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

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## **PART A: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

### **Chapter 1. The Australian Context**

Australia was formally established as a secular nation-state at Federation in 1901 with the official separation of church and state.<sup>27</sup> The dominant historical view is that Australia is a secular nation, even though conflicting viewpoints still exist about whether Australia is a inherently secular or Christian nation.<sup>28</sup> These perspectives are primarily based on statistical data and trends in religious affiliation and participation that most often refer to patterns of decline. In this section, I will discuss the establishment of Australia as a secular nation-state and outline the influence of the secular and the presence of religion in Australian history. Central to this discussion is the influence of sectarianism on Australian social, cultural and political life and the changing role of religion in the public and private sphere.

Prior to colonisation in 1788, Australia was not secular, with many active and strong spiritual leaders and nations present. Through the forces of colonisation, often driven by the Enlightenment tendency to experimentation, new ideas were transplanted into Australia, including religious ideas and practices in a place predominantly viewed by the early colonisers as a godless land.<sup>29</sup> One of the key goals of colonisation was to achieve an ‘enlightened society’ and consequently, there needed to be political control of the ideologies and practices that circulated within it including religion.<sup>30</sup>

The institutional presence of religion was strong from early colonial times, with schools and other charitable organisations contributing significantly to the social and cultural fabric of early Australia, oftentimes in partnership with governing bodies and the state. From 1788

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<sup>27</sup>Stuart Piggin, 'Power and Religion in a Modern State: Desecularisation in Australian History', *Journal of Religious History*, 38/3 (09// 2014), 320-40.p. 330

<sup>28</sup> Graeme Innes, 'Are We Really the Secular Nation We Think We Are?', (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2009).

<sup>29</sup>John Harrison, 'Faith and Belief in "the Land of the Holy Spirit"', *Media Development*, 59/1 (2012), 14-18.p. 14.

<sup>30</sup>Kay Anderson and Colin Perrin, 'Essays Beyond Savagery', (14: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008), 146-69.

onwards, the major Christian denominations found in Britain initiated representation in Australia, with Anglicanism being the favoured denomination by the English authorities.<sup>31</sup> The free settlers and convicts were obligated to attend religious services and fulfil the accompanying observances, but ministers were often disappointed in the disinterest and lack of spiritual sentiment in their congregations and communities.<sup>32</sup> The plans for a well ordered establishment of states, aligned with the moral principles and guidelines offered by active Christian communities, struggled to eventuate, even though the institutional presence of religions grew significantly during these early stages.

As towns and settlements expanded during the 1800's, the great distances between the settlers and established churches was another barrier clergy and congregations faced. The intermittent attendance at worship services and catechetical events contributed to a culture of irreligiousness that fostered an attitude towards the established churches as allied with the gentry and wealthy landowners, isolating the working class and convict elements.<sup>33</sup> A culture of religious disinterest developed, alongside increasing sectarianism, which pitched mainly Irish Catholics against British Anglicans or Presbyterians, and which created significant divisions in society. The seeds of sectarianism are to be found in the historical legacy that the newly settled immigrants had experienced in Great Britain and transferred to the colony. These ongoing divisions continued to be experienced by Catholics and Protestants in Australia and were further fuelled by growing class tensions.<sup>34</sup>

Sectarianism played a significant role in the social fabric of Australia in the lead up to Federation. The division of the country along Catholic and Protestant lines was long-

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<sup>31</sup> Frame, *Losing My Religion : Unbelief in Australia*. p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 41-42.

<sup>33</sup> Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand* (Victoria: Penguin Books, 1987). p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> Blyth, 'A Historical Overview of Australian Religious Sectarianism Accompanied by a Survey of Factors Contributing to Its Dissolution', ( p. 83.

established and deeply entrenched. According to Hogan, sectarianism was still influential in Australia post-World War Two across all major institutions, social, political and economic.<sup>35</sup> Sectarianism in Australia was more than a denominational divide; it incorporated distinctly social and cultural forms. These included marriage taboos and corporate, employment and workplace favouritism, as well as an educational divide.<sup>36</sup> The establishment of the University of Sydney in the 1850s is one case in point. In reaction to ongoing sectarian concerns the University of Sydney was established as a secular institution that would not be dominated by any one church or denomination. Even though this was the foundational principle, residential colleges were built that housed students along denominational lines allowing for a religious and moral instruction.<sup>37</sup> Consequently the establishment of the first Australian university was viewed as a unique blend of formal secular teaching alongside student religious formation.<sup>38</sup>

Although Federation enshrined a unified approach to Australian political governance while declaring the constitutional favouritism of one religion over another was not to occur in Australia,<sup>39</sup> each of the states developed from distinct contexts that were often influenced by sectarian conflicts. This can be seen in the mid-nineteenth century elections in Victoria and New South Wales that saw heated debate between Catholic and Protestant representatives seeking adequate representation of their constituents, based on their historical ties to Ireland or England.<sup>40</sup> As Blyth states, ‘Australian Sectarianism is historically rooted in the divisive

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<sup>35</sup>Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand*.p. 237.

<sup>36</sup>Blyth, 'A Historical Overview of Australian Religious Sectarianism Accompanied by a Survey of Factors Contributing to Its Dissolution', (

<sup>37</sup> Julia Horne, 'Political Machinations and Sectarian Intrigue in the Making of Sydney University', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, 36 (2015), 4-15. p. 9.

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<sup>39</sup>Piggin, 'Power and Religion in a Modern State: Desecularisation in Australian History', (p. 330.

<sup>40</sup> Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand*. pp 64–65.

events between England and Ireland; primarily the two foundational events of this nationalistic division were the Protestant Reformation and the English conquest of Ireland'.<sup>41</sup>

Sectarianism has played a significant role in the development of Australia, as it affected the social, religious and political dynamics of the burgeoning nation. Socially, there was antagonism between denominational groups and individuals, with intolerance and occasional open hostility impacting social cohesion.<sup>42</sup> Religiously, sectarianism contributed to an anti-clerical sentiment that impacted church attendance numbers and an anti-religious sentiment that created a veneer of religiosity, with less depth and spiritual growth than was hoped for by the clergy.<sup>43</sup> Politically, the state and federal governments continued to financially and publically support the churches, through funding of the school system and affiliated services. Furthermore, political party lines were sometimes drawn up along denominational lines depending on the issue of the time. An example of this is the campaign around conscription during the First World War, which more often than not saw Protestant support and Catholic opposition, as reflected in political candidates of the time.<sup>44</sup>

Notwithstanding the secular demarcations in the political and educational fields, religious institutions continued to grow, with their influence present throughout Australian history. In particular, educational institutions, such as those founded by Mary McKillop and Fr Tennison Woods, were largely affiliated with a particular Christian denomination and predate the public school system in Australia. Political affiliations were also drawn along denominational lines.<sup>45</sup> The above overview of the historical context indicates that publically Australia never was a society completely dominated by the secular and has always had a relatively stable

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<sup>41</sup> Blyth, 'A Historical Overview of Australian Religious Sectarianism Accompanied by a Survey of Factors Contributing to Its Dissolution', (p. 83).

