, ‘separation – physical, social, or symbolic’, and ‘militant struggle to overcome and capture the world’. Purity is a hard concept for many Australians to understand. Australians are likely to ask: who cares what you eat? Why bother with halal or kosher dietary rules? What is the problem with men shaking hands with women? Australians have become cosmopolitan in their food choices. They have developed discerning palates for a wide range of cuisines. But this was not quite so true before the post-war waves of migration brought these foods to ready availability, and there remain some who react to curries as though they are poisonously alien and impure and to some Asian cookery as though it were outside the range of safe eating. In a different way, some vegetarians react to meat as though it were impure and to dishes that include animal products as though they are poison. But these are instances of limits to taste, not religious restrictions.

Nonetheless, purity issues are central to the practice of some religions. The halal and kosher dietary requirements of Muslims and Jews are known, if not well understood. Although not central to either Judaism or Islam, some Jewish men and some Orthodox priests will not touch, or by touched by, a woman, and some Muslim women will not touch, or be touched by, a man. Many take purity issues seriously as religious obligations. Such observances structure interactions, pattern life and provide a strong sense of community (Saeed 2004: 52, 2003: 143–148; Hughes 2004a: Judaism). While these
practices produce a form of separation from the larger society, they do not in themselves constitute fundamentalism unless they are also tied to rhetorics of condemnation of those who do not follow their practices.

Withdrawal is one form of a plausibility structure designed to maintain a group’s beliefs and practices (Berger 1967). The Exclusive Brethren, Mennonites and the Amish avoid the world through withdrawal (Wilson 2000). Some will not associate with non-members and will eat only with fully accepted members of their religious group. Some Catholic and Orthodox orders of monks and nuns practise extreme withdrawal from the world, for example the Cistercian order or monks from the monastery on Mount Athos. Some new religious movements of the 1970s radically withdrew into communes or rural areas. In extreme isolation groups can lose touch with reality, become intensely fearful of the rest of the world and engage in self-harm. The classic case is Jonestown, where several hundreds of devotees followed their charismatic leader into the jungle in Guyana. After a while they committed mass suicide by drinking Kool-Aid laced with cyanide. Many smaller religious groups practise forms of withdrawal from the world, and the vast majority do not result in antisocial behaviour or personal harm.

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**Separation in an urban context**

While some groups retreat behind walls or to rural areas to reduce their contact with the contaminated world in order to maintain their purity, other forms of separation are also possible. The Christian Reformed Church in the USA and Canada provides an example (Bouma 1984). While residentially and occupationally distributed in urban populations, this church so organised the time of its members that opportunities to meet and get to know those of other churches was radically reduced. A teenager in the 1950s could expect to spend about forty-four hours per week in church-related activities: two church services of nearly two hours each on Sunday, Sunday school for an hour, catechism classes in midweek for an hour and a half, youth group for two to three hours and attendance at a church-related school thirty-three hours. Saturdays could be spent at a church-related beach, church-run sports centre or sporting event. Theatrical and classical music events were offered by the local church-related tertiary institution, Calvin College. Attendance at the cinema was banned.

One of the key elements in this form of urban religious segregation was the church-related school. Not only was teaching supportive of and informed by church views but also the schools provided a complete world in which these views dominated and were
Religiously structured social interaction is also found in Australia. Involvement in a mega-church such as Hillsong or Paradise will soon fill your time and structure your life with home groups, meetings and conferences. CDs and DVDs along with satellite television broadcasts will provide an alternative to secular forms of information, education and entertainment. Religiously based education has grown significantly in Australia as a variety of low-cost Protestant schools join the ranks of elite schools. The Catholics in the late nineteenth century embarked on a program of establishing parochial schools to ensure that young Catholics would be educated in a context that enabled rather than disabled their growth in faith and their ability to apply their faith to daily life. This was a worldwide strategy, and many Protestant groups like the Christian Reformed Church followed suit for the same reasons.

In Australia faith-based education has grown in part because parents think that such schools provide a better chance for university admission and career choices. Many Australians also value the attitudes and orientations developed in these schools as well as preferring the more disciplined environment. The range of schooling available is as diverse as Australian religious and spiritual life. Melbourne is home to the largest Jewish day school system in the world. Evangelical Protestant schools have emerged, as have Hare Krishna, Steiner and other schools. There are Catholic schools and Orthodox, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Muslim schools (Saeed 2003: 149–156). Some of these are elite, but many are low-fee and parent-controlled schools. Some are intensely religious, and others are essentially secular.

The greatest change has been the emergence of political engagement as many conservative evangelical and fundamental Christian religious groups move from quiescent withdrawal to active attempts to shape their societies. This is Antoun’s third way of seeking purity: religious groups seeking to impose their religious agenda on their societies by political action, or through conquering them. Key examples of this approach to promoting and
ensuring purity can be seen in two quite different cases, the USA (Antoun 2001) and Islamist groups in the Middle East and Asia (An-Na’im 1987; Appleby 2000). In both cases minority religious groups seek to shape the behaviour of citizens and reform their societies according to religious principles using legislative means and the power of the state. Each religious group has an ethical perspective on life. Each will seek, through a range of strategies from encouragement to enforcement, to instil or impose their views. This is just as true of liberal, social justice, equity-seeking and generous religious groups as it is of puritanical fundamentalist groups. The former will be found supporting equal rights for minorities legislation, anti-vilification legislation, social welfare, prison reform, and other legislation that conforms with their view of human nature and their theologies of human destiny. The latter tend to support legislation banning abortion, making illegal what they see as immoral, limiting the rights of some groups – women, sexual minorities and other groups deemed to have their unworthy status declared by scripture – and shaping welfare legislation according to theologies of individual – as opposed to shared social – responsibilities for providing health, education and care to those less able to care for themselves.

Attempts by conservative evangelical and extremist Islamic groups are easily seen overseas, but they are also evident in Australia (Maddox 2005). Australia’s social services and multicultural policies have been shaped by liberal Judaeo-Christian values characteristic of the mid-twentieth century: assisting the less well-off, integration of all members of society into productive roles, equality of access and opportunity, harm minimisation and the responsibility of society for the person. Recent dilutions and outright rejections of these values stem in part from the values of economic rationalism, but these upon closer examination seem to reflect or at least parallel many of the values of the puritan conservative religious Right. Individual responsibility replaces corporate responsibility; open compassionate reception of refugees is replaced by detention centres; and harm minimisation replaced by blaming the victim.

While strategies of disengagement may ensure that the group maintains and enhances its purity, strategies of engagement always involve compromise. Engagement with other organisations and groups to achieve political and social ends requires cooperation and usually leads to a moderation of views. Engagement also requires that a group adopt enough of the culture of the larger social and cultural context to be heard. Engagement breaks the
Australian Soul

isolation required to sustain extreme views and policies. The Family First Party was able to ‘win’ a seat in the Senate in the 2004 federal election because they did preference deals with the Labor and Liberal parties beforehand. This transformed a primary vote of 22,000 into a winning distributed array of preferences. It is not yet certain what these deals involved. This move from quietism to activism on the part of revitalised Christian groups in Australia is examined in chapter 8.

Spiritual innovation

The revitalisation of existing organisational forms of religious life and the fundamentalisation of some does not exhaust the ways Australians are responding to change. There is also spiritual innovation and creativity outside these forms. There is also considerable theological work going on to give careful voice to the changes in the ways people relate to the transcendent. While much of spiritual innovation can be seen to be practised in stillness and personal quiet, these innovations are grounded in organised approaches to religion and spirituality. Very little innovation either begins or remains personal or private. Much of what passes for privatisation is not all that private in terms of either its origins or its practice. Spiritualities are public in different ways compared with the social location of religion in Western modernity.

The growth of meditation and spirituality centres provides further evidence of the change and regeneration of Australian religious and spiritual life. Some refer to this form of spirituality as ‘New Age’ in part to distinguish it from the new religious movements that were founded in the second half of the twentieth century. New Age spirituality and religion are often inspired by paganisms and find awesome power that demands respect in the forces and beauty of nature. The number of Australians identifying with ‘nature religions’ increased by 130 per cent to 23,000 between the 1996 and 2001 censuses. Harvey (1996: vii) describes paganism as a ‘religion at home on earth, an ecological spirituality, a somatic philosophy of life’. Paganisms, according to Harvey, include Druidry, witchcraft, heathens, goddess spirituality, magic, shamanism, Gaia and others. Each of these is found in Australia, and their attraction continues to grow. Goddess worship has been particularly attractive to women who are fed up with the patriarchal paternalism of most forms of organised religion in Australia.
The way these innovative and often quite private spiritualities relate to the formation of religious identity is a hotly contested issue in current sociology of religion. Possamai (2005) carefully delineates the bricolage used by his respondents to piece together meaning, identity and spiritual connection and interprets this largely in terms of the nature of postmodernity. On the other hand, Phillips and Aarons (2005) find rather more traditional affiliative association with Buddhism among their sample of Australians who have taken up Buddhism. The analysis of the 2001 census conducted after the interviews for these two studies suggests that there is increased fluidity in identity choices. However, it is necessary to wait until the 2006 census to provide the next nationwide data that will provide information on whether the choices for Buddhism, which increased dramatically between 1996 and 2001, remain stable or show variation. These census data will also indicate whether the dramatic increases in choices of witchcraft, paganism, goddess religions and other spiritualities show variability or stability.

An Australian Buddhist

Sometimes I feel overwhelmed by all the mistakes I have made in my life. My teacher, a Western Tibetan Buddhist nun, once said: ‘Honey, how can you expect to have gotten it right when you were given the wrong map?’

The wrong map. Which map was I given?

I’m first-generation Australian, born into a Russian family. I had a private school education. My parents worked hard to provide it. I went straight to university from school and straight into a public service job after that.

Then, like many of my Generation X, I ran away from it all and went to Byron Bay to begin a spiritual journey of self-discovery. I lived in rainforests and on communities. I questioned consumer culture and sought an alternative, more sustainable lifestyle. What I was seeking was happiness. Not just my own happiness but happiness for everyone, for the planet. I was searching for some answers, for a methodology to follow, for the right map.

Eventually I found Buddhism and was told about the importance of balancing the ‘two wings’ of wisdom and compassion. I felt as if I had so much compassion within me, but I knew that what I was lacking was wisdom; that’s why I kept making such a mess of things.

Buddhism has given me the right map. It’s what I use to navigate by. Buddha said we have to question everything. My teacher says we have to ‘check it out’ for
ourselves. When I attend teachings and hear something that arouses my curiosity I experiment with it. I test it to see whether it’s true or not – for me. I meditate on it, both in contemplation and in action, until it completely makes sense.

In Buddhism there’s an equation that says ‘Virtue = happiness and non-virtue = suffering ALWAYS’. I ‘meditated’ on that for a year until I completely believed it.

According to Buddhism, we have over countless lives perpetrated all of the non-virtuous actions. All of us have. And all of us are also capable of being completely virtuous, of becoming a Buddha. Actually our true nature is completely pure; we just need to remove the obstacles that stand in the way of clear perception.

I’m trying to do that, and I must admit it’s not easy. It takes courage and strength but also deep compassion for all beings, including myself. It’s so hard to break bad habits. It’s so difficult not to make mistakes.

‘Never give up,’ my teacher says. Imagine if Buddha had given up on the path to enlightenment. It’s heartening to remember that we all stumble time and time again before we get there and that the more we keep practising virtue, the happier we become.

Following the teachings of the Buddha has certainly been beneficial for me.

Anna Halafoff

Phillips and Aarons (2005) treat types of religious identity as oppositional. They argue that the nature of the choice may affect its permanence. Choosing to become or intensify one’s commitment to Islam or Pentecostal Christianity may lead to more permanent religious identities due to the fact that these groups insist on singularity and consistency of religious identity. By comparison, identifying as a Jeddist, witch or pagan may be less likely to persist due to a greater openness to multiple religious identities. In addition to the impact of beliefs held by the group, persistence of identity may be patterned by the degree to which the spirituality is organised and able to provide a range of social supports – groups, networks, spouses – to support the new or renewed religious identity.

