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The changing face of Australia: From secular to post-secular identity

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## PART C: FURTHER REFLECTIONS

### Chapter 9. Developments in Australian Religion: Contemporary Post-Secular Movements

#### Introduction

Australia has not been immune to the recent world-changing events over the last decade or so. Alongside these external events, a change in attitudes to religion has been developing that has been described as ‘the return of religion and the “crisis of secularism”’.<sup>740</sup> Although the number of Australians regularly attending religious services or identifying with religious traditions is decreasing over time, there is nonetheless a growing interest in and inclusion of religion in public dialogue and debate. The phenomenon of the ‘post-secular’ is embedded in these discussions and reflects responses to these global events and the changing attitudes towards religion in Australian public life.<sup>741</sup> The three movements discussed in this chapter are evidence of this response and reaction to global events that see people seeking answers to crisis and change. This seeking is framed by a rejection of secular worldviews and an embrace of diverse spiritual and religious perspectives, often cited as characteristic of post-secular change.

Whilst the phenomenon or idea of the post-secular is less evident than the secular in Australia, it is nonetheless a feature of public debate and dialogue concerning the nature and role of religion in Australian life. The very notion that there is such a phenomenon as the ‘post-secular’ is a matter of significant debate amongst scholars in the field, particularly as it is often defined in opposition to the secular. At the very least, the use of the term ‘post-secular’ amongst scholars in the Australian context appears to operate largely within the

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<sup>740</sup>Wilson and Steger, ‘Religious Globalisms in the Post-Secular Age’, (pp. 481–82).

<sup>741</sup>Ibid.

ongoing theoretical debate over the role and future of religion in Australian life, both public and private. In this chapter, I argue that religion in Australia is subject to a range of unique conditions that sets it apart from its British roots, and more particularly differentiates it from the United States. I investigate three movements in Australia that display post-secular characteristics such as detraditionalisation, pluralism and a blending of knowledge systems.

On a global level, the post-secular has often been defined as a resurgence of religion, which has cast a negative light on the term, developing as it has in response to a number of calamitous world events.<sup>742</sup> In Australia, the picture is less clear, although the return – rather than resurgence – of religion is noteworthy. The post-secular here can be seen as a possibility, an undercurrent that connects people back to historical ideas and experiences, while pointing to contemporary changes. These apparent changes to religion and secularity may be labelled post-secular, as some of the definitions of post-secular currently circulating find relevance.<sup>743</sup> For the most part, however, Australia's experience so far of the post-secular is quiet and inconclusive; nevertheless, the role of religion in Australia is being renegotiated. This renegotiation has been led by religious and political leaders, as well as by the public through the diversity of religion practiced here.

Australians play a large role in the acceptance or denial of the post-secular. Many Australians are viewed as religiously indifferent; from the early days of the colony, this indifference has been well documented.<sup>744</sup> The story of the post-secular sees secular Australia as continuing on this trajectory, while a number of new religious and spiritual horizons begin to appear. The movements discussed in this section serve as examples of the phenomena associated with post-secularism and speak to the post-secular in their revivalism, impact on the individual and

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<sup>742</sup> Habermas, 'Notes on Post-Secular Society', (p. 17).

<sup>743</sup> Paul Rooney, 'National Curriculum, Postsecularism and Pedagogy : Opportunities for Christian Education', *Journal of Christian Education*, 55/2 (2012). p. 30.

<sup>744</sup> Patrick O'farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia : A History* ([Melbourne] : Nelson, 1977., 1977).p. 17.

capacity to support a range of values and experiences for the individual. In addition I discuss changes within the Australian Catholic Church as an exploration

## **Changing spiritualities**

To preface my discussion of the movements, it is important to discuss spirituality and contemporary changes to the individual's experience of religion and spirituality. Historically, religion was considered the source of spirituality and understood as its 'depth dimension'; in modern times, however, it is positioned as separate to, and even in tension with, spirituality.<sup>745</sup> Religion is now more often associated with adherence to tradition in the form of creed and dogmatic requirements, and less with personal religious experience. Tacey explores the notion that spirituality has been seen in a pejorative sense, as something that could radicalise individuals against religious authority through their reinterpretation of the faith.<sup>746</sup> Many a mystic over the centuries has experienced criticism or censure for what was misplaced enthusiasm viewed as a threat to accepted belief. Nonetheless, in contemporary terms spirituality is understood as existing largely separate from religion and has taken on diverse associations and expressions.

Spirituality now has connotations of connection to the sacred as well as of alignment with inwardness and personal experience, as Tacey states, it is a 'people's religion'.<sup>747</sup> Viewed as remarkably positive, spirituality has a connection to the inner life of the individual while directing whole-of-life dimensions. This relocation of spirituality from religion to the inner subjective world of the individual resituates authority from external to internal sources and gives some indication as to the emergence of these movements as a reconnection to principles

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<sup>745</sup>Howell, *The New Spiritualities, East and West: Colonial Legacies and the Global Spiritual Marketplace in Southeast Asia*.p. 20.

<sup>746</sup>Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution : The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*.p.33.

<sup>747</sup>Ibid. pp.38–39.

thought lost or endangered. In the drive towards deeper spiritual experiences and self-fulfilment in contemporary contexts, these movements advocate for belonging and holistic connections.