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

<sup>43</sup> Frame, *Losing My Religion : Unbelief in Australia*. p. 44.

<sup>44</sup> Blyth, 'A Historical Overview of Australian Religious Sectarianism Accompanied by a Survey of Factors Contributing to Its Dissolution', (p. 90).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. pp. 81–82.

institutional religious presence.<sup>46</sup> However, secular ideas and ideologies increasingly came to be viewed as the necessary concomitant of a progressive, non-sectarian, modern, liberal and democratic society.<sup>47</sup>

Australia continued to develop and retain strong intellectual, social and cultural ties with Europe and the US, where huge social and cultural changes were occurring.<sup>48</sup> Major events on one side of the world had ramifications across the globe and, with two world wars and the devastation these brought to many people, long-held ideas were being challenged. From this ferment, imported philosophies and ideologies began to impact on the relative isolation of Australian life.

The social and historical change that occurred after World War Two had a significant impact on Australia. Waves of migrants brought their religious beliefs and practices to the country, and alongside a conservative and relatively stable Anglo and Celtic Christian population, religion experienced what is mistakenly viewed by some as a 'golden age' of expansion and influence.<sup>49</sup> This was soon to be challenged by further social and cultural changes.

The 1960s presented Australia with its fair share of turmoil and social upheaval. The impact of the 1960s highlights just how closely Australia was aligned with its overseas counterparts. The western world was undergoing significant social and cultural changes, as long-held ideas and doctrines were questioned and often invalidated. In the academic world, the development of secularisation theory was at its apogee and institutional religion certainly appeared on the

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<sup>46</sup>Stephen Chavura and Ian Tregenza, 'Introduction: Rethinking Secularism in Australia (and Beyond)', *Journal of Religious History*, 38/3 (09// 2014), 299-306.p. 302.

<sup>47</sup> Anne Aly and Lelia Green, 'Less Than Equal: Secularism, Religious Pluralism and Privilege', 2008, 11/2 (2008-06-01 2008).

<sup>48</sup>Frame, *Losing My Religion : Unbelief in Australia*.p.106.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid. p. 64.

decline. On the other hand, spirituality, in a number of new and diverse forms, was being imported, embraced and moulded to Australian tastes.<sup>50</sup>

Australia followed this pattern of change for a number of years and experienced substantial diversification in belief systems. Although previously seen as an innocuous presence, the secular began to take hold in a range of fields and exert itself ever more forcefully. While the presence of militant secularism in Australia is often denied, this is not altogether accurate; in the halls of academia a war was being fought between secularists and traditionalists. Secularists saw the influence of religion on Australian society as negative and in opposition to progress.<sup>51</sup> Despite this, they continued to outwardly tolerate the presence of religion in the name of liberal- democratic freedom.

Even so, the secular also began to be called into question, not just in the halls of academia but also in the public square, as people reasserted their right to practice and experience spirituality and religion as an expression of their individual identity. Just as this move towards individual expression gained momentum, so too did the drive towards reasserting the secular nature of Australia. Secularists (comprising atheist, humanist, rationalist and sceptic voices)<sup>52</sup> gained visibility and began to exert their influence, calling for public spaces to be free of religious influence. Gaining momentum in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, particularly within the political arena, this influence became stronger and more visible. At the same time, changes in Australian society (i.e., new waves of migrants who brought with them distinct religious traditions) appeared and new concerns and fears were raised.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid. pp. 74–75.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid. p. 271.

<sup>52</sup>Gary Bouma et al., 'Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia', (Sydney: Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Bouma, *Australian Soul : Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century*. p. 6-7.

From both a political and ideological viewpoint, the secular has infiltrated areas previously untouched, including religious institutions themselves. Although this was cause for concern amongst religious people, the rest of the world was experiencing similar issues and was reconsidering the role and place of religion. It is at this point that some prominent intellectuals began to question the so-called dominance of the secular worldview, and to distinguish some social changes that would mark the end of this dominance. Although Australia has remained distanced from much of this debate, these changes were noticed here by key academics and discussion began about how they might impact Australia.<sup>54</sup> Some considered Australia to have never been truly secular in the first place, and that religion and spirituality always remained influential, merely ebbing and flowing.<sup>55</sup> Others see that the secular needs re-evaluation and that although we have understood Australia as secular, the definition of this is changing.<sup>56</sup> Others consider the secular as a way of life, simultaneously doctrine and practice that is just as much an ‘experienced’ reality as religion, and it is an individual choice.<sup>57</sup> From this perspective, the secular has become the default position and as problematic as religion.

Some scholars question how the secular became so influential and widespread so to inhabit and appropriate the public space, and to remain undisturbed there despite social changes.<sup>58</sup> Hence the perception that the secular has become an ideological force, programmed and impressed into the very fabric of Australian society.<sup>59</sup> In tandem with this perception is the awareness or understanding that the changing views on religion and spirituality cast the post-secular as an important aspect for the future of religion and spirituality in Australia, and the

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<sup>54</sup>Chavura and Tregenza, 'Introduction: Rethinking Secularism in Australia (and Beyond)', (p. 299.

<sup>55</sup> Bouma, *Australian Soul : Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century*. p. 5-7.

<sup>56</sup> Chavura and Tregenza, 'Introduction: Rethinking Secularism in Australia (and Beyond)', (p. 301.

<sup>57</sup>Bouma et al., 'Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia'. pp. 25–27.

<sup>58</sup> David Tacey, *The Spirituality Revolution : The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* (Sydney HarperCollins, 2003). p. 12.

<sup>59</sup>Bouma et al., 'Freedom of Religion and Belief in 21st Century Australia'.

wider global community. I discuss these perspectives in this thesis drawing on my research and interviews with academics who have long pondered the positions briefly outlined.

## SECTARIANISM AND SECULAR EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

One area in Australia marked by secular change and sectarianism is education. This aspect of Australian history has been extensively researched by scholars, so what I offer here is a summary of the major changes to education in Australia and how these are inherently connected to a secular agenda.

Education in Australia was strongly connected to the liberal discourse of eighteenth century England. The early colonial government and religious authorities in Australia saw education as a way to ensure the moral and social harmony and cohesion of an ethnically and culturally diverse colonial population.<sup>60</sup> The understanding of the secular at this point in time was not the same as it is now, but encompassed a range of ideas based on moral codes predominantly founded on Christian values, rather than being divorced from them.<sup>61</sup> There was a drive to reduce sectarianism in schools, but there was no fundamentalist secular push to have all or any references to God excised from public schooling. The elimination of sectarianism was central to the understanding of the secular at this time. This excerpt from the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus* in 1878 highlights the understanding of the time.