However, at a societal level there has been a shift from totalising religious identities to a range of styles of religious identification from ‘traditional’ to rather more fluid and multiple. Thus the available data suggest that it is necessary to be open to a ‘both/and’ answer to the question about the nature of the choices people make in forming religious identity in the twenty-first century. They are made in a context that no longer rigorously enforces
singularity of religious identity, unless the choice made requires them to enter a segment of the society that does. Thus some choices may be long-lasting and exclusive, but others are not. I suspect that choosing to become a Muslim in Australia will have greater and more lasting identity consequences than choosing to label oneself as a Jedi knight, Druid or even Buddhist. The patterns of choosing religious identities and the consequences of choice need careful and nuanced exploration.

Not only is the interest in spirituality evident in the census but also it has spawned an industry and substantial commerce. Spirituality bookstores are now morphing into supermarkets, and spirituality service providers offer literature, candles, incense, art, massage, meditation or lectures. Advertising space in newspapers once taken by churches to inform the populace about the times of services and the topics of sermons is now filled with invitations to meditate, use crystals, practise various forms of alternative health therapies, attend the lectures of gurus, engage the services of a personal trainer and other services and products designed to improve a person’s religious and spiritual life.

_Sedona spirituality_

I went to one of the myriad spirituality centres that compete with each other in Arizona’s spirituality Mecca, Sedona. In addition to offering a wide variety of books, CDs, incense, aromatic oils, glorious crystals, art work and massage, this centre offered a service of worship on Sunday mornings at 10am – long the prime worship hour for Protestants in the USA. I noticed that they had pew notice sheets with an order of worship and that spiritual songs would be sung. The setting was outside with hewn logs for pews, and the focus was a lectern before which was a table with symbols of the earth, fire, wind and water. I also noticed wooden bowls for gathering the collection. The images and apparatus of the dominant and hegemonic religious groups in the USA – mainstream Protestants – can be seen in these accoutrements of this expression of New Age religion.

Gary Bouma

New Age forms of spiritual searching and expression have been largely a private matter. Through improved individuals the world will be made a
better place. One theme of New Age spiritualities can be expressed as: ‘Fix yourself and improve the world’. Seeking good things for oneself and personal well-being is legitimated as being part of the solution to the problems of the world (Wuthnow 2005: 106–129). Some have referred to these forms of religion and spirituality as self-religions (Kohn 1991). The critics of these forms of spirituality usually view them from the perspective of highly communal and rational religious groups. Anything that does not produce such communal commitment or that is not moderated by reason is suspect.

While few formally organised religious groups have formed around these highly individualistic spiritualities to this point, the generation of new religious movements and the spread of those formed in the recent past continue. For example, covens meet regularly, and there are periodic spirituality fests that attract many participants to spiritually significant landmarks in Australia: Uluru, beaches and forests. Moreover, the form of organisation that is likely to emerge will reflect the shift from print to electronic media. While books can still be bought, there will be more communication through websites and satellite television. These require and enable quite different forms of organisation from the dinosaur-like committee-driven hierarchies of old-style Christian denominations.

Theological innovation in postmodernity

Social and cultural change not only affects the way we live, it also changes the ways we relate to God and conceive the transcendent. For several centuries reason had provided an external God-like basis for challenging entrenched authority. The advances of science seemed to prove the validity of reason and were seen by some to be discoveries of the laws of God. Reason was certainly more secure than tradition. The laws of science became like the laws of God, revelations of the mind of God. God was seen as the lawgiver, the source of reason, and law became the arbiter of social relations. This era saw the rise of Calvinism and the Jesuits, who quintessentially expressed Christianity via reason. So does the phrase, ‘Think right thoughts and be saved; think wrong thoughts and be damned’. All of this is reflected in creeds, confessions and statements of union, which essentially demand that the believer ‘Toe the credal line and you will be all right’.
The social is foundational to theology in that theology is a group effort—not a solo activity—and because social images are the ones most used by theology to represent, suggest or point to God. For example, during the rise of industrial society and the early marvels of engineering some depicted God as a master mechanic who set the machinery of the universe going and left it to run its course. Examples of elements of the social being used to image God include such references as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Prince of Princes and other hyperbolic relationship formations in which God’s transcendence is averred by doubling a human social relationship were noted earlier. While for many in the West imperial images such as king of kings, or images of Eastern potentates, along with other trappings of courtly life, sound OK, referring to God as ‘president of presidents’ just does not work. How about ‘managing director’ or ‘chairman of the board’? These fail to combine warmth and power, distance and interest in persons. So does the suggestion made at a conference of theologians and scientists that God be referred to as ‘the system of systems’. The image of ‘judge’ has had a long history of use. What about lover, parent, friend or father? Or the more neutral ‘everlasting arms’? These images each come from our experience of human relationships—leadership or parenting (Blombery 1989). The images we use to define leadership within the church and to define the nature of God’s leadership reflect our experiences with the society that shapes us, nourishes us and sustains us.

For some the sociality of God is more profound than mere imagery. Some Christians insist that God is in some sense male. The Hebrew Scriptures speak of humans as being made in God’s image (Genesis 1: 26). In most theologies God is seen to be social, a person in relation with others. Indeed those theologies that attempt to avoid using anthropomorphisms, for example Paul Tillich, who speaks of God as the ground of being, do not attract great human followings as such a God is too remote, cold and unappealing. Indeed, according to one reading of the Hebrew Scriptures (Miles 1996), it is in God’s dealings with humanity that God is or becomes a social being. God in relationship with humanity develops an externalised sociality, goes through phases and indeed learns how to relate. For example, having expressed rage against the wayward ways of humans by sending the Flood to kill all but a select few, God repents and says, ‘No, I won’t do that again. I promise’ (Genesis 8: 20, 21).
God in Christian imagery represents an example of the chicken and egg dilemma of the social and the personal: which comes first – the theological image or the social experience? Does experience with fathers lead to father image for God, or does father image for God caring, disciplining, ordering, omniscient and comforting shape expectations for parenting? Cross-cultural comparative studies have shown that societies with punitive child-raising patterns have theologies of a punitive god(s), whereas those with more lenient practices have more lenient deities. The parenting styles of evangelical Christians who emphasise God’s fatherly wrath and indignation with sinful humans are more likely to be harsh and include physical punishment than those of more liberal Christians whose image of God is more gracious and forgiving. However, this simply leaves unanswered the question of which came first, child-raising patterns or theologies. That they can be seen to be mutually reinforcing is accurate but does not settle the issue.

Another way of looking at the interconnectedness of theology and sociology is to realise that every theology either presents or presupposes a sociology (Gill 1977, 1996: 147). Theologies not only describe the ideal or expected relationships between the transcendent – usually given personal features – and humans; they also more or less explicitly describe the ideal relations among humans and groups in a society. This is often made evident in the ethical discourses of a theology, but ethics presupposes a view of what is supposed to be. An example of this relationship between theology and sociology can be seen in Christian theology where God becomes internally social. Trinitarian theology makes God social in essence. The way this internal sociality is imaged is likely to reflect the social order of the society that gave rise to the theology (LaCugna 1991). God’s relationships with Godself, with creation and with humanity will be expressed using images and concepts that are shaped by believers’ experiences with human relationships. This goes beyond psychology; it is social because of the three persons in relationship. Thus, each theology presupposes and gives expression to sociology of the divine–human relationship.

An example of the impact of the social on theology can be seen in the degree to which individualism affects the way God relates to us and to Godself and how we relate to God. The modern era saw the rise of radical individualism made possible in part by the decrease in the strength and impact of community structures due to industrialisation, urbanisation and migration. These social changes resulted in a more individualised notion
both of the relationships within the Trinity and of the way God relates with humans. The decline of the communal in society is mirrored in the decline of communality in the language in use about the Trinity, conceptions of the nature of salvation and Christian ethics.

As societies change in structure and composition, a change in theological imagery can be expected. As a result of the changes, some images will cease to make sense, as they no longer appeal to or resonate with the experiences of people. New images will emerge for referencing the numinous and transcendent that are more congruent with common experiences of the social in that society. With the decline of the communal and the rise of the individual, we can expect more individualistic theologies and spiritualities, such as those of the New Age and evangelical Christianity with their heightened focus on individual salvation. As relationships become less hierarchical and warmer emotional tones are expected, there will be changes in images of God. In hierarchically differentiated Christian societies, notions of the Trinity will be hierarchical: Father first, then the Son, and after them the Spirit, whereas in functionally differentiated societies, images of the Trinity are more likely to be more functional: creator, redeemer and sanctifier. Similarly, in societies where collegiality and norms of equality prevail, God is likely to be depicted as less hierarchical both in relation to us and in the internal relationships of the Trinity. In such societies, God shifts from being judge to friend, from distant to close, from stern parent to companion, lover and mate. As patriarchal features of our society recede, churches are challenged to soften residual images of patriarchy and hierarchy.

**God in twenty-first-century Australia**

If theology reflects key aspects of society, what kinds of theology can Australia expect in the early twenty-first century? The rise of globalisation, religious revitalisation, threats of global warming and predictions of increased numbers and levels of natural disasters are some of the defining features of life today. The rise of religiously inspired threats to peace and order occurs at the same time as meditation and quieter spirituality practices increase.

Since World War II Australia has had to confront its abandonment by Britain. Moves towards a republic are only a symptom of a late dawning of awareness of this abandonment. Do Australians feel abandoned by God? Are Australians seeking to become independent of God? Or are Australians seeking replacements? Australia has courted involvement with the USA – ‘All
the way with LBJ’. Now it is even further with George W. Bush as Australia plays an eager role in the ‘coalition of the willing’ in the War on Terror. But can Australia count on the USA to come to its aid? Uncertainty continues to characterise our global situation.

With abandonment can come maturity and self-reliance. We are on our own in the Asia Pacific. Our location in the world is not secure, our ties no longer bind and we are adrift, alone on the globe. What is worse, we are responsible for ourselves. Some would just love to pin the Stolen Generation on the British. But it cannot be done. We did it. Would not it be wonderful if Hansonist xenophobia and political movements promoting harsh treatment of refugees were US imports? But they are not. They too flow from a dark corner of the soul of Australia; as does the economic rationalist campaign slogan of ‘putting Australian interests first’. We are not all beauty and light, lovely larrikins with nothing more to do than go to the beach. We are also capable of evil.

Australia is learning – slowly – that it is responsible. Yes, there is room for legitimate pride. Yes, there need to be more ‘sorry days’ as this newly felt responsibility percolates through our national psyche and Australia seeks to understand itself, to feel confident in the world. In this context some will peddle old images of God, browbeating Australians into guilt and despair. But new images of God will also emerge, less heroic images, less triumphal and less judgemental; images of a God who understands what it is to feel responsibility, who shares our pain and knows our worries, even a God who is prepared to say ‘sorry’ and rather less given to judgement and more to commiseration.

Australia’s location in the geopolitical landscape has affected its theology. Australian theologies have always presented a relatively distant god who had a limited view of life here on earth, or at least in Australia. Australia’s God was essentially benevolent, but a long way away and quite possible to hide from. Australia’s God has been a god to be put safely in a preamble of the Constitution, just to be sure; a God to be appealed to in dire emergency, to bail us out of our own messes very much like appealing to the Crown to sort out political messes. Australia’s God is a distant god who demands occasional pomp and circumstance; a god who requires a distant allegiance, duty and loyalty but not warm fealty; and a hierarchical god, not so much a companion on our way. These images reflect Australia’s past relations with the imperial powers, legal, state, industry and cultural, which dominated
and ran Australia for 150 years, when the centre of power was half a globe away, when we had to cope on our own and could do on our own. Some think this situation still obtains. They are wrong, but old gods take time to die.