It is often assumed that discussion of new spiritualities refers to New Age-style beliefs, but the changes to spirituality discussed here are necessarily ‘New Age’, though they may bear some resemblances. The changes discussed below refer to developments occurring within mainstream Christian belief systems as well as them. In a sense, there is nothing new about the emergence of these movements; many others have arisen throughout history and have already been noted in the literature as significant. Their occurrence is an indicator of social and cultural change.<sup>748</sup> What makes this post-secular era distinctive is that these practices may be participated in without any prerequisite of religious affiliation. Taylor notes that what may have been understood as ‘optional extras’ in previous eras are now parts of the mobile field of an individual’s association towards, and away from, various aspects of faith and belief.<sup>749</sup>

Perhaps what most marks this era is the changing association between these individual components and fusion with a community. If the post-secular is a new turn towards the self, then what needs to be understood is that the self takes precedence; community needs are to serve individual needs. Lynch notes that individuals may practice certain beliefs and rituals without feeling the need to be involved with organisations or communities. The online presence of various religious and spiritual viewpoints has also assisted this change.<sup>750</sup> The online access to these movements also indicates a membership or involvement that is somewhat anonymous, voluntary and does not rely on ritual or a designated worship centre,

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<sup>748</sup> One such contemporary commentary is provided by Graham Reside, ‘The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century – by Gordon Lynch’, *Conversations in Religion & Theology*, 8/1 (2010), 60-77.pp.68–69, but there are numerous others. Also notable is Durkheim’s exploration.

<sup>749</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 516.

<sup>750</sup> Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*.pp.72–73.

indicating the changing nature of religious communities. The exception to this in the three movements discussed below is New Monasticism, with its emphasis on communal living. Nonetheless, community members are allowed freedom to participate in activities beyond community life which, in previous eras, would have been untenable.

What comes to the fore in examining these movements is that personal goals, inner authority, experiential values and interior religiosity have shifted to the norm rather than the periphery of the experiences of belief. This is evident in all three movements discussed. While much of the discussion of the post-secular has related to the European context, I consider it equally applicable to the Australian context, although it does not provide a mirror image of the European situation, as the rise of various religious movements has also been noted by Bouma and Tacey as indicating a plural and evolving society in Australia.<sup>751</sup>

### **Three movements**

Three diverse movements that have appeared on the religious landscape in contemporary Australia are New Monasticism, Creation Spirituality and Evolutionary Christianity. I have chosen to investigate these movements as they typify key ideas and/or trends coming to the fore in contemporary religion and spirituality; caring for the planet, the blending of knowledge systems and a global presence. According to Gordon Lynch, religious movements such as these are emerging across and beyond religious traditions rather than in isolation from them.<sup>752</sup> This chapter will investigate the principles they espouse and their relevance to the changing face of the experience of religion in Australia. What is less evident in this research is the level of affiliation or membership growth; these movements are often not clearly demarcated within larger denominations, making it difficult to estimate membership. I reflect on the question of whether these movements have emerged due to what David Tacey terms

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<sup>751</sup>Bouma, *Australian Soul : Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century*.pp.116–17; Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution : The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*.

<sup>752</sup>Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*.p.7

‘the patent failure of secular humanism’.<sup>753</sup> I also discuss a number of similarities in terms of genesis of these movements, with each situated within the mainstream religious groups from which they emerged while attracting people from various denominations. What their appearance also indicates are changes to the experiential role of religion in people’s lives.

One recent event embodies the concerns of these movements and signifies the rise of their visibility and mainstream acceptance of the values they espouse. The 2009 gathering of the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Melbourne, Australia, adopted the theme ‘Make a World of difference: Hearing each other, Healing the earth’. The predominant theme of this gathering was based on the principles of common responsibility, global community and the sacred nature of the environment.<sup>754</sup> This gathering also discussed social justice concerns such as poverty and peace alongside issues specific to Indigenous peoples, while fostering a sense of shared community and spirituality in the current globalised context. This conference offered a forum for dialogue on the many concerns of contemporary religious movements, such as developing community between religious groups and breaking down denominational barriers, underpinned by a deepening concern for the earth and the planetary future. All these concerns form the backdrop to the post-secular perspective.

The movements investigated here are not clearly bounded by denominational lines and are therefore not often the subject of statistical research. While working on my PhD, I have become more aware that statistics can only show one small part of the story of religious experience (see the box discussion below regarding fertility and religion). Statistical data about religious affiliation and experience does not always consider the formation and development of movements between and within religious organisations and institutions. Data is often collected through analysis of clearly defined categories, i.e., mainstream religions,

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<sup>753</sup>Tacey, 'Environmental Spirituality', (p. 17).

<sup>754</sup>Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, 'The 2009 Parliament', (updated 12/06/2011)  
<<http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm>>

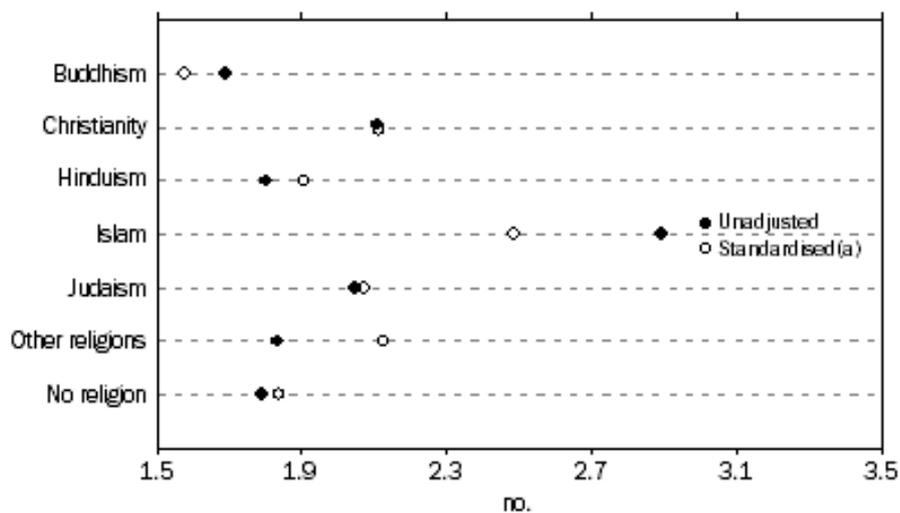
with less concern for changing religious contexts. In this I agree with Lynch, who argues that what is interesting about this time is that there are a number of shared characteristics present in the recently emerged movements discussed here that statistics cannot cover.<sup>755</sup>