‘The great object of the department’, said Ramsay, ‘should be not to teach dogma, but a high moral tone’. He did not specify what type of education would produce a ‘high moral tone’, but fellow member of the Victorian lower house and former teacher, Mr Sergeant, gave his view. ‘... what was moral must be religious’ declared Sergeant to the sounds of ‘Hear, hear’ from fellow legislators. ‘If they taught the children what was right’, he

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<sup>60</sup> Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand*. p. 81.

<sup>61</sup>Remy Low, 'A Genealogy of the Religious Versus Secular Schooling Debate in New South Wales (Part II): Populism and Patriotism', *Journal of Religious Education*, 62/2 (07// 2014b), 53.p. 55.

argued, 'they would teach the fundamentals of religion'. Again the words 'Hear, hear' could be heard in the chamber. (*The Argus*, 18 October 1878, pp 9–10)

Historically, there was often a partnership between state and church schools, particularly before Federation. The arrival of clergymen with the First Fleet, and later arrivals in greater numbers, paved the way for the initial establishment of church-governed schools. While almost entirely Anglican in the first few decades, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist schools were established in the early to mid-1800s with changes to legislation that allowed for the diversification of the school system.<sup>62</sup> Although denominational schools were aided by the state and governed by the same authorities, the beginning of public schools grew out of opposition to denominational schools, particularly the growing Roman Catholic sector. This was coupled with an ongoing drive towards the establishment of a liberal secular state that had its sights on the elimination of religious sectarianism.<sup>63</sup>

The mid 1800s saw a distinct divide emerge between those who argued for 'free, compulsory and secular'<sup>64</sup> education and those who supported the existing denominational and private system. Between 1872 and 1893, all colonies introduced legislation for these changes.<sup>65</sup> The role of the state in education was hotly debated on a number of grounds, which included: the promulgation of morals and values without recourse to religion; the breaking down of the monopoly of Anglicanism in both politics and education; and the anticlerical views held by some in power.

The passing of the *Public Instruction Act 1880* (NSW) was a watershed moment in terms of consolidating this divide, as Prime Minister Henry Parkes made education compulsory while also retaining the teaching of religion in state schools. Linking government funding and

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid. p. 54.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid. p. 58.

<sup>64</sup>Peter Meadmore, 'Free, Compulsory and Secular'? The Re-Invention of Australian Public Education', *Journal of Education Policy*, 16/2 (2001), 113-25.p. 114.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

agendas to secular schooling and instruction might appear to amount to bolstering the secular–religious divide, but this was not necessarily the intent of Parkes’s reforms:

Surely the Catholic religion... cannot be a thing, the teaching of which renders it necessary to separate the Catholic children from the other children of the country. They must mix in after years, and be associated with each other in all the duties of everyday life. Let them be workers, traders, men of competent means; let them go anywhere they may, into whatever groove of society they come – they must mix with persons entertaining other opinions... let us remember that we are above everything else free citizens of a free commonwealth. Whether we are Englishmen, Scotchmen, or Irishmen, or whether we are the sons of some foreign land, over and above every other consideration we ought to be Australians.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, the Australian identity Parkes is constructing here is one of religious tolerance, maybe reflecting Australia’s already lukewarm approach to religion as evidenced in census data from that time, or reviving the early Enlightenment ideals which informed the colonisation of Australia. Even though Parkes appeared to offer a conciliatory hand, sectarian schooling remained a ‘fighting ground’ for years to come.<sup>67</sup> The *Public Instruction Act 1880*, far from heralding a new progressive secular age, indicates more about the place of religion in Australia at the time than anything else. It highlights the deep social rift present in education, as well as in wider Australian society. Secular schooling as a neutral meeting point of religious difference and disagreement was the prevailing idea at the time.

What the history of education in Australia points to is the problem of the secular when it is viewed as a neutral position and which in this context has been the overriding perspective. In the educational context, religious and secular schooling are positioned on opposite poles, but

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<sup>66</sup> Henry Parkes as quoted in Blyth, 'A Historical Overview of Australian Religious Sectarianism Accompanied by a Survey of Factors Contributing to Its Dissolution', (p. 93).

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

as Low indicates, these were understood to be different things at different historical times.<sup>68</sup> What is important here is that secular schooling was viewed as progressive and for the good of the nation, while religious (often Catholic) education was retrograde and divisive.<sup>69</sup> Protestant education at times aligned with secular/public schooling, as there was more readiness by those in power within the Protestant denominations to concede that religious instruction can be separated from education in general and still be effective and valuable.

As Sherington and Campbell note:

The legacy which the establishment of colonial public schools left was thus closely associated with the nineteenth century colonial liberal middle class Protestant agenda. Bureaucratically and centrally managed in the apparent interests of efficiency and good order, Australian public schools offered a secular education which was essentially a form of common Protestantism. Left out of this settlement, the Roman Catholic Church and its communities had to build schools based on local parishes and religious orders pledged to uphold the faith against the threat of the secular state. It was this sectarian divide that remained one of the legacies of colonial liberalism to Australian education.<sup>70</sup>

Marion Maddox has written extensively about the secular in Australia and particularly in Australian politics. Maddox contends that the oppositional status of secular and religious in Australia is not as straightforward as we are led to believe:

Australia is often held to be an extreme case among secular societies... contrary to reputation, religious concepts retain a considerable vitality in late-twentieth-century Australia. However, their meaning has shifted. Rather than statements of shared faith, they provide a way of expressing – and, sometimes, resolving – new anxieties and preoccupations.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Remy Low, 'A Genealogy of the Secular Versus Religious Schooling Debate in New South Wales (Part I): Terror and Suspicion', *Journal of Religious Education*, 62/1 (04// 2014a), 25. p. 30.

<sup>69</sup>Low, 'A Genealogy of the Religious Versus Secular Schooling Debate in New South Wales (Part II): Populism and Patriotism', (p. 59).

<sup>70</sup>Craig Campbell and Geoffrey Sherington, 'Australian Liberalism, the Middle Class and Public Education from Henry Parkes to John Howard', *Education Research and Perspectives*, 31/2 (2004),p. 62.

<sup>71</sup>Marion Maddox, *For God and Country Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics* (Canberra: Department of Parliamentary Library, 2001).p. 41.

## Religion and spirituality in Australia

In the Australian context, religion has been defined by the High Court in the 1983 'Scientology case' as follows:

(T)he criteria of religion are twofold: first, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief, though canons of conduct which offend against the ordinary laws are outside the area of any immunity, privilege or right conferred on the grounds of religion.<sup>72</sup>

This definition is the culmination of a set of historical events that took place both internally and externally to Australian society, where a diverse range of belief communities now practice religion and spirituality. These communities exhibit many different structures of belief and practice that influence individual ways of being and their worldviews. Although in Australia there is a strong presence of monotheistic faiths, there is also a growing presence of creed systems that may not subscribe to belief in a deity or deities; rather, they may consider other principles for guidance in their life journey.