Will the interconnectedness provided by rapid telecommunications and the global movement of people, capital and cultures give Australians the sense of being part of a larger whole that includes even more than did the British Empire? Will this new global network provide new images for God? The heightened levels of surveillance and security systems installed everywhere may provide the experiential base for a God who sees every thing, is constantly watchful and ready to intervene.

**Conclusion**

It is now clear that Australia’s religious and spiritual life is alive and responding creatively to the chances and changes of its social and cultural context. Contrary to the claims of secularisationists, the story of religious change in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is not all privatisation and marginalisation. It is not all about religious confrontation and threats, either. Rather there are complex, mutually influential relationships between religion, spirituality, society and culture. What will emerge in the future is not clear, nor is it predictable which groups will survive these changes.

In this twenty-first-century context much is happening. Mega-churches grow and offer a brand of Christianity that supports most of the status quo and judges stridently issues of personal morality in a purported attempt to shore up the family. Meanwhile the formerly mainstream Protestant groups find themselves on the margins of a world they do not understand. Spiritualities are rife as Australians take seriously their responsibility for themselves and their spirituality. They will use what they wish from the resources available, but will do so carefully, discerning what helps and heals while avoiding what harms. But all is not sweetness and light. Some theologies have become worrisome. Chapter 8 considers how religion has come to be back on the social policy agenda and in what ways.
‘Social policy’ refers to efforts to control, organise or direct the shape and operation of a society designed to achieve particular ends usually seen to be making things better for the society and its people. The issues addressed by social policy, particularly in societies like Australia, include equity in the distribution of goods and services, fairness in employment, education and health policies, population size and composition policies, intergroup relations policies, multicultural policies, gender relations, family formation policies, inclusion and exclusion. Any dimension of social life can become subject to social policy. While governments exist in part to establish such policies, organisations also set internal policies about the relations of their members, hiring practices, bases for grievance procedures and privacy. Social policies reflect, either intentionally or accidentally, a society’s ideals for itself.

The Australian Government has established social policies on discrimination in hiring, access and equity, privacy, funding for separate schools and a host of other areas. State and local governments usually follow suit, putting in place legislation to ensure that the policies have effect. In addition corporations, schools and universities, and other organisations establish their own policies and internal working procedures to implement policies. Policy without procedures to ensure that the policy is applied is ineffective. Policies and procedures often have the force of law or the backing of the state. Policy may be negative: trying to stop something, or positive: aimed at promoting something. Of course, deciding not to do something is also a policy. Alcock defines social policy as ‘actions aimed at promoting social well-being’
(Alcock in Alcock, Erskine & May 1998: 7). Anderson, Brady and Bullock (1978: 5–6) provide the following key dimensions of social policy: ‘1) public policy is purposive, goal oriented; 2) policy consists of courses of action; 3) policy involves both decisions and subsequent acts of implementation; 4) policy may be negative or positive; 5) policy is based on/in law and is authoritative.’

This chapter outlines how religion has returned to the social policy agenda and the ways religion relates to social policy, and explores the challenges of attempting to manage religion in the twenty-first century through an examination of some current examples of religion and social policy. The involvement of religion in social policy has been ignored by most treatments of religion and of social policy mostly because of secularist ideologies that declared religion to be epiphenomenal to social change (Thomas 2005). Since that position has been seriously undermined by recent events, it is time to re-examine religion and social policy. Moreover, it is precisely when religious groups seek to influence social policy and when social policies put in place by governments affect religious groups that the most intense conflicts between religion and society occur.

The reader will notice that spirituality has dropped from discussion in this chapter. Only when a spirituality becomes sufficiently organised will it feel the effects of policy or wish to shape policy, in which case it is well on its way to being a religion. So long as a spirituality remains a private practice, it is unlikely to be consequential for a society. So long as Falun Gong remained a set of ‘traditional practices to improve body and mind’ it was of little interest to the government of China. However, when the Falun Gong claimed to have more members than the Communist Party the Chinese Government cracked down on them.

**How religion returned to the social policy agenda**

A third of a century ago most social analysts and policy-makers ‘knew’ that religion was dead, irrelevant and at most a lingering but definitely passing phenomenon. So they had been taught. Secularisation was seen to be proceeding at such a pace that the new millennium would dawn with no religious celebration marking its arrival and religion no longer an issue of interest to the vast majority of people. Then virtually no one working in
the area of social policy would have considered religion to be an important source of or an issue for social policy (Thomas 2005). It was assumed and proclaimed that as science progressed, as humans matured, as liberal morals were propounded and enjoyed, and as churches shrivelled into the non-existence of privatisation and marginality, a new age flowing with free-spirited but caring people would ensue along with a society characterised by responsible prosperity-driven freedom from want, disease and poverty.

That was then. But since then a few events have happened to make that dream quaint and archaic. Now many policy-makers act as though religion is not an issue, hoping that it will go away, considering these events to be minor setbacks on an inexorable evolution towards secularity. Periods of revitalisation follow periods of decline. Ordinary people seem to know that religion is again an issue and that it will not just go away. Policy-makers act out of their secularist training whereas people respond from their experiences. Some of the events to change the perception of the relevance of religion for public and social policy include:

Worldwide events:

- the overthrow of the Shah of Iran by a reformist Islamic party
- the increasing influence of the Christian right in US politics from the 1980s
- the end of the Cold War, the dismemberment of the former USSR and the return of religious life, including revitalised Islam to Russia and the republics
- the events of September 11, 2001 and the War on Terror
- continuing religiously motivated suicide bombings in many parts of the world
- the return of religious and values rhetoric to political discourse
- increased religious diversity rising as a result of the global movement of people and ideas
- the serious debates in major industrial societies about the teaching of ‘Creation Science’ or ‘intelligent design’
- the failure of liberal reform programs to eradicate poverty, injustice and disease and usher in a new, safe, healthy and beautiful world
- the continued intractability of the religious conflicts in Ireland, Israel and Palestine, and the Asian subcontinent.
Australian events:

- the Bali and London bombings and attacks on Australian consulates
- the rise of the proportion of Australia’s government welfare spending that is channelled through religious organisations (Maddox 2005: 228–259)
- the rise of religious rhetoric in politics, for example the federal Treasurer attends Hillsong Church and the rise of the Family First Party
- the rise of revitalised Islam in countries of the Asia-Pacific, including Australia
- the rise of religious diversity within Australia
- the extension of government support to a wider range of religious schools
- the rise of racial and/or religious conflicts in Australia, e.g. the Cronulla beach fracas and religious vilification.

Religion and the social policy discourse

Events and issues like these would imply that religion would feature prominently in social policy textbooks and conferences on these issues. However, a review of every public and social policy book on sale at bookstores at Michigan State University and the London School of Economics that I conducted in 2000 revealed virtually no reference to religion. There were two exceptions. A few books mentioned religion and education: Catholics and increasingly others wanting the state to pay for the costs of separate schools, and a few mentioned religion and health policy, mostly about changes in abortion availability. A state-of-the-art text devoted half a page to a general discussion of religion and social policy, only to ignore the topic in the rest of the book (Baldock et al. 1999: 75–76). I thought then that this book might be a sign of things to come. However, in 2005 I surveyed all books and recent articles on social policy and religion at the British Library and Foyles bookstore in London and revealed the same result as in 2000. Only books published in the USA mentioned the role of religion, usually in reference to the campaign for Black civil rights (Tice & Perkins 2002), education (Wolf & Macedo 2004; Judge 2002) and, more recently, the delivery of social welfare by religious organisations (Wineburg 2001). When the standard introductions fail to mention it at all, and the discourse of social policy gives but the most cursory reference to it, religion still seems not to be on the agenda for policy-makers.
Conferences on terror and responses to it are not much better. As policymakers try to come to terms with the issues of the day, many continue to try to ignore or deny the role of religion (Thomas 2005: 1–16, 47–69). Some do this in an effort not to demonise Islam. But that relies on the misguided notion that Islam is the only religion used by some to legitimate violence. Appleby (2000) demonstrates that religion plays as much of a role in promoting peace as violence and that no religion is free of association with terrorism, including Buddhism in Sri Lanka (Appleby 2000: 133–136) and Cambodia, as well as Zen in Japan (Victoria 2005). The responses made to shocking events reveal the agendas of those responding. Secularist Marxists still try to argue that religion cannot be a factor; it must be poverty even if the bombers are nearly always well educated and middle class. Moreover, Al Qaeda has a religiously inspired agenda. But few policy-makers have been educated in the way religion works, and most are quite ignorant of the differences and similarities characteristic of religions. Recent publications show the beginnings of an increase of writing by those who do respect and understand the role of religion in public policy (Nesbit 2001; Thomas 2005).

**How religion relates to social policy**

I have found it useful to distinguish four ways religion relates to public and social policy: religion as the subject of policy, the source of policy, a shaper of social policy and implementer of social policy. Religion operates in a frame of creative tensions between the here and now and that which is more than the here and now; between what is and what should be, between the incredibly minute and the grand picture. Successful religions hold these dimensions in tension. A religion too focused on the big picture becomes irrelevant for the suffering of one person. On the other hand, a religion that cannot link that suffering to a big picture has less potency than one that can. These tensions are again evident in the relationship between religions and social policy.

**Religion as a subject of social policy**

Most societies have norms and expectations about the place of religion in them. Some of these are encoded in legislation; others take the shape of social policy directing the actions of agencies and government organisations.
Section 116 of the Constitution of Australia declares that ‘the Commonwealth shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free practice of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth’. The USA has a Bill of Rights that ensures freedom of religious belief and practice and the separation of church and state. Comparisons of the ways these relationships are worked out in Britain, Australia or Canada (Lyons & Van Die 2000) reveal profound differences.

European history is full of examples of religion as the subject of social policy. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648, which established that the religion of a principality was the religion of the monarch, the imposition of the Books of Common Prayer 1549, 1552 and 1662 in England, and the introduction of religious freedom or tolerance in Holland are but a few examples. From the end of the sixteenth century until recently the key expectation was that it was necessary for a society or nation to have one religion to provide unity of focus, legitimation and ceremonial celebration of critical events. Religious diversity was seen as a threat to the survival capacity of the state. Some of this attitude is reflected in some uncritical studies of religion and society and in some policy discussions related to contemporary religious diversity.

Some states still have established churches. In Denmark any religious group that seeks to operate in Denmark must register with the state Lutheran Church and get its approval to do so. This requirement has been used to try to limit the activities of some groups like Scientology and the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormons). Buddhists and Muslims find it distasteful to seek permission from Lutheran Christians to minister to their people already resident in Denmark. Similar limitations are imposed on the freedom of religion in some Muslim-dominated countries where legislation exists that limits the actions of Christian missionaries, the printing and use of Bibles in the common language, or the ownership of land by churches. China has ten approved religions – none others may operate legally. It is interesting to note that Catholics and Protestants are two different religions because they each have different names for God, having separately translated the Bible and liturgical material into Mandarin. While many of the religious tests for participation in British society were discarded in the 1830s, some remain, notably for the monarchy. Australians find the religious test for the monarchy one of the motivations to move towards a republic. Hospital and
prison chaplaincies in the United Kingdom are in the control of Church of England clergy, such that other groups, including Methodists and Muslims, require the permission of the Church of England chaplain to visit their people in hospital or prison (Beckford & Gillat 1998; Beckford 2004: 241).

Societies debate the role of religion, the style of acceptable religion and how to manage differences between religious groups, and they have mechanisms for controlling religions. Societies usually resist new religious groups, and established groups often use social mechanisms to resist change. At times religious groups have referred their internal differences to the courts for settlement (Piggin 1996). In Australia the state has been called on to settle internal religious disputes over the ordination of women that brought several policy dimensions into conflict: the separation of church and state, who owns church property, equal opportunities and gender equality (Hilliard 2002: 133–137).