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<sup>755</sup>Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*. p.8

## Statistics and religion - Birth rates and religious affiliation in Australia

One statistical area of interest is the relationship between religion and birth rate in Australia. In 2008, the ABS released data around religious affiliation and birth rate that still engenders controversy. Their findings relate to the significantly higher birth rate of women from Middle Eastern backgrounds at 2.9 in 2006.<sup>756</sup> This figure remains quoted in the 2015 Australian Muslims: A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia Report.<sup>757</sup> In comparison for all women in Australia it is 2.0. Adjusted birth rate for Islamic women is more likely closer to 2.5 but this is still higher than other religious groups. Christianity has the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest rate of 2.1 with little variation between Christian denominations. Other religions represented in Australia have lesser figures such as Buddhism at 1.7 and Hindu at 1.8.



(a) Standardised to the total 40-44 year old women's level of education and income.

**Figure 8: Average number of children born and religious affiliation, women aged 40–44 years (2006).** (Source: ABS 2006 Census of Population and Housing)

As noted in the abovementioned report, '[f]ertility behaviour is one of the most socially and culturally regulated behaviours in society. There is a general tendency towards convergence of fertility behaviours of migrant and local populations'.<sup>758</sup> These two aspects, regulation and convergence suggest that national ideas regarding fertility are influential and align with secular influence. Regardless of this religion remains influential

<sup>756</sup>Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 'How Many Children Have Women in Australia Had?', (Canberra: Australian Government, 2008).

<sup>757</sup>University of South Australia International Centre for Muslim and Non-Muslim Understanding, 'Australian Muslims. A Demographic, Social and Economic Profile of Muslims in Australia Report', (2015).p. 26.

<sup>758</sup>Ibid.

as the statistics show. This small picture of one aspect of social life in Australia is interesting as it is a microcosm of the changes at a personal and family level, as well as the national level, that highlight religion is still important to individuals but other secular influences are also significant. This blending of religion with the secular is characteristic of religious phenomena in Australia and points to the complexity of the link between them.

First, religion could affect individual preferences for children or for use of birth control. Second, religion could influence social norms regarding childbearing and women's work. Third, religion could affect education and thus change the shadow price of raising children. Fourth, religious communities could lower the effective price of raising children by providing child-friendly social services, such as day care, schools, and medical care. Finally, religion could affect national politics and thus the provision of child-friendly social services by government.<sup>759</sup>

These aspects discussed by Berman, Iannaccone, and Ragusa are important as they allude to the individual experience of religion and its impacts on behaviours, values and practices. On face value the decline of religion in Australia appears to be linked to the overall decline in birth rate, while at the same time indicating that religion to some groups influences values and attitudes to key practices. As can be seen the link between religion and birth rate is not straightforward and needs a more critical response than statistics indicate.

## Post-secular religion

The post-secular is referred to as 'complex and diverse changes that in different ways involve e.g. resacralisation or revitalisation of religion and transform the religious landscape in a profound way'.<sup>760</sup> Bouma argues that this post-secular form of revitalisation is 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'.<sup>761</sup> He also argues that this form of religious expression is 'modern', particularly in the sense of how it is communicated via technological

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<sup>759</sup>Eli Berman, Laurence R. Iannaccone, and Giuseppe Ragusa, 'From Empty Pews to Empty Cradles: Fertility Decline among European Catholics', *NBER Working Papers*, (2012).

<sup>760</sup>Nynas, 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape in Finland'.p. 8.

<sup>761</sup>Bouma, *Australian Soul : Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century*.p. 103.

channels and with its global reach often leading to more fluid expressions.<sup>762</sup> This section seeks to clarify aspects of these theoretical discussions currently found in the literature as characteristics noted in relation to post-secular religious movements. This same literature expresses caution towards the use of 'post-secular' as it remains a contested and ambiguous term. Several noteworthy characteristics of the post-secular will be discussed, including detraditionalisation, the return to orthodoxy, pluralisation and the blurring of the boundaries between sectors of knowledge.

### 1. Detraditionalisation<sup>763</sup>

As noted by Lieven Boeve, detraditionalisation is the 'interruption of traditions' (in this case religious), which are no longer passed on generationally or as a pre-given set of values.<sup>764</sup> It is not limited to the Christian faith but has affected numerous religions. This has resulted in disruptions to the process of transmission that religious traditions have historically relied on for continuation of their faith. The five characteristics of detraditionalisation explored by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead are

- the weakening of tradition,
- the sacralisation of the self,
- the individualisation of religion,
- the consumerisation of religion, and
- the universalisation of religion.<sup>765</sup>

Detraditionalisation as a category of post-secular belief suggests that religion has undergone an institutional shift away from mainstream organised churches to the 'diffuse pattern'

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<sup>762</sup>Ibid..

<sup>763</sup>Boeve, 'Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe', (p. 99).

<sup>764</sup>Ibid. p.105.