Prior to European arrival, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lived out their beliefs as taught by oral tradition. Their complex belief systems incorporated reverence for ancestors and nature, often referred to as the Dreamtime or the Dreaming. This spiritual system is based on the interconnectedness of human and non-human entities and is lived through practices that include rituals, song and artistic expressions, alongside customary law and tradition.<sup>73</sup> Contact with external cultures and religions began well before settlement in the 1800s. It is now known that Aboriginal people in the north of Australia had contact with Muslim believers through trade with Indonesia over the last 500 years or so.<sup>74</sup> This mutual exchange

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<sup>72</sup>*Church of the New Faith v Commissioner of Payroll Tax (Victoria)*(1983–84) 154 CLR 120 at 136, quoted by Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 'Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups', <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/775012EF0058A77DCA25697E00184BDC?opendocument>>

<sup>73</sup> Bouma, *Australian Soul : Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century.*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>74</sup>Anthony Reid, 'Crossing the Great Divide: Australia and Eastern Indonesia', in Marshall Clark and Sally May (eds.), *Macassan History and Heritage* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013).

of ideas and beliefs left a legacy in language and practice that continues to evolve today, showing the changing nature of religion and culture in this country.<sup>75</sup>

With the arrival of the Europeans came a new set of beliefs, practices and traditions that were in, some aspects, in sharp contrast to those of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The greater majority of early settlers were adherents of the Church of England, but there were also small numbers of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists.<sup>76</sup> These small numbers have grown exponentially over the last 200 years and continue to be the largest denominations within what is still considered by some to be predominantly a Christian nation.<sup>77</sup>

Alongside Christian churches, Jewish people were also represented from these early times and remain a significant group in Australia,<sup>78</sup> while Chinese workers in the mid-1800s brought Buddhism with them; hence from the earliest days of the colonial era, Australia was a place in which different religious practices developed. These changes have continued right through to recent times and include the arrival of Hindus from the sub-continent seeking work opportunities and an increasing numbers of Buddhists in response to the devastation caused by the Vietnam War in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, Middle Eastern strife and instability has brought a growing number of Muslim immigrants.

## **RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION**

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<sup>75</sup> See P. Stephenson, *Islam Dreaming: Indigenous Muslims in Australia* (NewSouth Publishing, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Henry, Nicola, Kurzak, Karolina & Sherlock, Charles (nd), 'Religion in Australia', Fact Sheet (The Australian Collaboration), accessed at <[www.australiancollaboration.com.au/pdf/FactSheets/Religion-FactSheet.pdf](http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/pdf/FactSheets/Religion-FactSheet.pdf)>. pp. 1–2.

<sup>77</sup> Kevin Donnelly, 'We Are a Christian Nation under Threat', <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-05-21/donnelly-we-are-a-christian-nation-under-threat/6486830>>

<sup>78</sup> The Australian Collaboration, 'Religion in Australia', <<http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au/pdf/FactSheets/Religion-FactSheet.pdf>>

Figures on religious affiliation, released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), provide an interesting snapshot and have largely contributed to the current understanding of the nature of religion and spirituality in the country.<sup>79</sup> Statistics indicate that after the initial strong increase in Christian affiliation due to migration, there has been a steady decline in affiliation since 1911 as Christian affiliation fell from 96 per cent in 1911 to 61 per cent in 2011. Two of the major denominations, Catholicism and Anglicanism, have experienced the strongest decrease, from 2001 figures of 27 per cent and 21 per cent respectively to the figures indicated in Table 1.1. There were also small increases in some Christian denominations from 2001 to 2011, including Pentecostal denominations which rose from 1 per cent to 1.1 per cent.

**Table 1.0: Religious affiliations 2011.**

Religion	No. affiliated	Population	Proportion born overseas(a)
	'000	%	%
<b>Christian</b>	<b>13 150.6</b>	<b>61.1</b>	<b>22.9</b>
Catholic	5 439.2	25.3	24.0
Anglican	3 680.0	17.1	17.5
Uniting Church	1 065.8	5.0	11.4
Presbyterian and Reformed	599.5	2.8	26.3
Eastern Orthodox	563.1	2.6	43.6
Baptist	352.5	1.6	28.8
Lutheran	251.9	1.2	24.5
Pentecostal	238.0	1.1	32.6
Other Christian	960.7	4.5	31.0
<b>Non-Christian</b>	<b>1 546.3</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>67.0</b>
Buddhism	529.0	2.5	69.4
Islam	476.3	2.2	61.5
Hinduism	275.5	1.3	84.3
Judaism	97.3	0.5	48.9
Other non-Christian	168.2	0.8	57.2
<b>No Religion</b>	<b>4 796.8</b>	<b>22.3</b>	<b>22.5</b>
<b>Total(b)</b>	<b>21 507.7</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>26.1</b>
(a) Proportion of people reporting this religion who were born overseas.			
(b) Total includes inadequately described (supplementary codes) religions and people who did not state a religion.			

<sup>79</sup>Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 'Religious Affiliation', <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2071.0main+features902012-2013>>

Similarly in 2016 ABS census data the changes from 2011 to 2016 are evident with the most significant growth pattern indicated in the No religion category.

**Table 1.1: Religious Affiliation 2011-2016**

**RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS, 2011 AND 2016<sup>80</sup>**

Religious Affiliations	2011(a)		2016	
	Populations ('000)	Population (%)	Populations ('000)	Population (%)
<i>Christian</i>	13 149.3	61.1	12 201.6	52.1
Catholic	5 439.3	25.3	5 291.8	22.6
Anglican	3 679.9	17.1	3 101.2	13.3
Uniting Church	1 065.8	5.0	870.2	3.7
Presbyterian and Reformed	599.5	2.8	526.7	2.3
Eastern Orthodox	563.1	2.6	502.8	2.1
Other Christian	1 801.8	8.4	1 908.9	8.2
<i>Other Religions</i>	1 546.3	7.2	1 920.8	8.2
Islam	476.3	2.2	604.2	2.6
Buddhism	529.0	2.5	563.7	2.4
Hinduism	275.5	1.3	440.3	1.9
Sikhism	72.3	0.3	125.9	0.5
Judaism	97.3	0.5	91.0	0.4
Other	95.9	0.4	95.7	0.4
No Religion(b)	4 804.6	22.3	7 040.7	30.1
<b>Australia(c)</b>	<b>21 507.7</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>23 401.9</b>	<b>100</b>

(a) 2011 data has been calculated using the 2016 definitions.

(b) No religion includes secular beliefs (e.g. Atheism) and other spiritual beliefs (e.g. New Age).

(c) As religion was an optional question, the total for Australia will not equal the sum of the items above it.