**The promotion of moderate Islam**

In the wake of religiously inspired violence many have called for moderate Muslims to speak out against the excesses of terrorists who claim to be motivated by Islamic beliefs. Many Muslims claim that terrorism, the killing of any innocents and violence are not supportable by their beliefs and object to the hijacking of their religion by terrorists (Capan 2004; Rauf 2004). In this context the USA has adopted a policy of supporting moderate Islam. Many Muslims object to the term ‘moderate’, saying that they take their faith seriously. What many mean by ‘moderate’ is a form of socially engaged and responsible Islam that participates in the debates of its society, takes seriously its role in promoting community harmony and acts as a social critic where necessary. The USA has decided that Sufi branches of Islam are particularly suitable and pour money into organisations that promote interfaith understanding and cooperation.

One of the primary public intellectuals promoting this social policy is Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, who offers an appealing new vision for Muslims in the West (Rauf 2004). In the foreword to Rauf’s *What is Right with Islam*, Karen Armstrong points out: ‘One of the most important assets of the United States in their struggle against terrorism is the Muslim community of America. Many American Muslims have long been aware that they can practice their religion far more creatively in the USA than they could in their countries of origin’ (Armstrong in Rauf 2004: xii). Armstrong goes on to draw
a comparison with the USA’s Catholic community and its rise from being a despised and mistrusted minority group to being part of the mainstream. The book is a sustained argument for the support of moderate Islam, for Muslims to continue to take seriously the challenge of discovering what it means to be a Muslim in the West as citizens of non-Muslim majority countries. What Rauf and Armstrong say about the USA is equally true of Australia. The discussion of how to promote moderate Islam provides a current and evolving example of social policy directed at shaping the beliefs and practices of a religion.

**Social policy as protection from religious excesses**

Some policy-makers and implementers argue that it is the role of the state to protect its citizens from things that might injure them: poorly made goods, poisonous substances and bad religion (Richardson 1995, 2004b). This is an extension of the welfare state concept. The claim that a group is harmful may be used by one religious group to exclude another. Cult-busting is a worldwide movement that periodically causes local concern and moral panics about particular groups. There is no question that some religious associations can cause harm. The extremely difficult problem faced in these cases is always one of selecting the criteria to apply (Richardson 2004b).

For example, the criterion that such groups not cause physical pain, especially to children, sounds as if it would exclude activities every right-minded person would agree should be excluded. Most would probably agree that a society certainly would not want to allow religious groups to harm people, particularly children. However, who is to decide when pain is injurious or just good for a person? Moreover, some religious groups that are universally accepted as legitimate, such as Jews and Muslims, practise male circumcision. Some people have objected to Scientology because it charges for its religious services and seems to make money. Similar concerns have been raised about some Pentecostals and televangelists. However, this presupposes that religious services are supposed to be supplied at no cost or at a loss. Some Australians still think that religion is or should be paid for by the state. Of course, it is in Germany, where citizens have to opt out of the state church tax, but if they do, they do not have access to the services of the church either.

The exclusion or repression of religious groups on the basis of protecting citizens from injurious ones has not had a history of success (Beckford
1985; Richardson 2004b; Barker 1987; Shterin & Richardson 1998). Many groups, including Christianity, are considered dangerous in their early days, only to enjoy respectability and wide acceptance later. Early Quakers were suppressed as a potential threat to social order. Following its foundation and early repression by the state, the rise to middle-class acceptability of the Church of Latter Day Saints in the USA and around the world provides another interesting case in point.

Those promoting an interventionist role for the state in ensuring the religious safety of a nation come into direct conflict with those who argue for a permissive approach, such as that declared in the C18 protocol of the United Nations. The UN C18 protocol requires signatory nations to legislate to make religious discrimination in housing, employment and other aspects of life and racial and religious vilification illegal. Several major religious groups have opposed such legislation on the one hand because they wished to make strongly worded negative comparisons between themselves and other groups that could have been considered vilification. On the other hand, some religious organisations also wished to be able to discriminate on religious and moral grounds in hiring employees to work in their increasingly state-funded welfare, educational and health agencies and programs as well as in selecting personnel to serve in religious programs.

The problems faced by a society when these two views come into conflict were highlighted by the way the state governments of Victoria and New South Wales became embroiled in a cult-busting program in the late 1990s. The social services divisions of these states were alarmed by the claims made by visiting anti-cult organisations about the injuries caused to children by various groups such as the Family. When social workers removed the children, the problems really began. After nearly two years and many thousands of dollars spent on court cases, no allegations of abuse were proven, and the children returned to their communities (Boyle & Sheen 1997; Wybraniec & Finke 2004: 538).

States face a serious dilemma of how to respond when group A alleges that group B is abusing people. The issues become more problematic when children are involved. The bases for determining when a state should be involved in ascertaining the religious health of a religious group are not clear. It is often discovered that some practice and belief that is declared to be extreme by a group is the basic entry requirement for another. What is
appalling to one religious organisation is normal to another. Moreover, there is no way of being sure that all branches of well-known and accepted groups act within whatever bounds of acceptability might be set. People have been abused by extremists and predators within mainstream religious organisations. Some argue that this or that religious belief or practice is irrational and thus to be eliminated. But at their core all religions are irrational, even the ‘religion’ of rationality. The argument simply degenerates into being one religious group in conflict with others.

States continue to debate how to manage religious diversity (Wuthnow 2005; Richardson 2004b). In Switzerland voters have rejected a narrowing of immigration. Religious diversity is usually the hidden agenda in many immigration debates about culture or acceptable birthplace sources. In Germany diversity continues to be a problem with the skinheads on the one side and new religious movements on the other. China continues to be repressive of religion. The range of options for a state includes setting up some form of established religion – examples include the Church of England for Britain, Shinto for Japan and the State Lutheran Church for Scandinavian countries – various forms of separation of church and state and/or the repression of religious diversity.

Religion and education

Many of the conflicts between church and state in the late nineteenth century focused on social policy dealing with religion in education (Hogan 1987: 80–100; O’Farrell 1977). Religious organisations had provided education, but there was a call for universal, free – that is, state supported – and secular education. However, the meaning of ‘secular’ provided the major problem. At first a British Protestant ethos prevailed. After all, Australia was assumed to be a Christian country. However, through the twentieth century this increasingly came to mean the removal of specifically religious curricula to be replaced with a secular and somewhat anti-religion ethos. Churches responded varyingly. Catholics around the world established parallel faith-based education systems associated with parishes. These schools were staffed through religious orders and funded through fees and parochial support. The parish adopted major educational responsibilities for its people. In Catholic societies these were state-supported. Some Protestants also established separate schools. In Australia some previously existing schools of religious foundation continued, and many became elite academies.
The debate over state support for religious schools continued into the twentieth century with a wide variety of outcomes from the Australian, where the state will support any school that teaches the essential curriculum and supplies its own basic infrastructure, to the Canadian, where the state funds secular and Catholic – but not other – schools, through to the USA, where only secular schools are funded. The Australian social policies on funding for separate religious schools have been hotly debated, but have proven a boon in a multicultural multifaith society. Elsewhere Muslims and others have had to fight, usually with little or no success, to establish local schools which teach in ways that are informed by their faith. Catholics have sacrificed to supply these schools in most parts of the world, but they are not alone. Jews, Muslims, Steiner groups, evangelical Protestant groups and others have separate schools in Australia. As a result these faith communities are enabled to develop and instil a religious identity that is also grounded in Australia. Australian Muslims do not have to send their children overseas to find faith-based and faith-sensitive education. Faith-based schools also provide an important context for religious groups to work out how to be both members of a faith and citizens of Australia, how to be Australian Muslims, Australian Catholics or Australian Lutherans.

Religious groups also press for religious education either within state-run secular schools or in separate programs. This issue has been bubbling away since the late nineteenth century when free, public and ‘secular’ schools became the norm in the West. Each Western country manages this issue differently. In some cases the definition of secular has been pressed by the avidly secular to mean that no religion of any sort may be present. In the USA this means no prayer in public schools, no prayer groups, no prayers at gatherings and no crossing of oneself before sporting events. However, in Australia separate religious and other schools are funded by the state according to a formula established in the 1960s when the Catholics – about 24 per cent of the school population – threatened to send their children to the state-run schools (Hogan 1987: 252). This support was extended to all schools.

Religion in education has been raised as an issue for Australia as a multi-faith society (Cahill et al. 2004). If religious differences have come to threaten social cohesion and it is not possible simply to ignore or repress religion in Australia, then it is desirable to educate all Australians about the faiths of their neighbours and classmates. Some teachers find teaching religion even
more controversial than sex. The issues raised include how to teach about faith rather than teaching in order to instil faith, who is to teach the material, which version of the stories of faiths is to be told and which faiths to include. Ignorance is not an appealing option as it leads to fear about the neighbour who may be different or seem strange.

The demand for values education is also heard. Both religious and non-religious Australians are demanding that values be taught. By this they usually mean shared values, while some refer to family values. Attempts have been made to identify shared values. The problem remains that values are grounded in communities and in the theologies or philosophies maintained by these communities. Values do not float about in space disconnected from specific communities with particular histories and shared stories that are used to instil these values. The fact that highly different and conflicting groups share values is because certain values are essential to the sustainability of human society – such as the Golden Rule, the capacity to forgive and move on, mutual respect, shared care for the weaker and justice for all. Any group that has persisted for several generations will have these shared values. Groups that do not have these values do not survive long.

A current issue concerning religion in education centres on the teaching of evolution and what has come to be called ‘Creation Science’, and more recently ‘intelligent design’. The early twentieth century saw the Scopes trial in the USA in which a high school teacher was arrested and tried for teaching evolution contrary to the law of the state. In a multifaith society there may be many religious perspectives on the origin of the universe and life. The relationship between religious and scientific perspectives on origins has been a source of conflict for many centuries. To declare the schools a secular zone in which ‘science’ is privileged is one option. Teaching a variety of perspectives without privileging any is another option, but an extremely difficult one that is unlikely to satisfy everyone. Moreover, there is no unanimity within religious groups – or even the scientific community – about how to handle this. Conflating religious and scientific explanations does not help teach either well.

Religion in the census and social policy

Once we take seriously the possibility that there may be religious dimensions to public and social policy it becomes important to know the relative numerical size of religious groups in society and which are growing and
which declining. The census provides information essential to many areas of social policy: income distributions, poverty estimates, education levels, household composition, family formation, types of housing, ethnicity, language use, employment distributions and religious identification.

An example of the utility of a religious item in the census is provided by the ability to describe the geographic distribution of religious groups. Many people, including some members of parliament, are now concerned about the distribution of religious groups in Australia, particularly Muslims (‘We may become a Muslim nation: Vale’, Age, 14 February 2006, p. 6). Because the Australian census includes an item on religious identification it is possible to describe accurately the residential distribution of religious groups in Australia (Bouma & Hughes 2000; Bouma & Dobson 2005). Our analysis of 1996 census data using a small but meaningful reporting unit equivalent to a suburb, the postcode, found that the percentage of Muslims in any Australian postcode aside from the Cocos Islands does not exceed 27 per cent. By 2001 this had increased to 32.9 per cent. This change is explained by the fact that Muslims have built new homes in or have moved to places near Muslim schools and shopping precincts that serve Muslim needs. The only group to exceed 50 per cent were Catholics in one district of Melbourne. Jews constituted 40 per cent of one postcode in Melbourne.

Any social policy directed at issues of the distribution of groups in a society, including religious groups, needs to begin with facts about their distribution—not myths. The census information is useful for dispelling myths about the growth and decline of religious communities, about employment, education, age, gender, income and other characteristics of these communities. Many of these characteristics will be related to social policy issues related to religious organisations or for planning issues within them.