<sup>765</sup>Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (eds.), *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000).p. 342.

referred to by Boeve.<sup>766</sup> He notes that this has been caused by the influence of secularism and is, indeed, the realisation of this process. This is worlds away from the demise of religion foretold by this very same thesis. Instead, alternative processes such as detraditionalisation are now the subject of discussions such as those by academics Heelas and Woodhead and are posed as contemporary indicators of change. Through this, the zero-sum model of the relationship between religion and secularisation has been challenged. As the current transformations of religion suggest, secular values, although still influential, are less likely to present alternative worldviews. Secularisation is not now considered the only force affecting these changes to religion.<sup>767</sup> Instead, Boeve's diffuse model that speaks of a transformation of religion is more relevant in post-secular discussions. Under this understanding, the use of data to examine the decline of religion can only speak to one part of the equation, the decline; it cannot help us understand the reaction to secularism in the form of the rise of individual beliefs and spirituality.

### **Detraditionalisation: New monasticism**

One example of detraditionalisation in Australia is 'new monasticism'. New monasticism refers to contemporary communities that embrace ancient monastic practices such as community ritual, responsibility, work and mission, offering contemporary reinterpretations of these practices. These reinterpretations sit alongside distinct breaks from tradition, such as not renouncing the world but, rather, working in the world; imposing no requirement of celibacy; and embracing other non-Christian religious beliefs and practices. 'The modern monk does not want to renounce, except what is plainly sinful or negative; rather he wishes to

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<sup>766</sup>Boeve, 'Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe', (p. 101).

<sup>767</sup>Houtman and Aupers, 'The Spiritual Turn and the Decline of Tradition: The Spread of Post-Christian Spirituality in 14 Western Countries, 1981–2000', (p. 305).

transform all things... he is not interested in stripping himself of everything, but in assimilating it all'.<sup>768</sup>

As discussed by Mcentee – one of the authors of *New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living* – detraditionalisation is acknowledged as a legitimate process of making religion and spirituality relevant for contemporary times.

I think that for many there's a rejection of being embedded in a traditional path, and there's a rejection of having a spiritual life that is not directly related in some way to serving the world we are living in right now...And there's often a certain sponatneous kind of antipathy at being in a particular tradition to the exclusion of others.

These new monastic communities have proliferated over the last decade and are primarily situated in the UK, US and Australia. The term 'new monasticism' emerged in 1998 in the response of American theologian Jonathon Wilson to Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of modernity. This critique called for the construction of local communities sustained through their resistance to modernity, much as Saint Benedict, a significant figure in the early history of monasticism, did in his time against equally challenging forces.<sup>769</sup>

New monastic groups are affiliated with western Christian traditions including Evangelical, Protestant and Catholic groups.<sup>770</sup> In Australia, new monasticism has close links with the Anabaptist and Evangelical traditions, even though its members are not solely from these traditions. New monastic communities are found in a number of states, primarily in larger cities. These communities include the Urban Neighbours of Hope in Sydney and Melbourne (Churches of Christ), The Community of the Transfiguration in Geelong (Anabaptist) and The Peace Tree Community in Perth (Anabaptist).<sup>771</sup>

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<sup>768</sup>R. Mcentee and A. Bucko, *New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living* (Orbis Books, 2015).

<sup>769</sup>MacIntyre as quoted in Jason Byassee, 'The New Monastics: Alternative Christian Communities', *The Christian Century* (122, 2005), 38-47.

<sup>770</sup>Mark Hurst, 'Anabaptism: The Beginning of a New Monasticism', (Canberra, 2008). p. 1.

<sup>771</sup>Ibid. pp. 4-5.

These communities typically attract younger members; they declare strong links to the poor and care for the environment, and have adapted and adopted a monastic rule involving discipline and communal practices.<sup>772</sup> What is unique about these new monastic communities is that they have modified monastic rules to incorporate both married and celibate adherents, in addition to varying organisational structures and granting some level of autonomy for individual members and latitude in regard to their ecumenical associations. This fosters an eclectic mix of theology and spirituality within each community.<sup>773</sup> These communities are also variously viewed as a response to individualism, the mega-church movement, consumerism, globalisation and the emptiness of modern suburban life. In short, they are counter-cultural.<sup>774</sup>

This movement can be considered post-secular due to its adaptation to changing national and global circumstances, while simultaneously reconnecting to older traditions. It is a reaction to the secularisation of mainstream churches as well as the secular influence in wider society in broader terms. On a more individual level, new monasticism may be attracting what Charles Taylor describes as the contemporary pilgrim 'seeker', individuals attempting to discern and follow their own path of which this movement is but one destination.<sup>775</sup> Furthermore, Taylor notes that these contemporary religious drives are towards smaller, more intimate groups of family and friends, often in ecumenical settings with a plurality of spiritualities accepted as the norm.<sup>776</sup>

## 2. A plural field of interacting religious positions.<sup>777</sup>

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<sup>772</sup>Rob Moll, 'The New Monasticism', *Christianity Today* (2005).

<sup>773</sup>Hurst, 'Anabaptism: The Beginning of a New Monasticism'. p. 2.

<sup>774</sup>*Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>775</sup>Taylor, *A Secular Age.*, p-532–33.

<sup>776</sup>*Ibid.* p. 534.

<sup>777</sup>Boeve, 'Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe', (p. 107).