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing, 2011 and 2016

Alongside the continuing decrease in Christian affiliation indicated from 2011 to 2016 there has been a slow but steady increase in those reporting to have no religious affiliation. Figure 3 is a graph comparing those who declare no religion over time from a 2013 ABS summary.<sup>81</sup>

Although this does not include the 2016 census data the increase remains steady and

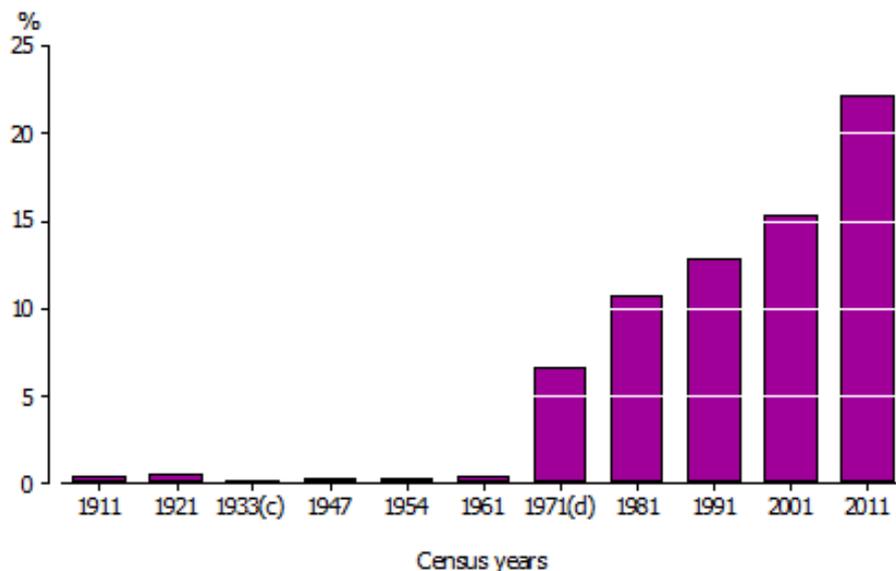
<sup>80</sup> Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 'Religious Affiliation', <<https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Religion%20Article~80>>

<sup>81</sup> Australian Bureau Of Statistics, 'Losing My Religion?', <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features30Nov+2013>>

substantial. There are a number of problems associated with these figures, as Gary Bouma pointed out recently:

The problem is the ‘no religion’ types are certainly not all atheists. In the last census there were only 31,000 who wrote in atheist in the census... Many people who say they have no religion might say they’re spiritual or engage in spiritual activities. It’s a very mixed bag. The intriguing thing to me is given the rate of rise, yes we now have those declaring ‘no religion’ being the first category in five out of eight of our states and territories.<sup>82</sup>

As Bouma notes, this is not a straightforward category and the conclusions reached through a cursory analysis of statistics will not give an accurate picture of what is taking place. The ‘nones’ as Bouma refers to in this category are ‘becoming the new "normal" in Australia. This has profound effects in ways that are only just becoming apparent’.<sup>83</sup>



- (a) Prior to 1971, people describing themselves as more than 50 per cent Aboriginal were excluded from the census
- (b) Includes (variously over time) atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, socialists, rationalists, humanists and people who stated ‘No denomination’ and ‘No religion’
- (c) In the 1933 census the public was specifically informed there was no legal obligation to answer the question on religion. ‘Not stated’ responses increased at this point.
- (d) In 1971, the instruction ‘If no religion, write “none”’ was introduced to the census.

**Figure 2: Percentage of people reporting no religion 1911–2011.**

<sup>82</sup>Gary Bouma, '2011 Census Reveals Rise of 'No Religion' ... But They're Not Atheists', in Andrew West (ed.), *Religion and Ethics Report* (ABC Online, 2012).

<sup>83</sup> Gary Bouma, 'Religion in Australia: What are the Implications of 'None' being the New Normal?' <<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/religion-in-australia-what-are-the-implications-of-none-being-th/10094576>>

Besides the information gleaned from the statistics, the legislative and constitutional protection offered to religion in Australia is indicated in section 116 of the Australian Constitution, which states that:

The Commonwealth of Australia shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.<sup>84</sup>

This section is reminiscent of the concerns of the founders of Federation regarding state interference in religious matters, and reflects the trend found at that time in other western nations. In Australia, there is a relatively widespread understanding that people are free to choose their religious and belief systems as long as they are respectful and law-abiding. This may be the governing idea, but this has not always proven to be the case. In recent years, in the wake of terrorist attacks overseas, domestic security measures have increased, with growing anxiety about some religious groups also increasing. The laissez faire attitude Australians were seen as holding towards religion and religious practice has, in fact, often proved to be superficial, reflecting the cultural attitudes and government policies of the time.

Furthermore changes to religious affiliation statistics, to some extent, reflect trends in other western nations including Britain and some European nations, with the United States as the exception. Surveys over the last few decades reflect the change in attitude towards religion in Australia. Below are two samples of research that paint a similar picture.

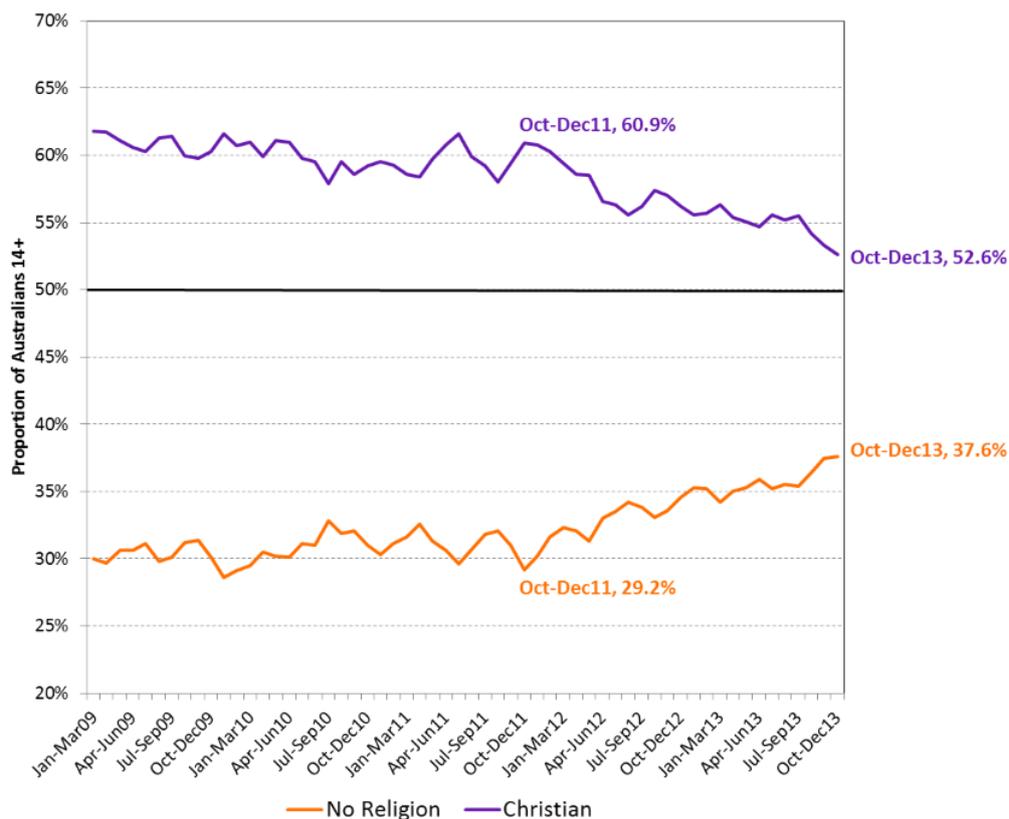
In the 1998 Australian Community Survey, 10 per cent of respondents stated that religion was the single most important category for describing who they are – and a further 11 per