Australia uses the figures on relative numerical size of religious associations to grant time on the ABC, to decide numbers of chaplaincies in the armed forces and chaplaincies in prisons and whom to involve in civic ceremonies and to weigh the relative importance of requests coming from various groups. Schools use the census to predict what proportions of groups are in their catchment areas. Since schools have become increasingly responsible for tailoring their curricula to their clientele and need to succeed in attracting that clientele in order to keep their funding, religion has become one of the dimensions to which they have to be sensitive. Schools in Muslim areas need to ensure that uniform and sporting requirements are satisfactory to the local community.
Australia’s system of released time religious education enables religious groupings to provide instruction in their religion in state schools on a voluntary basis. Christian communities have used this system for decades. The State of Victoria had been providing a small annual sum to the Council for Christian Education in Schools to certify the religious education teachers and to do some curriculum development. With the advent of – or, more appropriately, the recognition of – religious diversity, other religious groups were given access to the released time religious education program and to the funding. A successful case for providing funding to support these groups was then made by the World Conference on Religions for Peace – Australia on the basis of census data and appeals to equity. If the state were to support Christian organisations, many of which were much less numerous than Buddhists or Muslims, should they not also extend that support to these groups?

Religion as a source of social policy

Religions have beliefs about the good and seek to realise them by declaring what they consider to be good for citizens, the social order and other aspects of life. These ethical principles lead religious communities and their leaders to influence social policy. Thus, the second way religion is relevant to social policy occurs when religious groups are the source of social policy.

One of the clearest examples of religion promoting and legitimating a social policy can be seen in the various roles religious communities have played in social policy relating to race relations. Religious organisations motivated by religious belief supported by texts taken from the Hebrew and Christian scriptures defended the institution of slavery, the practice of racial segregation and the repression of Blacks in South Africa and the USA. On the other hand, other religious organisations motivated by religious belief supported by other texts from the same scriptures have provided a great deal of motivation and resource in the campaign to end slavery and to grant civil rights to Blacks in the USA and South Africa. Earlier religiously inspired leaders in Britain had used theological arguments to bring slavery to an end in the British Empire. This does not mean that religion is inconsistent or a self-cancelling force. Religion was a powerful source of motivation and legitimation in both cases. I do not doubt the integrity of either set of believers and what they saw to be the social policy implications of their
beliefs. Religion is not unitary but diverse, and it plays a variety of roles in any social context (Appleby 2000).

**Food, health and religion**

Religious belief and organisations have been active in the social policies dealing with health. Religion has been very much involved in the availability of abortion in the USA and Australia – again on both sides. During the 1960s many clergy banded together to provide realistic and effective counselling for women facing a problem pregnancy. They were also politically active in securing the changes in legislation that made abortion widely available from the 1970s. In the late 1960s a major American denomination, the United Presbyterian Church, USA, declared its support for more liberally available abortion in the interest of promoting women’s rights and preventing the injuries and occasional death associated with illegal abortions. More recently, however, the religious Right in Australia has been active in curtailing the availability of abortion. In the early twenty-first century the anti-abortion argument is that there are ‘too many’. It is not that there is an acceptable number. The argument is an emotional one, not a rational one. Abortions just do not feel right. This reflects the cultural shift from rational argumentation to emotional. Others argue that abortion never feels right, but there are times when it may be rational depending on the circumstances the woman faces and the presuppositions brought to the argument.

The Catholic Church has declared its opposition to birth control and to research involving embryos. Recently it campaigned actively against a change in the Italian law that would have allowed embryonic stem cell research. It actively opposes the distribution of condoms in jails or as part of foreign aid designed to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. In Australia, individual Catholic pharmacists have been known to refuse to dispense the oral contraceptive or provide condoms. Hospitals routinely permit operating theatre staff to opt out of being involved in surgery that offends their religious sensibilities, including abortions and sterilisations. Increasingly Catholics are joined by conservative evangelical and Pentecostal Christian groups in seeking social policies that reflect their beliefs.

Some religious groups have deeply held beliefs about gender relations that shape the provision of health. Some Muslim women believe that they should not be touched by a man. This includes medical examination. The provision of counselling and psychiatric services needs to take into account
not only the religious sensibilities of the client but also those of their gender.

There is great difference among religious groups in the management of death and grieving. Health service professionals need to be aware of these. Muslims and many Jews believe that burial should occur on the day of death or within a day. Muslims believe that the dead should be buried in certain ways, including being in contact with the earth. Some groups prefer or tolerate cremation, whereas for others it is anathema. Fortunately, organisations like the Australian Multicultural Foundation have prepared material for health professionals and the police.

Managing these issues in a multicultural and multifaith society challenges the assumption of policy-makers that one form of providing a service should suit all. Secularity is not a neutral stance; it too has its presuppositions and value commitments. Health systems are increasingly expensive and rely on the state for funding. The state is under pressure to provide a wider range of options. This is difficult enough to do in urban areas, and it is nearly impossible in rural and regional Australia.

Religious beliefs and practices lead groups to press for regulations that enable suitable food to be produced. For example, the rise of substantial communities of Jews and Muslims has led the push to provide kosher and halal food. These pressures may affect the policies governing the slaughter of animals and the storage of food. It is now fairly common to be asked by a host or a conference organiser about food requirements, and increasing numbers of venues have ways of providing for quite a range of religiously based dietary needs. Most Australian cities have ample provision for the dietary needs of religious groups. As with many other facets of religion and social policy, there is no really safe option, although ‘vegetarian’ will cover a wide range of religious groups. Where possible, it is better to cater by intent than attempting to eliminate foods that offend as there is no safe lowest common denominator.

**Employment, law and religion**

Discrimination in hiring on the basis of ethnicity, gender and age is forbidden in Australia. However, religion is not explicitly covered by many of these policies. Many organisations have established policies that forbid discrimination on the basis of religion. Some argue that the wearing of religious
dress is against Australian values. Which values? Australia values freedom of choice, and most wear religious dress out of choice.

The management of religious diversity at work poses challenges that require considerable creativity from human resources managers (Bouma et al. 2003; Hicks 2003). This may include using flexitime to accommodate Muslim prayer times, allowing people to schedule holidays to enable participation in religious holy times, being sensitive to Muslims during Ramadan, providing food that is acceptable at catered events and canteens, ensuring that examinations are not held on Jewish holy days, and making provision in the design of uniforms for head covering or other forms of religious dress.

Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Baha’is and many other groups celebrate holy days at times when others do not. Making provision for Muslims as they respect the privations of Ramadan – no food, drink or sex from sunrise to sunset – presents challenges in many workplaces. The following case study discusses whether to raise religious issues in the workplace.

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**No ‘big deal’ . . . or is it?**

Fall is an important time for Jews around the world. Like me, they will be celebrating the Jewish High Holy days. This period is called the ‘10 days of awe’ because of its deep spiritual significance. At sundown on October 3, Rosh Hashanah begins, marking a new year (5766) and is followed by Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement, beginning at sundown October 12 through October 13. Yom Kippur is the holiest and most solemn day on the Jewish calendar. Despite the magnitude of this time for Jews, my guess is that there is little awareness of it in your workplace – perhaps a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ attitude prevails. In other words, if you are not Christian, the majority religion in most workplaces, you just celebrate quietly, taking time off without much explanation.

Most of us who are Jews or Muslims or Hindus or Baha’i or the hundreds of other minority religions in the USA believe it’s best to keep our practices to ourselves. Besides, this country is founded on separation of church and state. We keep religion out of our government and our workplaces, right?

But consider this. A client asked a colleague and me to facilitate the second half of work we had begun with their leadership group. They selected October 4, a date when their leaders would be together in one city. That day is Rosh Hashanah. I hesitated to make a ‘big deal’ out of it for my client, and I really wanted to be part of continuing
this important work. But I told him that, based on the fact that it is my religious holiday, there wasn’t any way that I could be there that day. When my colleague and I explained why and suggested that October 4 may not be a good day for some of the attendees as well, we were told that there were no Jewish attendees, so there was no problem on their end. How would you have handled this?

Here is another example. A Jewish member of a project team was asked to sign off on a final product proposal before it was sent to the client. The client deadline was the morning after Yom Kippur. Several weeks earlier, the team member had let his co-workers know that during the final week of the project, he planned to leave at noon on Wednesday and return on Friday. When he reminded the project manager of his planned personal time off, the reply was, ‘No problem. We will email it to you on Thursday morning. That way you can look at it while you are at home and get it back first thing in the morning.’ How would you have handled this?

It’s fairly easy to see the assumptions at work in these two scenarios, as well as the challenging positions in which individuals who practise minority religions find themselves in our land of religious freedom.

Myrna Marofsky, President of ProGroup Inc., www.progroupinc.com, used with permission

In the USA there have been major legal battles about displaying the Ten Commandments in and around courthouses. Evangelical Christian groups have been demanding that the Christian – and presumably Jewish – foundations of American society be honoured and displayed. Recently the US Supreme Court declared that an outdoor installation was acceptable but placing them on the wall inside a courtroom was not.

Law relating to marriage and family often attracts the efforts of religious groups to pressure the state to manage marriage and divorce in particular ways. The relationship between religious marriage and divorce and legal marriage and divorce poses problems in many countries as different legal systems clash and parties appeal to one or the other as they see fit to their own benefit. Until recently divorce was nearly impossible in Italy because the Catholic Church resisted the introduction of the necessary legislation. The issue of gay marriage is a current hot topic. Some nations and US states are making legal provision for it whereas others – often in response to pressure from some religious groups – make it illegal. Sweden used to require that all marriages be performed by Church of Sweden clergy. Recently, however, it
disestablished its state Lutheran church as a result of pressure from secular people, Muslims and others who objected to having to go to the state church to be married and to register the birth of their children or the death of their deceased. Increased diversity in both religion and forms of family have made the formation of social policy more difficult.

Religion as a shaper and implementer of social policy

Religious beliefs shape social policy in several ways that are less direct than the implementation of ethical and moral beliefs. Religious conceptions of human nature will shape social policy (Milbank 2006). For example, different theologies of the human person lie behind different social policies related to crime. While a religiously based ethic may stipulate that a given form of behaviour is immoral or criminal, theological conceptions of how humans work will influence the measures taken to prevent, punish or ameliorate criminal acts. Punitive responses to crime presuppose that punishment changes human behaviour or that God demands it. Theological conceptions of the human range from a rational calculating actor with free will, to totally depraved and incapable of good, to perfectible, prone to sin but accepted by God, and to prone to sin and needing much constraint. These different theological anthropologies will shape the type of policies proposed and how policies are implemented. They shape the choice of responses to criminal behaviour or to deviance between policies designed to reduce risk and manage harm reduction or policies focused on punishments and retribution.

Liberal and liberalising theologies of the human that supported more ameliorative, educative and harm minimisation approaches to deviance and crime were ascendant in the twentieth century (Sifton 2003), yet this does not look like continuing. Increasing numbers of theologies with more negative assumptions about humanity are clamouring for attention and getting it. Current examples include the reintroduction of the death penalty in the USA, calls for mandatory sentencing, more punitive responses to deviance and an increased emphasis on law and order. In health provision these more negative theological views of human nature are heard in the debates about euthanasia and palliative care. Some argue that pain is character-building so painkillers should be used sparingly even for terminally ill patients. Thus,
while liberal theologians find soulmates among those in other religions who take similar gentler and more optimistic views of humanity, so too are the negative and pessimistic theologians finding soulmates in others from different denominations and religions, as new partnerships that cross the usual dividing lines between religious groups emerge in the task of shaping social policy.

Religious communities often implement social policy. Religiously motivated compassion has led to welfare, education, hospitals, social work, slum clearance, reduced working hours, removal of children and women from mines, and other improvements in the living conditions of people. The source of the compassion probably affects the way in which the compassion finds expression in policy. From the late eighteenth century Britain sent chaplains with the armed forces and with the administrators of penal settlements in order to civilise them and the newly incorporated natives. Religion was seen as a civilising influence, and the state church was the agency for this. This policy echoes today in the comments that religion is a good thing as it teaches ethics and trains people to behave properly. Another echo of the civilising role of religion in British imperial policy is heard in the call for all the religions of the world to cooperate and train their members in ‘universal values’.

Some of the role of religious groups in the implementation of public or social policy stems from religion’s historical involvement in hospitals, education and charity work. Today in Australia religious organisations are being used to channel a substantial proportion of the social services dollar. Since social service providers now need to bid to receive funding for essential Commonwealth government funding to deliver particular programs in the tender process, one religious group often finds itself pitted against another. There is much debate about the value and appropriateness of these organisations being used in this way.