In a post-secular environment, the disappearance of religion as foretold by the secularisation thesis has not eventuated; instead, a ‘dynamic multi-religious society’ is evident. As Boeve explains, these societies may host a number of ambiguous and conflicting beliefs. Secular culture has not replaced the dominant belief system; instead, a range of belief options are available alongside the traditional. Detraditionalisation and pluralisation are two parts of the one process. This plural field has been assisted by patterns of global migration and technological advances that have shifted and connected people who in previous eras were less likely to cross paths. Even though tensions remain between a number of religious groups, there is a distinctive ecumenical and syncretistic outlook evident in these new movements and this speak to the changes evident in post-secular contexts.<sup>778</sup>

Boeve states that this pluralism has led to the inversion of the privileged status of Christianity in Europe. This may be the case in Europe, but is less applicable in the Australian context. Tom Frame notes that although Australia has a Christian heritage that continues to influence public life, Christianity never was the state religion, unlike a number of European nations.<sup>779</sup> Gary Bouma states that Australia is both nominally religious and nominally Christian.<sup>780</sup> In contemporary Australia, there is now an increased visibility of other religions and spiritualities alongside Christianity, with cross-pollenisation evident in this post-secular change. Bouma further argues that the plural religious landscape in Australia is growing and all indicators suggest that growth will continue.<sup>781</sup> These belief systems relate relatively peacefully with each other, showing strong ecumenical ties.<sup>782</sup> So, with both ecumenism and pluralism manifest in Australian society, I argue that religion and spirituality are large and syncretic fields of understanding, fostering beliefs that facilitate the growth of new movements.

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<sup>778</sup>Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*.p. 110.

<sup>779</sup>Frame, *Losing My Religion : Unbelief in Australia.*, p. 272.

<sup>780</sup>Gary Bouma, 'The Emergence of Religious Plurality in Australia: A Multicultural Society', *Sociology of Religion*, 56/3 (1995), 285-302.p. 287.

<sup>781</sup>Ibid. pp. 26–87.

<sup>782</sup>Ibid. pp. 299–300; Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution : The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality.*, p.16–17.

## Pluralism: Creation spirituality

Creation spirituality is a set of beliefs based on sacredness of the earth and its inhabitants, both human and non-human. It promotes the deepening of the relationship between humanity, the earth and God by encouraging reverence and mutuality through acknowledgement of the commonality of the sacredness that exists throughout all creation. Creation spirituality draws on biblical creation events, with a particular focus on the time before the fall of humanity, directing beliefs to considerations of God's unerring presence in all creation.<sup>783</sup> For creation spirituality, there is less emphasis on fallen humanity and more on the goodness of humanity and all creation. With a strong focus on sacredness and Indigenous religion and symbols, creation spirituality has had worldwide appeal, particularly with Matthew Fox in the US and his influence further afield in the UK with the Green Spirit organisation.

Fox is one of the seminal figures of the movement. His autobiography, *Confessions: The Making of a Postdenominational Priest*, offers an insight into the pluralism evident in this movement

Scales fell from my eyes; I was bumped from my horse! The most pressing question I had brought with me to Paris – how do mysticism and social justice relate (if at all)? – now had a context! So did the issues of dualism and the demeaning of body and matter. Creation spirituality would bring it all together for me: the scriptural and Jewish spirituality (for it was the oldest tradition in the Bible, that of the Yahwist author of the ninth or tenth century before Christ); science and spirituality; politics and prayer; body and spirit; science and religion; Christianity and other world religions. It would be my task to study creation spirituality more deeply and to begin a cultural translation of it. This task would prove to be a process in its own right with unforeseen consequences.<sup>784</sup>

It is difficult to estimate affiliation with this movement, but what is evident is the infiltration of mainstream religion by the principles of ecology theology. Certainly this movement can be

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<sup>783</sup>B Coman, 'Environmentalism and Catholicism in Australia: The Provenance of 'Creation Spirituality' and Some Implications Arising from the Idea.', *The Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Australia 2007 Annual Conference* (Campion College, Toongabbie, NSW, 2007). p. 4.

<sup>784</sup>Matthew Fox, *Confessions: The Making of a Postdenominational Priest* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997).

credited with reconnecting individuals to care for the earth and environmental responsibility. It is this intersection between contemporary concerns for the environment and ecological consciousness that has assisted the rise in expressions of this spirituality. In Australia, these expressions include the 1997 publication of *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, an ecumenical theological engagement between Christianity and Aboriginal culture, and the Ecofaith movement, an initiative of the Uniting Church in Australia. Both these movements see Indigenous knowledge systems as at the core of spiritual transformation in Australia, offering creation spirituality as an expression of the connectedness of creation to the Creator.

Defining creation spirituality presents a challenge due to the ambiguity of the language used in reference to it. Fox writes of it as integrating Indigenous cultures, seeing creation-centred spirituality as ‘cosmic... open, seeking, and explorative of the cosmos within the human person and all creatures and of the cosmos without, the spaces between creatures that unite us all’.<sup>785</sup> Although Fox and his followers are highly visible in reference to these beliefs, similar expressions were found by this researcher in other sources. The use of such terminology as open, seeking and cosmic is suggestive of a kind of abstract mysticism that is non-doctrinal, as well as one in which the causes of environmental destruction are less significant than relocating the relationship of humanity to nature.<sup>786</sup>

Not unlike the new monastic movement, creation spirituality seeks to reconnect its followers to a ‘local experience’ of religion, one which Tacey claims has been absent in Australia since the establishment of colonial religion here.<sup>787</sup> Tacey also writes of creation spirituality as affiliated with Indigenous culture and as fostering connection with and respect for the earth and ecology. These principles often coincide with new spiritualities, which appear to lack

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<sup>785</sup> Fox as quoted in Harold Wood, 'The Creation Centered Spirituality of Matthew Fox and His New Reformation of Christianity', (2006).

<sup>786</sup> Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*. pp. 37–39.

<sup>787</sup> Tacey, 'Environmental Spirituality', (p. 18).

organisational boundaries, allowing for a type of loose association with them that brings together people from diverse backgrounds and belief systems.<sup>788</sup> This involvement is encouraged by a very visible presence online, with numerous sites devoted to this spirituality and its contemporary manifestations.