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<sup>84</sup>Interfaith Australia, 'Australian Discrimination Laws', <<http://ic.org.au/interfaith/discrimination.html>>, accessed Decemeber 11 2015

cent said that religion was ‘extremely important’ to their identity, while 43 per cent said it was ‘not important at all’.<sup>85</sup>

According to Roy Morgan Research in 2014, as of late 2011 Christians outnumbered the non-religious by over two to one: 60.9 per cent of Australians over the age of 14 (= 11.4 million) said they belonged to a Christian denomination compared with 29.2 per cent (= 5.5 million) who said they had no religious affiliation. However, in the last quarter (October to December of 2013, only 52.6 per cent of Australians (= 10.2 million) were Christian, while 37.6 per cent (= 7.3 million) had no religion – halving the gap to 15 percentage points. If the recent trend continues, fewer than 50 per cent of Australians may self-identify as Christian by this time next year.<sup>86</sup>



<sup>85</sup>Collaboration, 'Religion in Australia',

<sup>86</sup>Roy Morgan Research, 'Christians in Australia Nearing Minority Status as Religious Affiliation Declines Sharply since 2011', <<http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/5541-fewer-australians-identify-as-christian-december-2013-201404152234>>

**Figure 3: Proportion of Australians 14+ who say they are members of a Christian denomination or No Religion.** (Source: Roy Morgan Research, January 2009 to December 2013, rolling quarters. Average quarterly sample n = 4840 Australians aged 14)

The research and statistics reflect a change in Australian culture but gloss over a number of emerging factors, including the growth in non-traditional churches such as Hillsong, the increase in private and non-government schools, and the growing move toward interfaith dialogue.<sup>87</sup> The decrease in mainstream religious affiliation has become the accepted narrative of religion in Australia, while spirituality is tolerated as a culturally present and ever-changing phenomenon. The next section will discuss changes within the largest representation of Christians in one mainstream religion, The Catholic Church, with an emphasis on lay movements.

### **Growth in lay movements in the Catholic Church**

Lay movements (also called ecclesial movements or communities) have been present in Australia from the early history of Christianity . A number of communities have more recently become popularised, particularly in the light of the new evangelisation and the recognition of the crucial role that the laity plays in the ongoing life of the Church. Some of these communities have also been the subject of media interest, contributing to a somewhat controversial status in the public's understanding. This section will discuss some examples within the Catholic Church, with some of these movements promoting ecumenism and attracting members from a range of Christian backgrounds. Additionally, these same changes – greater involvement and formation of the laity – are occurring across Christian denominational lines.

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<sup>87</sup>Collaboration, 'Religion in Australia',

Ecclesial movements, inspired by a desire to live the Gospel more intensively and to announce it to others, have always been manifest in the midst of the People of God. ... In our day and particularly during recent decades, new movements have appeared that are more independent of the structures and style of the religious life than in the past.<sup>88</sup>

The growth in Australia mirrors a worldwide growth in lay movements, documented by Brendan Leahy in his 2011 book *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance and Issues*.<sup>89</sup> Leahy discusses the plethora of organisations that have arisen since the middle of the twentieth century. Leahy's book looks at some of the 122 new movements categorised in the Pontifical Council's *Directory of International Associations of the Lay Faithful*, of which a significant number are represented in Australia. Gary Bouma also lists a number of these organisations, including Opus Dei, in *Australian Soul*, claiming that these revitalised movements are characteristic of post-secularity.<sup>90</sup> In a sense, the term 'lay movements' is a misnomer, as these groups will also have priests and religious involvement, reflecting a whole-church perspective rather than being an exclusively lay group.

The evangelisation of the laity is the foundation of the turn towards reaching out and incorporating the laity in all aspects of parish life. The decline religious vocations has, to some degree, increased the need to build a strong lay community to retain parish services, build parish life and form parish identity. Vatican II was, in part, the catalyst for changes in the approach to the role of the laity, marking a clear shift in emphasis from 'territory to people', reflecting the biblical and theological shift from the church to the 'people of God'.<sup>91</sup>

The distinctly ecclesial nature of this shift to mobilising the laity is based on what is viewed as the need to evangelise the secular world. Cardinal Arinze states, 'The essential feature of

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<sup>88</sup> Pope John Paul II as quoted in Dominic Cudmore, 'The Emmanuel Community', *Australasian Catholic Record*, 89/2 (2012), 186-207.p. 186.

<sup>89</sup>Brendan Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance and Issues* (New York: New City Press, 2011).

<sup>90</sup>Bouma, *Australian Soul : Religion and Spirituality in the Twenty-First Century*.p. 102.

<sup>91</sup>Brian Lucas, 'Building Parish Communities through Better Communication', *Australasian Catholic record*, 81/4 (10/2004, 410-30.p. 411.

the layperson's role is the vocation to bring the spirit of Christ into the arenas of secular life from within, i.e. into the family, work and profession, trade and commerce, politics and government, mass media, science and culture and national and international relations'.<sup>92</sup> In the face of the fear of an impending secular tide, strengthening and mobilising the laity may be seen as a necessary strategy. Below are some examples of lay movements that have impacted in Australia over the last 10 years, highlighting the growing understanding that the laity comprise 99 per cent of church membership and play a crucial role in evangelisation.

### PASSIONIST COMMUNITIES

Passionist communities are made up of priests, nuns and lay people whose spirituality is based on principles of community worship, service and mutual support. These communities can be aligned with parishes, as in St Brigid's, Marrickville, one of the largest parishes in Sydney, or more contemplative and communal, such as the community of ordained and non-ordained at the Holy Cross Centre in Templestowe, Victoria. Active contemplation sums up the blend of ministry and contemplative spirituality practiced.<sup>93</sup> The first Passionist family groups were established in Australia in Terrey Hills Parish, Sydney, in 1973. This has since grown into an international community, primarily situated within parishes and building parish life.