In the USA, Catholic groups are buying up hospitals. When control is secured, abortion, contraception and palliative care services are no longer available. The recent history of the attempt to set up safe injecting rooms in Sydney and Melbourne has found religion as motivator, religion as instigator and religion as thwarter. As religion becomes more diverse, it will be found on an increasingly diverse range of sides of any issue. There will not be a single religious view, even as it is impossible to get an Anglican view, or even a Catholic view, although they are more likely to try to speak with a
unified voice. Religion will continue to be a complex factor in the provision of health, education and social services.

Religious groups have also been active in thwarting the imposition of policies they consider unjust. The opposition of religion to limitations placed on the rights of racial groups by policies of segregation has been mentioned. Religious communities have given asylum to persons and groups hounded by immigration patrols and have lobbied for humane treatment of asylum seekers. Religious organisations have both supported and opposed wars, the death penalty and the rights of workers. In all these ways and more, religion is a critical part of any and all social policy debates and issues. It is going to be less quietly a part of those debates in the future than it has been to this point.

Regulating religions in postmodern secularity

One of the key features of today’s world and Australian society that supports the claim that Australia is an example of postmodernity is its degree of diversity, including religious diversity. The increased degree and scope of diversity means that policy-makers must cope with much more variability in community composition: ethnicity, age and religion, a wider range of ideals for a society, and an increased acceptance of and value of diversity. Religion is part of this diversity, and religious diversity has become a hotly contested area in social policy both in Australia and around the world (Beckford 2003; Richardson 2004b; Wuthnow 2005). Diversity is increasing at societal, communal and personal levels. Australians are becoming more complex in their own religious identity and engaging in a wider range of religious and spiritual activities and organisations. Similarly congregations are limited in the degree to which they can be culturally plural, and local communities will be less plural than the societies of which they are part (Wuthnow 2005: 230–258).

Social policy has yet to catch up with both the fact of religious plurality and its rising acceptance. Not only is religious and cultural diversity accepted, it is also increasingly viewed as a positive value for a society, which increases rather than decreases its sustainability and capacity for cultural creativity. While diversity in itself is seen as good for a society, it is also clear that not every instance of difference is good or healthy or contributes to sustainability.
Thus social policy seeking to shape and manage religious diversity becomes more and more important in many societies, including Australia.

**Managing religious diversity**

All societies manage religion and religious diversity. Every society has a religious institution that will apply and enforce norms and expectations about religion and spirituality. These norms address various aspects of the religious and spiritual life. They address the ways religious groups relate to each other, limiting and shaping the ways they compete in order to keep conflict within tolerable ranges. They determine which communities can operate in a society. They will also shape which beliefs and practices are permitted. This section will first review some of the history of the management of religious diversity in order to develop an understanding of the range of issues and approaches social policy has taken in this area. Then the area of interreligious relations today will be examined as it is the most tendentious issue facing policy-makers. Finally, several other issues will be explored, including the rise of new and unexpected coalitions.

The rise of religious and cultural diversity challenges the current policy of promoting faith-based welfare. Australia’s religious social service providers have a wealth of experience in meeting the needs of people. The channelling of such assistance through particular religious organisations raises issues. If government-supported assistance in finding employment is allocated to one religious group, say the Catholics, it then becomes necessary for a Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu or, for that matter, a Baptist or Pentecostal to have to go to a Catholic social services agency to seek work. On the other hand, it is also possible that going to a secular agency could also be unacceptable because they may lack any sensitivity to the implications of religious belief for employment.

**Social institutions of religious diversity management**

A society’s religious institution will include norms about the acceptable in religious life, belief and practice. Those individuals and groups whose beliefs and behaviour lie outside the range set by these norms will be sanctioned informally and formally to bring them into line. At this time in Australia there is a substantial debate about the level of acceptability of beliefs in creation, intelligent design and evolution. Repressed beliefs become privately held by groups who meet to sustain their beliefs, but acceptable beliefs become
part of the public discourse and the curricula of schools. There are practices that are certainly beyond the pale for Australia. Human and animal sacrifice has long been unacceptable. Sexual activity as part of a religious ritual is not accepted. Some symbols would be deemed offensive, for example, some Hindu groups use a symbol that looks like a reverse swastika. Although the Hindu symbol has been used for many centuries, there are occasions when its association with the Nazi swastika brings protest over its use. Finally, informal social sanctions will apply to those groups or persons who are deemed to be over-enthusiastic or over-committed or to spend too much time or money on religious goods and services.

A quick review of some of the history of the management of religious diversity will help to understand this process and policies related to it. In the Roman Empire, so long as persons and groups worshipped the state gods and served in armed forces, they could practise other religions as they pleased. Then a Jewish sect caught on and rose in popularity. Some Jews tried to extinguish it as an internal heresy that needed to be corrected and brought into line. At the time there was already a great deal of internal diversity within Judaism, and this group might ultimately find acceptance. The Romans responded to this new sect in much the same way it dealt with Jews: occasional repression by force, torture, imprisonment when their radical monotheism and refusal to worship the emperor raised the spectre of sedition, of diminished loyalty to the state. Once accepted by the state, the early Christian church quickly moved to use the force of the state to support orthodoxy and suppress heresies (Stark 1996). The early Christian church quashed certain theologies mercilessly.

About a thousand years later the Spanish Inquisition provides another example of the management of religious diversity. Andalusia had been a successful multicultural and religiously plural society. The year 1492 not only saw the discovery of America by Columbus but was also the year of the expulsion of Jews and Muslims from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella. Cordoba, Seville and Granada had been wealthy centres of learning where Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars wrote science and theology in Arabic. The end of this era can be attributed to a failure to maintain policies that promoted healthy interreligious relations on the part of both Muslim and Christian leaders. In the Inquisition people were forced under penalty of death to become Christian and to take on Hispanic names in place of Arabic names. Many fled, and with them went much of the knowledge that had been kept and developed by Muslim scholars during the European era known as
the Dark Ages. As many fled north into Europe this fund of learning and critical thinking fed the fluorescence of the Renaissance.

The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 provides another example of the attempt to manage religious diversity. For more than a hundred years wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics had ravaged Europe. Moreover, states would change between being Protestant or Catholic, and subgroups within states were often engaging in civil wars aimed at establishing their form of religion as the state authorised religion. The Peace of Westphalia sought to end the wars of religion – both within and between states – by establishing two principles. First, each state could only have one religion. Second, the religion of the prince determined the religion of the state. The effect of the Peace of Westphalia was to make the interests of religion subservient to those of the nation state (Thomas 2005).

It took a long time for freedom of religious expression to become a principle in Europe. Holland was the first European state to provide religious liberty. One of the key elements in the origins of the USA was groups seeking religious freedom: the Puritans in Massachusetts; English Catholics in Jamestown, Virginia; Unitarians in Rhode Island and Quakers in Pennsylvania. At first only William Penn gave general religious freedom. At the outset of the colonies each had its own established religion because that was the accepted way to manage – that is, control – religious diversity.

The 1960s and 1970s not only spawned an array of what came to be called new religious movements but also gave rise to organisations that opposed these religious groups, accusing them of brainwashing, kidnapping and imprisonment (Richardson 2004b; Robbins 1988; Barker 1986). Parents upset about the religious rebellions of their kids sometimes sought help from these organisations. Careful studies of what has been termed brainwashing have discounted the claims that it is effective in producing profound changes in people or intense commitments (Richardson 1999, 2004b). Nation states have also become worried about religious diversity and possible religious foundations for rebellion or insurrection. Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma bomber, seems to have come from an extremely religious right-wing anti-government organisation.

Managing religious diversity around the world today

Nations differ in their management of religious diversity (Boyle & Sheen 1997; Richardson 2004a). For example, Germany funds several religious organisations from a church tax. Citizens not wishing the services of one of
these groups may opt out of paying the tax. This has the effect of privileging a few groups. Meanwhile Germany actively represses organisations it refers to as sects and cults, among which they classify Scientology. Switzerland has a government department set up to protect its citizens from dangerous religious groups and actively suppresses those that they deem a problem. Following seventy years of active suppression of religion by a secularist fundamentalist regime, Russia now permits a few religions to operate, primarily those present in 1920. The rest are suspect and suppressed. Religion is actively managed in both Malaysia and Singapore, which are Muslim majority states but make room for some other groups while privileging Islam.

In Australia there are now calls to promote ‘moderate Islam’ and to discourage ‘extremists’. This presupposes the ability to distinguish non-problematic religious enthusiasm and commitment from toxic varieties. It also raises the social justice issue of whether the same criteria and policies will apply to Christian extremists and other groups. For a time in which religion is supposed to be withering away many societies seem to be spending a lot of time trying to control religion.

Social policy and the religious Right’s transition from quietism to activism

Religious revitalisation gives rise to increased efforts to reshape social order by religious groups. These efforts are aimed at changing aspects of social policy. Some in the popular media describe particular societies as beset by religious fanatics who would remake society according to their vision. But this has always been the case. It is in the nature of the religious vision to seek not only the better person but also the better society. It is in the nature of religious conviction to deem it necessary to force some to conform so that the ideal may be achieved even if that forced conformity is to have to live in a system that permits free choice.

What became clear by the end of the twentieth century was that when it comes to seeking ways to put faith into practice, to shape a society according to the beliefs held by some citizens, secularism is as much a religious ideology as the Christian Right or Catholic anti-abortion or Baptist temperance movements, or Hindu fundamentalism or Islamic political activism. From this view Islamists seem like Cromwell; fundamentalists and pro-familists go hand in hand; liberals generate sweet confusion until pressed and then come out fighting using all the power and privilege they can muster.
From a Western liberal perspective the most dramatic cases of seeking to structure society according to religious belief involve attempts to establish shariah law. However much this may challenge or offend the sensibilities of Western liberals, sociologists from Western societies need to remember their own histories, including the Crusades and past impositions of Western law – Christian and secular – by the British, French, Germans and Americans. The imposition of civilisation by various Christian churches under the aegis of imperialism involved chaplains who accompanied imperial armies and served as magistrates in prison colonies. What is becoming clear is that the presumptions of neutrality by secular law are false and hide a coercive power as repressive as religious law (Thomas 2005).

There are those in Australia who, like their counterparts in the USA, seek to reshape societies according to their religious beliefs. This is often proposed under the neutral-sounding banner of family values (Maddox 2005). They seek to make divorce and abortions more difficult to obtain. They try to enshrine their anti-homosexual marriage attitudes in law. The way this will play out in a parliament that represents the great diversity of Australia will be interesting – but it will not be easy.

In this debate new coalitions may emerge. Evangelical Protestants may find that they favour similar legislation about the family to some Catholics and Muslims. This will challenge the purity focus of some groups, and may open the eyes of others to the validity of the faith of people they had previously mistrusted. So now as then, here as there, the religious is involved in the reshaping of the social. The groups may change, the issues may vary, but religion and spirituality are about change. Only otiose religion is an opiate; the rest is dynamite.

Internal diversity

The move to try to shape a society according to religious belief brings quickly to the surface all the internal diversity of a religious group. Yes, a religious community may agree on love, fair play, even respect for diversity. Universal values reside in particular groups and are nurtured by them. People do not learn values from the air, although the media have an important shaping role. Not only are values grounded in organisations but even more so are their interpretation and views about their application. In this context some try to redefine the core while others try to clarify where the boundaries are to be drawn. Whatever, the divisions within religious groups are often as great
as those that divide them when it comes to the social policy implications of their beliefs. This explains why strange alliances involving people from different religious groups emerge to promote certain policies. It also explains why the most trenchant critique of any proposed policies arises within the communities proposing them.