One important aspect of creation spirituality is what Coman describes as the experiential considerations of adherents.<sup>789</sup> This movement relies heavily on what he says is the individual's subjective experience of the sacred in nature. This experience of the immanence of the sacred directs much of the belief and activity of the followers, who seek to more intimately exist in relationship with creation, and thereby the Creator.<sup>790</sup>

3. The blurring of the boundaries between different sectors of knowledge which juxtapose scientific, religious, esoteric and therapeutic discourse and practices.<sup>791</sup>

Peter Nynas uses the rise in popularity of therapeutic and wellbeing practices to indicate that secular and religious epistemologies increasingly intersect in popular culture.<sup>792</sup> Often these practices are promoted as self-help and are flavoured by spiritual knowledge such as eastern mysticism. This aspect is described as a transformation of religion, with some beliefs tied to continuity with the past, while others reflect modernity or a plurality of religious, world and life views.<sup>793</sup> Charles Taylor notes that these intersections bridge the humanist/spiritual divide, particularly those that combine therapy with spirituality.<sup>794</sup> These are indicators of the broadening of the understanding of spirituality and sacredness, both of which in contemporary understandings uphold individual choice and personal experience. On the other

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<sup>788</sup>Reside, 'The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century – by Gordon Lynch', (p. 63.

<sup>789</sup>Coman, 'Environmentalism and Catholicism in Australia: The Provenance of 'Creation Spirituality' and Some Implications Arising from the Idea.' p. 1.

<sup>790</sup>Ibid.

<sup>791</sup>Nynas, 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape in Finland'. p. 6.

<sup>792</sup>Ibid.

<sup>793</sup>Boeve, 'Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe', (p. 113.

<sup>794</sup>Taylor, *A Secular Age.*, p .513.

hand, this ‘pick-and-mix’ approach suggests there is less commitment to spirituality, and far more questioning of how it serves our personal needs. Individual needs may change over time; consequently, spirituality is understood less as a process of belonging and more about inner need and fulfilment.<sup>795</sup>

Tacey notes that as spirituality has become an individualistic phenomenon subject to constant change, people now bring their understanding of spirituality to the various fields of knowledge they interact with.<sup>796</sup> He also suggests this has given rise to a new sense of belonging.<sup>797</sup> This new spiritual sense has shifted across boundaries and epistemologies, bridging the faith/knowledge divide. As part of the post-secular spiritual quest of the individual, spiritual possibilities can be found in and through a range of experiences. In the various discourses on the environment, lifestyle and health, spirituality has become more explicitly evident. Rather than the decline of such understandings, spiritual quests has prompted a rise in the popularity of what may be considered by some to be a type of pseudo-spirituality. Rachael Kohn notes that this interchange of ideas and values is an exchange of the secular with the spiritual that is characteristic of this era.<sup>798</sup> The collapsing of the boundaries between seemingly opposing knowledge systems such as science and faith signals that secular and post-secular ideas and influences are concurrently circulating, and are dependent on each other for meaning.

### **Collapse in the boundaries of knowledge: Evolutionary Christianity**

While also crediting its beliefs with increased concern for the environment, evolutionary Christianity is a recent movement that has had wider implications for many followers of Christianity. The tension between evolutionary theory and Christianity remains, but this

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<sup>795</sup>Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution : The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality*.pp.44–45.

<sup>796</sup>Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>797</sup>Ibid. p. 44.

<sup>798</sup>Rachael Kohn, *The New Believers: Re-Imagining God* (Pymble, N.S.W: HarperCollins, 2003). p. 4.

movement seeks to bring together what is often perceived as being in opposition, namely science and belief. The personal order of God's relationship to humanity is contrasted with science's impersonal order, in which humans exist as result of general universal laws rather than on specific claims to benevolence on the part of a divine being.<sup>799</sup> Evolutionary Christianity's concern with the origin of the cosmos, humanity and all life forms is paramount, with creation as part of a greater 'natural' process initiated by the divine creator.<sup>800</sup> More distinct in terms of beliefs and principles than creation spirituality, evolutionary Christianity holds that the either/or view of the origins of the earth (either you are a creationist or an evolutionist) sets up a false dichotomy that has led to much conflict for Christians pressed to assume one position or the other.

In the book *Stories of Contemporary Christians: Towards Evolutionary Christianity*, a number of followers of this movement share their stories. Below are two excerpts that express the intersection of knowledge systems evident in this movement.

We no longer stay with biblical or medieval thought about everything else – medicine, science, politics, social structure – but for some reason many people think they have to stay with medieval theology that developed in an entirely different world view. To my mind, we have to interpret Christianity through 21st century spectacles. I am currently writing a book which seeks to do just that, linking up some of the new scientific insights from quantum physics and epigenetics to go beyond traditional theological interpretations of the Christ event and link with the idea of global shift that is now happening.<sup>801</sup>

Now I see the universe as an evolving whole. Time is never-ending so there is no final separation. We will end up whole. The ultimate reality is love, and this love longs to express itself. Evolution is the process through which this love is expressing itself in Creation.<sup>802</sup>

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<sup>799</sup>Taylor, A *Secular Age*.pp.362–63.

<sup>800</sup>Denis O. Lamoureux, 'Evolutionary Creation: Moving Beyond the Evolution Versus Creation Debate', *Christian Higher Education*, 9/1 (2010), 28-48.p. 28.

<sup>801</sup>Janice Dolley and Jane Ozanne (eds.), *Stories of Contemporary Christians Towards Evolutionary Christianity* (CANA, 2011).p. 22.

<sup>802</sup>Ibid. p.51.