Parish life revolves around support structures that connect individuals and families for the purposes of building faith and identity in an often impersonally large parish. The smaller networked groups foster a sense of belonging and ministry, while building up the entire parish through these groups.<sup>94</sup> These extended family-like structures are used to allay isolation

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<sup>92</sup>Catholic World Report, 'Cardinal Arinze on the Role of the Laity', <[http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/2629/cardinal\\_arinze\\_on\\_the\\_role\\_of\\_the\\_laity.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Item/2629/cardinal_arinze_on_the_role_of_the_laity.aspx)>, accessed November 11 2016.

<sup>93</sup>Holy Cross Centre, 'Who Are the Passionists', <[http://holycrosscentre.com/p\\_community/](http://holycrosscentre.com/p_community/)>, accessed Nov 11 2016.

<sup>94</sup>Lucas, 'Building Parish Communities through Better Communication', (p. 417).

and encourage participation, so a spirituality of support and communion through life's struggles and joys is encouraged.<sup>95</sup>

## OPUS DEI

Opus Dei in Australia has a relatively small membership; even so, it is considered to have a strong influence on political and social life. The Opus Dei website states it has 85,000 members worldwide, with a 2008 article stating the membership in Australia at that time was 500.<sup>96</sup> A significant number of these members are active in public life.

The organisation began in Australia in 1963 and is based on principles that foster holiness in everyday life and in every sphere of human endeavour. Its lay spirituality is a foundational part of the movement's vision. This lay spirituality involves an understanding of how daily life, especially work, is a path to holiness. Holiness in this context is grounded in imitation of Christ and the practice of the themes that emerged from the Vatican II which looked at the role of the laity and the universal call to holiness.<sup>97</sup>

The growth of Opus Dei is evident in the opening of spiritual and doctrinal centres in and around Sydney and in other Australian states; at the time of writing, Opus Dei activities are hosted by schools, educational facilities and parish facilities. One example is Harkaway Hills College, which opened in 2016 in Victoria. Like its New South Wales counterparts, the school features an educational philosophy based on the development of the whole person supported by the cultivation of the human virtues. Opus Dei is often labelled as conservative and right wing by the press, who suggest it has powerful connections, both financial and

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<sup>95</sup>National Office For Evangelisation, 'Passionist Family Group Movement',

<<http://www.evangeliseaustralia.com/directory/passionist-family-group-movement.html>>, accessed November 11 2016.

<sup>96</sup>Caroline Overington, 'Opus Dei More Transparent Than Legend', *The Australian*, July 15 2008.

<sup>97</sup>Opus Dei, 'Frequently Asked Questions About Opus Dei', <<http://www.opusdei.org/en-us/faq/#what-is-opus-dei>>, accessed November 7 2016.

spiritual to the Vatican. This may be the case, but the impact that individuals experience in their lives through their involvement in the organisation is noteworthy.<sup>98</sup>

#### NEO-CATECHUMENATE

Beginning in Australia in 1977, the Neocatechumenal Way has an estimated one million members in some 40,000 parish-based communities around the world.<sup>99</sup> This movement focuses on a spirituality of post-baptismal formation, mission and liturgy. It is a re-envisioning of the early church to meet contemporary needs, including the role of the laity and more active participation in the liturgy and the Eucharist.

Like Opus Dei, this organisation has not been without controversy. Questions regarding the validity of some practices, the power of the organisation in parishes, and the exclusivity of its membership, have left the movement with question marks over its legitimacy.<sup>100</sup> Regardless of these controversies, a number of parishes and centres are in operation in Australia, including a recently opened seminary in Sydney. On the basis of service to the poor, the community-based structure of the Neocatechumenal Way attracts families and individuals to its participatory rituals and intimate settings, where all members enter into the sacred space and share knowledge and story.<sup>101</sup>

When Pope Paul VI met with the Neocatechumenal Communities for the first time, he stated:

Here are the fruits of the Council! And this is something that consoles us enormously. You accomplish after baptism what the early Church once did before it: before or after is secondary. The fact that you aim at the authenticity, at the fullness, at the coherence, at the sincerity of Christian life. And this is a great merit that consoles us enormously.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *An inside Look at Opus Dei* (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2005), Abc (dir.).

<sup>99</sup>The Record, 'Neocatechumenal Way Co-Founder Carmen Hernández Dies at 85', *The Record*, (2016).

<sup>100</sup>Ian Ker, 'Neocatechumenal Way: The Age of the Neocats', *The Catholic Herald*, July 17 2008.

<sup>101</sup>Emanuela Contiero, 'Italian Catholicism and the Differentiation of Rituals: A Comparison of the Neocatechumenal Way and Renewal in the Spirit', in Giuseppe Giordan and Enzo Pace (eds.), *Mapping Religion and Spirituality in a Postsecular World* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 12–17.

<sup>102</sup>Leahy, *Ecclesial Movements and Communities: Origins, Significance and Issues*.p. 45.

## EMMANUEL COMMUNITY

A worldwide community of priests, religious and laity with 9000 members, the Emmanuel Community<sup>103</sup> has a small but global membership. Emmanuel Community spirituality is based upon the need to extend the love of Jesus as a force for renewal in the Church and beyond. With worship and praise as the basis of liturgy and the Eucharist, the Emmanuel Community has outreach branches to youth in particular, inviting commitment to mission and active participation in community. As an offshoot of the Catholic charismatic movement, Emmanuel Community is present across Australia, with a number of centres in capital cities.

Its blend of traditional practices (such as Eucharistic adoration) with contemporary activity (such as World Youth Day participation) captures what is typical of the movements discussed here. There is a reinterpretation and a reinvigoration of the early Church teaching and practice calling movements towards a participatory role in communion with others.

Characteristic of many of the new ecclesial movements and communities was the conviction that their followers were Christian believers 'on the way together' with fraternity and fellowship as core elements of their existence. This sense of community and fraternity were deeply Christo-centric and only through and in Christ did the new initiatives consider true community and mutual fraternal like-mindedness to be possible.<sup>104</sup>

### **Growth in religious orders**

Another aspect that requires mention in this section is the growth of religious vocations over the last 10 years. Predominantly viewed as on the decline, religious orders in Australia have been challenged in terms of sourcing new vocations, with a number of them experiencing a

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<sup>103</sup>Emmanuel Community, 'Presenting the Emmanuel Community', <<http://en.emmanuel.info/the-community/presenting-the-emmanuel-community/>>, accessed November 11 2016.