Examples of the internal diversity of religious organisations abound. Some see this inability to agree as an indication of weakness, as though singularity of mind is needed to succeed (Porter 2006). Others see this diversity as evidence of the vitality of the group. The issues dividing religious bodies today include the homosexuality debates, which can be seen as arguing about an issue of limits to tolerable diversity within the group (Bates 2004); the abortion debates; liturgical style – styles of liturgical dress used in most dioceses of the Anglican Church of Australia are illegal in Sydney; which forms of music and prayer are acceptable; what language to use in worship, which is an issue for groups that are settling into Australia from non-English-speaking backgrounds; styles of worship, ethical concerns and political preferences divide many groups; and issues of ethnicity, theology and politics divide Muslims, who are rich in diversity. The richness of this diversity at times makes it possible for creative responses to emerge and for a religious organisation to evolve in its adaptation to its social and cultural environment. It can also make for substantial and crippling internal conflicts. In this context it is almost impossible for a religious group of any size to speak with one voice, to have a single stand on almost any issue, let alone be able to use the threat of a voting bloc to shape government policy or elect one candidate over another. Cardinal George Pell’s protestations to the contrary and attempts to uphold Catholic uniformity in the face of a rainbow of diversity only provide further evidence of the enormity of the task.

**Religious competition**

The reality of inter- and intra-group religious diversity means that inter-faith competition is expected to be more prevalent in a postmodern and secular society. Competition increases because while diversity increases, often becoming more acceptable, the capacity of organisations and societies to control the beliefs, attitudes and practices of their members and citizens is reduced. The ‘modern’ goals of religious uniformity are set aside as impossible and undesirable. An increase in the diversity of religious groups
claiming distinctive truth will lead to competition and the need to reduce conflict. While difference becomes accepted, with accepted difference also comes competition. Some societies see religious diversity and competition as threats to the social order and institute policies to limit diversity and to restrain competition. Following a review of these societal changes, their policy implications will be explored.

The twentieth century commenced with much competition among religious organisations. Catholics and Protestants viewed each other with suspicion, and Protestant groups were at best uncertain about the validity of each other’s religious beliefs and practices. Sectarian rivalry that had emerged in nineteenth-century social policy led to debates about state funding for the building of churches and synagogues and the giving of land to Anglican and later other communities, then to major debates about the place of religious instruction in state schools (Hogan 1987). Far from indicating the morbidity of religion, the robust discussions about these issues reflect a vital religious and spiritual life (Stark & Finke 2000). The late nineteenth and early twentieth century also saw considerable interest in spiritualism, theosophy, the mystical and the occult (Sarmiala-Berger 2002). As Australia’s suburbs were built, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and other Protestant groups built churches within walking distance, but with little regard for the level of actual demand for their services, which produced what Gill (2003) discovered in Britain: churches that were empty because they could never have been filled.

As the twentieth century progressed religious competition began to be seen among Catholics as well as the dominant mainstream Protestant and Anglican churches as a bad thing to be overcome, something that threatened their core business. The twentieth century was a century of ecumenism and resulted in a general decline of religious intergroup competition and hostility, particularly since the 1950s (Hogan 1987). The old hegemony of British Protestantism has broken and is no longer taken as normative. Now many more kinds of Protestants are seen as acceptable; there has been a rapprochement between Catholics and a wide range of Protestant groups; Jewish and Christian groups work together well; and now many Australian religious groups are working on extending this larger household of acceptable religious diversity to include Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and a host of other religious groups, large and small. Australia has seen formerly competing churches merge into a single religious denomination with the formation of
the Uniting Church from the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational
churches. Moreover, since September 11, 2001 a vast array of local interfaith
initiatives have brought together people of many beliefs in ways that give
each the experience of meeting and getting to know people who differ from
themselves across faith lines.

While nothing boosts and develops brand-name loyalty like competi-
tion (Stark & Finke 2000), Australia has witnessed a decline in ‘product
loyalty’ in the importance of denominational identity (Kaldor et al. 1994:
225–239). This is partly a product of religious mobility and partly a prod-
uct of decline in competition. Carroll and Roof (1993) examine the issue
of denominational loyalty as a form of social and cultural capital focusing
on the struggle to build and transmit denominational culture. It takes a
great deal of effort to pass any culture, including a religious culture, from
one generation to the next. The plausibility structures required to instil and
maintain faith are costly in terms of time, money and energy. The mainte-
nance of separate schools is one strategy. Many groups were not prepared to
expend the energy and income necessary to support the structures needed to
maintain commitment and pass on the denomination’s culture to the next
generation. The result is a high level of religious ignorance in the general
population.

The late twentieth century also witnessed a massive decline in the num-
bers affiliated with mainstream Christianity in the West since the high water
mark of the mid-1960s. These churches have also aged considerably, having
essentially lost two generations. This decline has raised the issue of the rela-
tionship between ecumenism and church decline. Stark and Finke (2000)
argue that competition is good for religious life. As in other markets, the
lack of competition leads to organisational laziness, less willingness to attend
to consumer satisfaction, a reduction in product differentiation and, as a
result, lower market shares. This certainly describes the religious changes
experienced in Australia through the twentieth century.

However, while former lines of division have been softened and some
formerly competitive groups have merged, other lines of competition have
opened up. Pentecostals compete with formerly mainstream Protestants.
Catholics are taking a harder line on their relations with others, maintaining
respect but emphasising what they see as their beneficial distinctions. In this
context, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and others demand their rightful place
in society. In the process competition emerges, positions are declared and
defended, people convert and Australia’s religious and spiritual life shows signs of continuing – if not increased – vitality. While the rise of internal diversity seems to threaten the capacity of some groups to maintain any sense of unity, these too reflect a vitality of religious and spiritual life rather than morbidity. There is nothing vital or sustainable about uniformity in biological, social or cultural life.

Living with and utilising diversity

Religious groups are not all the same. Within each religious group there are subgroups that appeal to a particular slice of the market. Some appeal to particular ethnic groups. Some appeal to youth or to this or that subgroup. There are some for the elderly, others for gay and lesbian Christians. Some are for the rich, the poor or the aspirational. There are huge variations in theology, liturgy and social outlook among religious groups and among particular congregations, assemblies or other local organisational forms. Some demand long sermons, others want rousing addresses; others prefer no sermon at all, but focus on connecting with the transcendent through rituals, the sacraments or meditation.

Given the fact of difference, competition is likely. However, competition is conducted within the norms, laws and expectations of a society. The playing field will be more or less level, depending on the society. It is not permitted to kill someone for their religious beliefs or practices in Australia. In Victoria, as in Canada and Britain, it is illegal to vilify another religious group. ‘Vilification’ is defined as inciting to hatred, violence and demeaning. The fact that this legislation and its enforcement are hotly contested simply means that Australia is working out what are the limits to acceptable religious competition. Religious groups are becoming subject to expectations similar to those applying in the commercial world.

The issues for the management of religious diversity then become how to permit competition while reducing conflict. Diversity needs to be permitted so that creative changes and responses can emerge. For example, in a competitive religious market different groups may be encouraged to take pride in what they do well, identify their strengths, market strengths, advertise, differentiate from the crowd and stand out. Be prepared to insist that training is required of new members; build your cultural capital. Be prepared to offer many ways of being involved. Build your social capital. And let the market decide whether you have a future.
On the other hand, competition can become dangerous if one group vilifies another, uses its influence or numbers to prevent another group from establishing itself, or tries to make the practices and beliefs of the group illegal. In the commercial world these would be condemned as unfair competition. The aim of social policy designed to manage religious diversity is to assist religious groups and their society to live together in ways that promote peace and productivity in a sustainable social and cultural environment.

For some religious groups, dwelling in Australia means learning what it means to be one among many religious groups. While they may have been monopolies in other places – like Islam, Catholicism or Anglicanism in different times and places – they are no longer dominant, no longer able to define what is expected or what is normal. They are no longer the accepted ‘default’ religion, with all others being seen as deviant. The Australian context requires that religious groups compete on a more level playing field. They become options, variations, roughly equally socially acceptable ‘denominations’, to use a term that emerged in the Christian plurality of the USA in the twentieth century.

Diversity, including religious diversity, is clearly on the social policy agenda. So far we have seen that diversity is increasing, that diversity will lead at least to competition and probably to conflict, and that diversity and competition are healthy states for religion. Societies, however, have become concerned about the risks posed to social cohesion by religious diversity and seek to manage that diversity.

Conclusion

The continuing vitality of religion and spirituality is evident in their association with social policy. Every age produces new religions. New religions and newly revitalised religions make efforts to change social policy. This produces conflict, uncertainty and calls for controls of religion. No society is disinterested in the religion of its citizens. All societies engage in some form of control over the religions operating within them. Societies manage religious diversity within limits peculiar to each society. While globalisation brings increased diversity and exposure to global cultural trends, the local shapes the way policy is developed to address these issues.
In addition to being the subject of social policy, religious groups seek to initiate, shape and implement social policy in order to realise the implications of the value and ethical implications of their beliefs and engagement with the numinous and transcendent. These efforts include promoting legislation, protesting against injustices and participating in the electoral process to ensure that their views are heard and, where possible, put into practice. Engaging in these activities brings religious groups into conflict and at times brings them into surprising coalitions.
The future of religion continues to be greatly debated (Davie, Heelas & Woodhead 2003). Some see the spread of Pentecostal Christianity and the renewed energy of Islam as signs of hope. Some are disquieted in fear that some in these intensely religious groups will seek to remove hard-won freedoms and lifestyles enjoyed by many. Youth are seen to be spiritual and even religious, or at least more than would have been expected (Hughes 2004b; Smith 2005). Others say that religion has been denatured by secularisation and has become too individual, no longer powerful, a passing private fad practised only by the few. They often define the necessary characteristics of religion in terms of their views of how it was at some time in the past, failing to notice that the shapes taken by the religious and spiritual have changed and that the ways groups influence governments and agencies has also changed and requires new approaches and analyses. However, religion and spirituality are living phenomena, rather like the societies that give them birth. As such they can be expected to grow, develop and evolve over time while retaining some recognisable continuity.

I have spoken of the religious and spiritual life of Australia. Beckford (2003: 11ff) says that religion is what a society defines it to be. These definitions and social constructions will vary. Those who insist on a persistent definition of religion include those religious practitioners and religious studies scholars who have a stake in a particular form of religion. They may be as blinded to what is happening to a society’s religious and spiritual life as are secularisationists who have a stake in the withering away of particular
forms of religion. Those who insist on virtuosic performance may miss the quietly unprofessionalised forms of spirituality. There are core elements to the religious and spiritual, but what is seen as critically core at one time may not be at another. So it is with social change.

What is the future of Australia’s religious and spiritual life? The answer to this question of course lies in the future, but it is human to anticipate, just as it is necessary for social planning to predict. The core drivers of the future of religion and spirituality are different from the core drivers of the future of particular religious groups and organisations. The future of religion may be upbeat, but that of a particular religious organisation that may once have been central to a society but is now missing the trend may well be less rosy. Here we address the issue of religious and spiritual life and only incidentally the organisational forms that might or might not thrive.

Core drivers

All predictions are based on assumptions about the core drivers of the near future. These assumptions are grounded in perceptions of trends and theories of the overall direction of social and cultural change (Davie, Heelas & Woodhead 2003). The assessments of trends and the interpretations of theories are conditioned by the hopes and fears of those making the assessments and interpretations. Following are my assessments of the core drivers and likely directions for the near future.

First, the needs addressed by religion and spirituality are core to humanity: hope, and meaning grounded in a connection with that which is more than passing, partial and broken. The future of human life and society is less assured today than a few decades ago. Climate change, political instability, pandemics, crime, earthquakes and war all threaten the presumptions of comfort, security and meaning. The flood of responses to the events of September 11, the death of Princess Diana, the Bali bombings, the tsunami, air crashes and violent crime include religious and spiritual activities. People place flowers at the sites of tragedies and at other sites dedicated to symbolic representation of those affected. The outpouring of grief and the donations of money in the case of the tsunami can be seen as expressions of the interconnectedness of global community in the face of individualism.
The maintenance and celebration of hope in the face of despair, injustice, unexplained pain and tragedy remains a critical feature of life. The most developed responses to the need for hope have been found in community life, expressed in religious symbols and rites, and nurtured through spiritualities. They are also found in storytelling, myth-making and the sharing of life journeys. This accounts for the continuing appeal of movies, television drama and books. Dan Brown writes a compelling yarn that is ostensibly about religious themes and is certainly about hope, myth and the journeys of encounter that make up life. Ongoing television dramas may be accused of banality by those who prefer Wagner and Mozart, but both deal with hope in the face of despair, sacrifice in uncertain causes and nobility found in the ordinary.