As outlined by Tom Frame in his 2009 publication *Evolution and the Antipodes: Charles Darwin in Australia*, Australia has a long history of involvement in the debates surrounding evolutionary theory and the more recent development of evolutionary Christianity. While referring to the followers of this belief as ‘evolutionary theists’, Frame declares that ‘[t]he pre-nineteenth century depiction of creation as a single event at the beginning of time has been abandoned. Evolutionary theory requires creation to be understood as a continuous process rather than an isolated act completed in the distant past’.<sup>803</sup> This assertion may be a personal one by Frame, but the consequences of it are that science and the biblical account of creation are compatible and present no conflict. Weighing in on this debate in Australia is a network of organisations ranging from the more organised ‘Progressive Christianity’ group to academics and theologians. These debates have often circulated around arguments involving creation science and/or intelligent design, both of which fail to come to terms with the science;<sup>804</sup> the former upholds the Christian account of creation as literal,<sup>805</sup> while the latter views the natural world as evidence of a ‘guiding force’, not as a randomised process.<sup>806</sup> Frame quotes physicist Paul Davies, who asserts that many theologians now accept ‘God works through the evolutionary mechanism’.<sup>807</sup>

This movement can be viewed as post-secular due to the blurring of boundaries between science and religious knowledge and the incorporation of science. This aspect is explored by Gordon Kaufman, who believes that only by coming to terms with our biological evolutionary nature will we be able to attend to the ecological crisis besetting the planet.<sup>808</sup> Kaufman’s biohistorical approach is one in which evolutionary trajectories are initiated by God and situate humanity not as the apotheosis of creation but as entirely dependent on all

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<sup>803</sup>Tom Frame, *Evolution in the Antipodes: Charles Darwin and Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009b). p. 262.

<sup>804</sup>Ibid. p. 216.

<sup>805</sup>Ibid. p. 176.

<sup>806</sup>Ibid. p. 194.

<sup>807</sup>Ibid. p. 257.

<sup>808</sup>Kaufman, ‘Re-Conceiving God and Humanity in Light of Today’s Evolutionary-Ecological Consciousness’, (p. 338).

other aspects of creation.<sup>809</sup> Thus, humanity is fundamentally implicated in the ecological future, not by divine mandate but by obligation to the created order. This change to the established order of God, humanity, creation has far wider implications for Christianity and is a common thread in both evolutionary Christianity and creation spirituality.

Critical to this movement is the acceptance of a number of theological premises that involve a rethink of humanity in the light of the sciences. It is insistent that Christian theology dialogue with the sciences in order to gain fresh insights into the nature of humanity. Theologian Paul Jersild states that human nature's theological and biological paradigms are complementary, as they bring an 'indispensable perspective' to understanding the human person.<sup>810</sup> Thus, although evolutionary Christianity supports the meeting of science and religion, its most distinctive element is this rethink of the nature of humanity and, in turn, the relationship with the wider circle of creation.

#### INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

Underlining many of these possible post-secular characteristics is a drive towards non-dualistic or holistic understandings of life and the human person.<sup>811</sup> They also reflect the impact of globalisation, with the exchange and transformation of ideas and values both transnationally and via online communities. Furthermore, elements of a return to self are indicated; the changes to religion can be seen as part of the quest for self that identifies this particular age.<sup>812</sup> This is reflected in relation to religious identity, which is not understood as a pre-given or inherited reality, but as 'endlessly constructed' in post-secular contexts.<sup>813</sup> Concurrently, there appears to be a drive towards renewing older traditions and practices,

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<sup>809</sup>Ibid. p. 347.

<sup>810</sup>Jersild, 'Rethinking the Human Being in Light of Evolutionary Biology', (p. 38.

<sup>811</sup>Nynas, 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape in Finland'. p. 7.

<sup>812</sup>Taylor, *A Secular Age*.p. 509.

<sup>813</sup>Nynas, 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape in Finland'. p.7; Vaillancourt, *From Five to Ten Dimensions of Religion: Charles Y. Glock's Dimensions of Religiosity Revisited*.p .66.

making them relevant for contemporary applications.<sup>814</sup> So, what is found in post-secular situations is a mixture of revitalised practices and beliefs alongside more traditional forms. It should also be noted that the post-secular does not signal an end to the influence of secularisation; rather, as noted by William Keenan, society continues to be inflected with contrasting and often conflicting values and beliefs, secular and post-secular alike.<sup>815</sup>

The ongoing influence of secularisation in society does not nullify the growth of post-secular movements within it. Although secularisation continues to play a significant role in society, the disappearance of religion foretold by the secularisation thesis has not taken place; religion survived the immense drive towards secularisation.<sup>816</sup> Instead, as Boeve argues of Europe, a transformation of religion has taken place.<sup>817</sup> In what appears to be a reaction to overt secularisation, this transformation has seen the search for spirituality expand to transcend once rigid denominational boundaries. The transformation of religion suggests a number of processes at play in post-secular societies, such as detraditionalisation. Indeed, the post-secular does not signal the disappearance of already identified trends, but rather re-situates them within a growing religiosity.<sup>818</sup> For the movements discussed in this chapter, the contemporary cultural framework in which they function blends secular and post-secular, traditional and non-traditional, in an evolving and adaptive way that defies the secularisation theory. Consequently movements such as those discussed in this chapter will continue to surface and challenge the secularisation theory.

## **The post-secular future**

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<sup>814</sup>Nynas, 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape in Finland'. p. 2.

<sup>815</sup>William Keenan, 'Post-Secular Sociology: Effusions of Religion in Late Modern Settings', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5/2 (May 1, 2002 2002), 279-90.p.287

<sup>816</sup>Boeve, 'Religion after Detraditionalization: Christian Faith in a Post-Secular Europe', (p. 101).