<sup>104</sup>Cudmore, 'The Emmanuel Community', (p. 188).

sharp drop in numbers. Table 8.1, below, shows the changes in numbers from 1901 to 2009, with significant declines over the last 50 years or so.<sup>105</sup>

**Table 1.2: Australian religious personnel 1901–2009.**

<b>Category</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1926</b>	<b>1951</b>	<b>1966</b>	<b>1976</b>	<b>2009</b>
Sisters	3,622	8,141	11,245	14,622	12,619	5,927
Brothers	388	837	1,532	2,163	2,089	884
Clerical religious	195	432	1,087	2,628	2,321	1,611
Total	4,205	9,410	13,864	19,413	17,029	8,422

These figures paint a bleak picture, with the same report noting the median age of all religious in Australia in 2009 was 73 years.<sup>106</sup>

Nonetheless, more recent changes indicate a growth in some orders and the establishment of new orders . As noted by Dixon, although many members of orders were born in Australia, a growing percentage are now born outside of Australia and are sourced from more than 60 countries worldwide accounting for some of the growth discussed here.<sup>107</sup> This push to bring priests to Australia from overseas has given religious orders and parishes a global identity.

An example of this is in sourcing seminarians:

To compensate for the lack of local vocations, Australian bishops have, for several years now, increasingly sought seminarians from overseas, increasing their reliance on other churches. Since 2011, one in every two seminarians enrolled in Australia’s 6 diocesan and 2 Neocatechumenal Way seminaries have been born or recruited from overseas, a pattern likely to continue.<sup>108</sup>

**Table 1.3: Diocesan and Neocatechumenal Way (NCW) seminaries and seminarians preparing for Australian territorial dioceses, 2010–13.**

<sup>105</sup>Robert Dixon, Stephen Reid, and Noel Connolly, 'See I Am Doing a New Thing: The 2009 Survey of Catholic Religious Institutes in Australia', *ibid.*88/3 (2011), 271-83.p. 274.

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Bob Dixon, 'The Catholic Community in Australia: A Profile by Dr Bob Dixon', <<https://catholicschoolsguide.com.au/catholic-education-featured-articles/faith-and-spirituality/the-catholic-community-in-australia/>>accessed 20/02/2019.

<sup>108</sup> Peter Wilkinson, 'Who Ministers in Australia’s Parishes?', *The Swag*, (2014).

Date	Seminaries	Diocesan Seminarians	NCW Seminarians	Total Seminarians	Overseas-born (% of total)
July 2010	8	167	38	205	N/A
November 2011	8	145	35	180	100 (56%)
November 2012	8	158	34	192	86 (45%)
December 2013	8	169	37	206	106 (51%)

Australia has a diverse base of religious orders that were either established here (such as the Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Sacred Heart), or have a branch here but are based overseas (such as the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary). A scan of the vocation directory on the Catholic Vocations Ministry Australia website gives an indication of the diversity of orders in Australia.<sup>109</sup> This diversity reflects the changing population and indicates an evolution in needs, both social and spiritual, within Australia. There is an indication that some orders are becoming popular in Australia and are experiencing something of a revival in vocations, although no longer-term study can be found that indicates a significant trend as yet.<sup>110</sup>

## **Australian politics and religion**

Although considered a predominantly secular country, politics in Australia has also undergone a change, with a return to religion in the public square becoming more and more evident. At both federal and state level, representation of Christians in politics is high. Much has been written about this, particularly in relation to the Coalition governments of John Howard and Tony Abbott, but reference has also been made to former Labor Prime Minister

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<sup>109</sup>Catholic Vocations Ministry Australia, 'Vocation Directory', <<http://www.catholicovocations.org.au/Home/Catholic-Life/Vocation-Directory>>, accessed November 18 2016.

<sup>110</sup>Barry Coldrey, 'Australia's Seminaries Flourishing in 2015', *AD2000*, 28/3 (April 2015). Although AD2000 is not an academic journal I thought it important to include this point here to indicate a possible future direction.

Kevin Rudd and, at the state level, former NSW Premier Mike Baird<sup>111</sup>. Under Abbott in particular, almost half of the front bench were reported to be practicing Catholics.<sup>112</sup> Over the last 20 years, religion in politics has come under scrutiny in often controversial ways, with claims that the Christian right has too much power in what is essentially a secular country; however, as argued by Marion Maddox,

Secular structure has proved permeable to the sacred's destabilising residues or incursions, which, in every case, have turned out to have significant political effects. However, the effects are not uniform: religion does not (contrary to common interpretation) produce consistent leanings either to the right or to the left. Instead, each instance examined here reflects the dual tendencies of religion, at times investing the hierarchically-ordered status quo with an aura of religious legitimation, at other times challenging existing structure by a social critique from the margins.<sup>113</sup>

The fact that religion causes a stir in Australian public life on a regular basis in this way suggests that there are more significant tensions between religious and secularising forces in Australian culture than one would expect and, thus, that religion plays a stronger role in Australian public life than theories of secularisation (or secularists) would predict.

As a nation, political governance often uses the language of spirituality in a range of matters. As noted in previous chapters the deployment of religion spans national events such as the ANZAC Day commemorations and other national experiences. This is not accidental; it is an effective way to deploy values and communicate ideas, without which some of these strategic issues of governance would have less public impact. As Maddox notes,

The 1998 Constitutional Convention recommended constitutional recognition of Australians' 'spiritual wealth'. Looking back over his Prime Ministership, Labor elder Paul Keating declared the tasks of the office to include 'nurturing the spirituality of the nation'. In the public soul-searching about 'national identity' which characterised the lead-

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<sup>111</sup> Jonathan James, 'As Australia Becomes Less Religious, Our Parliament Becomes More So', *The Conversation* (2017).

<sup>112</sup> Jonathan Swan, Lisa Visentin, and 'Coalition Celebrates a Religious Easter: Eight of 19 Cabinet Members Are Catholic', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, April 20 2014.

<sup>113</sup> Maddox, *For God and Country Religious Dynamics in Australian Federal Politics*.pp. 258–86.

up to the republic referendum and the Centenary of Federation, strictly secular political language seemed to strain when required to contain modern Australia's ideas of nationhood and collective experience.<sup>114</sup>

In addition to the messages communicated in the public square, few Australian Prime Ministers have been notable believers, being for the most part marginal or nominal.<sup>115</sup> That these messages regarding spirituality have emerged from what is viewed as a secular space is therefore noteworthy.

Changes that can be considered significant in the intersection of religion and politics and that have forced religion to a pristine position include the demise of sectarianism and a united Christian constituency.<sup>116</sup> The religious flavour of Australian politics presents a rising conservative profile that has seen a number of key politicians in recent times promoting a return to conservatism in social policy.

This chapter examined historical and contemporary aspects of the context of religion in Australia.. This discussion will continue in chapter 9 with an exploration of case study examples. The following chapter will explore hermeneutic phenomenology, and the philosophical underpinnings of this methodology.

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>115</sup>Marion Maddox, 'God under Gillard: Religion and Politics in Australia', <<http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2011/11/10/3360973.htm>>

<sup>116</sup>Gregory Melleuish, 'Religion and Politics in Australia', *Political Theology*, 11/6 (12// 2010), 909-27.p. 915.