The seeking of transcendence is a very human mode of dealing with life and the universe. Hope demands that there be more than is seen, experienced, thought or enjoyed in the everyday. Yes, there will always be those who numb their seeking with intoxicants, narcotics and sex. In the face of the challenges to hope not all will resort to anaesthesia; nor will all find the nurture and celebration of hope in the cultures mediated by theatre, cinema and television. Some will continue to find hope in the disciplines of a spirituality and the offerings of religious groups. Religion and spirituality never engaged everyone’s attention or commitment. I expect, however, that more will in the near future than did in the near past. In Australia this will take forms that are quieter, less charismatic and more towards to the low-temperature end of the scale of religious intensity than elsewhere. Australia’s religious institution will continue to shape the ways Australians, including recent immigrants, will express their religion and spirituality.

Even the rise of the intelligent design, creation science and creationism debates can be seen to reflect the foundational incapacity of mature humans to live in a universe that does not care; that is not at its core somehow friendly. Yes, secularists and anticlericals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries belittled such an incapacity as reflecting an immature humanity clinging to the security blanket of childish images and succours. They argued that the mature human stood before the emptiness of space and experienced neither awe nor a sense of wonder, just a non-responsive void. An uncaring and unresponsive universe provides little foundation for care for self, other, society or environment. Such a position is no longer tenable. The universe is not empty; its interconnectedness is awesome, and solitary
non-responsiveness not a satisfactory human stance. Moreover, ordinary people continue to report encounters, experiences and moments of insight that have convinced them of the presence of the beyond, the more than, the transcendent.

The second major driver of the future of Australia’s religious and spiritual life is its increasing diversity. In addition to the persistent human search for and nurture of hope, the near future of Australia’s religious and spiritual life will be characterised by increased diversity and competition. This very diversity will likely produce a higher level of interest in and practice of religion and be more related to the construction of identity than in the recent past. Identities are grounded in similarity and set off by difference. If everyone is the same on a particular dimension it provides little traction for identity differentiation. Moreover, difference raises questions of how to understand the differences and relate. As a result of diversity religion is on the social policy agenda. People are discussing it. As interfaith activities bring differing groups into contact, each will ask questions of the other. Such questions will require those who had not thought about their beliefs and practices to learn about their faith. One of the early prompts to build mosques in Australia came from the questions children were asking their parents. The children of Muslim parents had been to school where classmates would tell them they were Muslims. On returning home they asked their parents what a Muslim is. Parents had to learn for themselves, then teach their children (Bouma 1994). Diversity promotes religious vitality.

The third major driver of the future of Australia’s religious and spiritual life is the rise of faith-based education. While hundreds of thousands may attend a weekend Buddhist festival and thousands make a pilgrimage to Taizé, millions of children from one to eighteen attend faith-based educational institutions. The best known of these are elite schools, many of which were founded in the nineteenth century and are redolent with British Empire association. They are less faith-based in that they are not dependent on religious organisations, nor do they see faith-relevant education as their primary purpose. They are more likely to be focused on training the next generation of corporate and professional leaders. However, the fastest growing segment of Australian independent schools takes the mandate to educate in faith-grounded values and to offer excellent education that prepares the whole person, including the spiritual person. Catholics have done this from the 1870s, and now other groups are seeing the provision of religiously
informed education as a way of growing the next generation of Christians, Muslims, Jews and others.

The short-term impact of the rise of faith-based education will be a cohort of religiously articulate young people who have a much more developed sense of their spirituality than previous generations. They will be more demanding and sophisticated consumers in the religious marketplace. The religious organisations that rise to this challenge will grow; those that keep insulting their market – as is the case for much of what passes for mainstream Christianity – will not. The role of school chaplains and religious education teachers in these schools is critical and needs to be taken more seriously by those who appoint them. The demand for this approach to education to be found at the university level is growing. The Australian Catholic University was formed and reinvigorated to do this for Catholics. Bible colleges provide an as-yet limited approach for evangelical Christians. Many major universities find themselves limited by a ‘secular clause’ in their constitutions. However, younger ones are less likely to be so limited but find the culture of secularism a barrier. This is in sharp contrast with the USA where a huge range of faith-based education is provided by private tertiary colleges and universities, many of which enjoy excellent reputations. The pressure for similar institutions will grow in Australia.

**Signs of hope**

There is evidence that religion and spirituality will be a significant part of Australia’s near future. They will be significant in that large numbers of people will participate in them, which will generate a continuing religious economic sector that will be more than trivial. They will play a role in public, civic and political life.

**Youth spirituality**

If young people are not showing signs of spiritual life, there is not much hope for the future. Some held out the hope that those who ignored religion in their teens and twenties would return with their children, or at least as they aged. There is little evidence to support this. Many of those who ignored religion while young continue to do so. But there are some signs of spiritual stirring among youth. However, there is evidence that today’s youth in their
twenties are more conservative and more religious than those who were in their twenties in 1978 (‘The atheist who’s selling Jesus’, Australian, 20 September 2005, p. 14). A marketing survey conducted in April 2005 found that 35 per cent Australians in their twenties said ‘religion was important in their lives’ compared with 21 per cent in 1978.

These youth are not found in large numbers in the ‘neighbourhood’ churches dotting Australia’s suburbs, but they are present in Protestant mega-churches and Catholic parishes and among Buddhists and other forms of spirituality. It may be that youth will demand a different periodicity in religions as they are most unlikely to commit to a weekly event. Youth are event-oriented, and spirituality events attract large numbers. The 2003 Buddha’s Birthday Festival in Brisbane attracted 200,000 people, most of whom were young. It is an annual three-day fun, food and spirituality event involving ceremonies like Bathing the Buddha, a Light Offering for Peace, fireworks, processions and more. The theme for the 2005 festival was ‘Auspicious Coexistence’ focusing on individuals who must live and work together and reaching out to Australia’s coexistence with the natural environment and Asia. The festival promotes a ‘healthy balance between body-mind-spirit’ (http://buddhabirthdayfestival.com.au/).

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**Bathing the Buddha ritual**

Part of celebrating the Buddha’s Birthday involves engaging in the Bathing the Buddha ceremony. The Buddha’s Birthday website describes the procedure in this way:

The ritual is to improve harmony & inner balance:

1. Please kneel on cushion
2. Fill ladle & pour water over small Buddha statue 3 times
3. While pouring water, say:
   - 1st wash: ‘May I eliminate all evil thoughts’
   - 2nd wash: ‘May I cultivate good deeds’
   - 3rd wash: ‘May I help save all living things’

According to the website, ‘This ritual highlights a universal message that it is easy to wash away physical dirt but it is much more difficult to cleanse one’s “inner dirt” of greed, anger and ignorance.’
These activities of youth suggest that the periodicity of religion and spirituality might change. Short periods of high intensity such as major events or pilgrimages are followed by times of near dormancy. The ability of religious groups to insist on weekly participation seems less likely, and Sunday morning is not at all popular with youth (Dixon & Bond 2004).

Although it might come as a surprise to many who decry the self-centredness of young people, youth are entering religious communities. New religious orders are being founded, and new religious organisations are attracting more young people now than in the recent past. These movements reflect the revitalisation of religion and offer opportunities to those who want a high-demand religion that structures their lives and channels their talents into service to those in need. Some people seem to be seeking communal ways to nurture their spiritual lives and put their faith into practice. A forerunner of these new religious communities has been the Taizé Community in south-eastern France. It is located in a small rural town a few kilometres from Cluny, the historical site of a huge Benedictine monastery. It regularly attracts thousands of young people from all over the world. They come and join the prayer cycle of the order, stay in tents or basic accommodation, attend daily Bible study and meditate. When Brother Roger, the founder of the Taizé community, was brutally murdered in August 2005, 12,000 young people from around the world attended his funeral. Although it was exceptional, this figure was less than three times the usual attendance on a summer Sunday.

We have seen that many Muslim youth in Australia have a more intense religiosity than their parents. Australian universities have active Muslim prayer groups and often support campus-based mosques. Many tertiary students from China find social support and community involvement in Pentecostal Christian groups. I see many more yarmulkes on the heads of Jewish university students now than twenty years ago. Studies of youth spirituality (Singleton, Mason & Webber 2004; Mason, Webber & Singleton 2005; Smith 2005; Hughes 2004b) are finding that many youth take their spirituality seriously; many seek traditional forms in religious organisations while others take a more do-it-yourself approach.

Grass-roots interfaith activities

While national leaders wring their hands worrying about interfaith relations, faith-inspired terror and the wearing of religious symbols, local
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communities, often with the help of community councils, promote positive and productive interfaith relations. The City of Darebin in Melbourne’s mid-north commissioned a study of its religious groups and organisations. It has produced a handsome volume, Guide to Faith Communities in Darebin, describing the faith communities in Darebin, what each believes, their practices and where they are. The aim is to promote awareness and understanding through shared information. According to Councillor Diana Asmar, the Darebin City Council in April 2005 committed itself to ‘take on board the task of promoting, facilitating and nurturing interfaith dialogue, relations and cooperation’. Speaking to the City of Darebin’s 2005 Interfaith Summit, Sheikh Fehmi Naji El-Imam, who is long recognised as one of the architects of interfaith understanding in Melbourne, said, ‘People who do not know each other fear each other. We need to get to know each other better.’

The City of Cabramatta in Sydney produced an audiocassette and CD to be played in a car giving directions to and information about the many different religious groups and buildings in the area. These stories do stand in stark contrast to the early 1980s when some city councils declared themselves to be ‘mosque-free zones’ only to watch their neighbouring councils offer hospitality to many religious groups and become vital religious and commercial centres.

**Interspirituality and bricolage**

While purists decry the blending, ordinary people and leaders of new religious movements seem quite happy to mix elements that some associate with different religious traditions. In postmodernity we can expect what has been called bricolage, the piecing together of cultural elements drawn from a variety of sources. So we have Christian meditation, Christian yoga, rap gospel readings, incense and candles in churches that had shied away from them, and Buddhists referring to ‘their book’.

Those who complain about such sharing seem to argue that there is or was a pure form of the several religions of the world. This is an untenable position. Borrowing has long been the order of the day, at least since those who compiled the book of Genesis borrowed pre-existing creation stories and adapted them to its purpose. Moreover, there is more in the traditions of each religious group that has lasted more than a few centuries than their more recent adherents realise.
Religion and politics

It is clear that many Australians join others in the world in supporting politicians who promote more humane values. The values push is a reaction against corporatist and managerialist approaches. Some refer to these as family values. Quality of life is critical. These are not people who have failed or who have been held back by the current structure of social and economic life, but are often those who are succeeding.

Australia’s future seems certain to include religion and spirituality, including both new and traditional – that is, new yesterday – forms. They will neither be weak, insipid nor irrelevant; nor will they dominate the landscape. Participation will remain low compared to the USA and some other places, for that is the Australian way. Hope will continue to be nurtured and quietly celebrated – a shy hope in the heart.
When reading about the beliefs and practices of a religious group it is best to read material prepared by a person who is currently practising that religion or spirituality. People who have left a group or converted to another are often negative about their former religion or spirituality. All writing is done from a standpoint, and there is no neutral or objective viewpoint. Having said that, I can nonetheless recommend the writing of Karen Armstrong, whose best work is on the three religions of the Book – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – because she is accepted as a lecturer in the clergy preparation schools of each of the three Abrahamic faiths.

**General**


**Religious groups**

**Anglicanism**


**Catholicism**

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Indigenous Australian religions

Islam

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