<sup>817</sup>Ibid. p.101.

<sup>818</sup>Ibid. p.102.

As illustrated by the three movements discussed in this chapter, individuals are being directed toward seeking experience of new ideas and understandings of religion. The presence of these and other movements in Australia in recent years speaks of a need to connect to the past to recover elements of what has been lost, alongside a reinvigoration with contemporary elements. On one hand, the rise of conservative and fundamentalist movements indicates this repositioning of religion; on the other hand, the expanding choice of spiritual and religious practices is another influential undercurrent. Nonetheless, at the heart of these positions there remains the question of the individual's experience of faith. Post-secular change has resituated the self as directing its own spiritual and religious choices over and above the more traditional inheritance of beliefs.

Encounter with the sacred continues to resonate as an individual need, with the post-secular as a fundamental manifestation of this drive. On this point I agree with Tacey and others who have recognised the human need for connection to life principles and experiences beyond the self, offering purpose and connection to the sacred in the many forms that may take. At this time, post-secular notions speak of such connections due to an inherent resistance to the dominance of the secular in discussions of religion. It is no longer acceptable to say that religion is playing less and less of a role in society; what is acceptable to say is that the role of religion continues to change and requires further positive attention from contemporary commentators. This is the challenge called for by Habermas, one of the foremost thinkers in the European context. He has shifted the discussion of contemporary religion by demanding that secular society seek a new understanding of religious beliefs, one that moves beyond perceptions informed by situating religion as a relic of the past.<sup>819</sup> New movements are

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<sup>819</sup>Florian Schuller, 'Foreword' in Jürgen Habermas & Joseph Ratzinger, *The Dialectics of Secularization*, Florian Schuller (ed.), Brian McNeil (trans) (San Francisco CA: Ignatius Press, 2006), pp. 11–12.

testimony to the fact that religion is as relevant as ever, even if that relevance happens to be expressed in new and different ways.

There are a number of aspects that have assisted the growth of these movements, including the new millennium, ecological crises, technological advances and an individualistic culture. The rise of these movements adds interest and diversity to a growing range of spiritual options that tend towards destabilising traditional meanings while redefining them. The individuals involved may be seeking to understand their faith on levels that were not accepted in previous times. At the very least, their engagement with faith and spirituality shows us how this process is in constant flux and takes on new horizons during times of social change.

In this meeting of secular interests with the post-secular, it is essential to understand these changes as part of a broader move to, as Taylor notes, redefine and recompose the Christian faith.<sup>820</sup> The tight link between religion and identity has been decoupled and what is now taking place is the assembling of a type of personal ‘spiritual identity’ that runs both counter to and parallel with historical religious understandings and practices. Secularism, largely seen as heralding the demise of religion and religious identity, has instead become the fertile ground for this process. Post-secular movements such as those discussed here feed an alternative theory – that secularism has assisted the rise of new and vibrant spiritualities largely driven by individuals wanting to both grow and share their experience of the sacred.

## **Conclusion**

As little has been written about the post-secular phenomenon in Australia, it is still difficult to know to what extent the changes explored here will impact in the long term. At present, post-secular understandings are a largely untapped phenomenon, with most of the ideas and

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<sup>820</sup>Taylor, *A Secular Age*. p. 513.

discussion emerging from the United States and Europe, overlooking the changes in Australian society. The definition of post-secular posed by Nynas earlier in this article, as ‘complex and diverse changes that in different ways involve e.g. resacralisation or revitalisation of religion and transform the religious landscape in a profound way’, is applicable to the Australian context. Given that these movements are small and often found on the periphery of larger religious groupings and movements, it is questionable whether the ‘profound’ transformation alluded to by Nynas is occurring.

Additionally, the idea of the post-secular evokes optimistic responses from some commentators, of which David Tacey is representative, who refer to it as the turning of the religious and spiritual tide in Australia. However, there are also those who are concerned that it signals the rise of fundamentalism and the expansion and imposition of orthodox religious viewpoints in the public sphere. Above and beyond these concerns, this chapter is a reflection on how these movements indicate contemporary developments in religion that are situated in the wider context of social changes. The influences encompassed – green movements, experiential concerns, notions of the sacred, wellbeing practices and individualism, among others – contain contradictory values. However, it is no surprise that the changes on the religious landscape discussed here are as interesting and diverse as they are contrasting. These notions will continue to feed back into social and cultural discourse over time, influencing Australian society in as-yet unmapped ways. At the very least, these changes offer what Lynch describes as a ‘sacralised framework’ for considering these contemporary issues facilitating religious and spiritual exchanges in the wider public sphere.<sup>821</sup>

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<sup>821</sup>Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*.p. 163.

That there appears to be a strong link between social change and religion is a further indicator of the continuing presence of religion in Australian society. This is what the post-secular represents – the ongoing importance of religion in the social and cultural dialogue of Australia and contemporary changes to religious and spiritual identity.

**REFLECTION SUMMARY: THE ESSENCE OF THE POST-SECULAR**

- Post-secular processes include detraditionalisation and pluralisation that have transformed a search for meaning into a multiple field of experiences negotiated by individuals.
- Personal spiritual identity encompasses a range of seemingly contradictory positions such as care for the environment alongside the primacy of individual needs and concerns.
- Post-secular movements have renegotiated elements both within religions and outside religions including notions of the sacred, connectivity, belonging and autonomy.
- The presence of the post-secular within society is found in spaces where both individually and communally an active process of the rearticulation of religious meaning is taking place. Through this process some truths will be lost while others emerge