THE SOCIAL ROLE OF RELIGION

Religions are social constructs, created and maintained by human beings who often believe them to have divine guidance and approval. Religions naturally vary from time to time and from place to place. This often frustrates their more conservative adherents who believe that, as divinely sanctioned agencies, they should not change unduly from the original model. Even in a thoroughly modern society like Australia, many religious traditions, practices and attitudes have been maintained which were developed in past societies, long before the existence of Australia was known to the outside world. Yet, at the same time new ideas and formations are constantly arising. Societies change and religious communities change accordingly, or may go into decline or fragment. Revival and reformist movements may affect these trends, and faith communities may be divided between those who want change and those who believe that things must remain as they have always been.

These adjustments often mean that many popular arguments about the truth or merits of different religions can be futile or misconceived. The same might be said of the sweeping attacks on religion by atheists such as Michael O'Flaherty and Tamas Parkhali. Their arguments are centered upon two propositions: that religions are based on unprovable beliefs, and that organised religions have done more harm than good to humans. Accusations based on remote historical myths are usually not legitimate. Catholics and Protestants no longer burn each other at the stake, and the Crusades occurred a long time ago. Religions, in general, survive and prosper throughout the world and in all societies. While religious change as societies change, they are also very resilient. The remarkable revival of religion in Russia after three generations of official atheism is only the most recent example. The five ideological systems dominating the past two centuries - Christianity, liberalism, conservatism, socialism and nationalism - have overlapped, struggled against each other, adopted different forms and theories and even cooperated. All have influenced Australia. Christianity has always been significant, even when divided among a variety of advocates.

The faithful take such revivals and survivals as evidence of the working of supreme beings or eternal laws. Yet, it could also be argued that religions are cultural phenomena that can maintain and reproduce themselves within an overall context of complex cultures, languages and traditions. It might also be argued that particular faiths are 'true' or 'false' only within their own terms and traditions, or for their own adherents. One thing remains constant: that religions of some sort or another exist everywhere and have done so for thousands of years. Political regimes that attempt to suppress religions are far more likely to wither and die than the religions they aim to replace. Secular ideologies may last for a few generations, but religious beliefs usually last much longer. In recent years, only two regimes - the governments of Cuba and North Korea, both communist - have tried to abolish religion altogether. One authoritarian system, whether communist or fascist, has either compromised with religion or actively endorsed religion as official. Religious beliefs and loyalties are often more deeply embedded within the culture than are secular ideologies. While the intensity of religious belief varies greatly from one era to another and from one society to another, it does not vanish altogether.

The challenge to religion in a modern, secular society such as Australia, which has a recently developed national culture, is indifference rather than persecution. Almost one-third of the Australian population does not participate in, nor manifest much interest in, religious activity. Almost one in five are prepared to state, at least on a census form, that they have 'no religion'. These are the 'great unchurched' of evangelical camp meetings. The largest component among past Australian nation builders were the English, many of whom were already secularised over a century ago. These may have created four or five generations of religiously indifferent Australians. But other elements in the new society - especially among the Irish, Welsh, Scots, Germans and Corsairs - were highly organised around Christian beliefs, which they brought with them and recreated in the new society. This did not lead to the overwhelming religiosity manifest in the United States, but it did mean that Australia was influenced more by evangelical Protestantism and active Catholicism than England was as a whole. Despite its unorthodox origins, modern Australia soon created effective Christian denominations on the basis of widely held basic beliefs. Until quite recently, most Australians were prepared to take part in such religious rites of passage as baptisms, weddings and funerals. Despite the rise of secular alternatives, a majority still do.

Religion clearly fulfills many important social and psychological functions, even for those who do not actively subscribe to a particular creed. Religious have fed into the national culture a wide range of moral, behavioural, political and social practices and attitudes. Many of these have become internalised over time, even within those who are not consciously religious. Public authorities have recognised the social value of religion. Despite the apparent separation of church and state in the Australian Constitution of 1901, there remains as close an engagement between religions and the public sphere as in the United Kingdom, with its two established churches. Public funds have been available to support religious activity since the earliest days of modern Australia. This factor is now of central importance in education, welfare, health, migrant settlement and support for established institutions. In contrast, religion in general is less influential in determining public morality than in the past.

RELIGION AND AUTHORITY

Many political societies have endorsed a single religion as compulsory for all their subjects. Secular authority thus becomes divinely justified. This practice can be traced at least to the ancient Egyptian dynasties, and was also favoured by the Roman Empire at various times. The emperor Anaka (d. 218 BCE) tried to impose Buddhism over much of India more than 2000 years ago, with limited success. The Catholic Church expected obedience in the Holy Roman Empire. Its Lutheran opponents likewise required obedience in those Germanic and Nordic states that were ruled by Protestant monarchs. The English Reformation of 1534 created the Church of England as the sole legitimate religion, headed by the monarch Henry VIII. It is still the established church of England, and is still headed by the monarch today. A royal coat of arms was placed in every church and prayers were regularly said for the monarch. Clergymen sat as magistrates and administered the parish Poor Law funds until 1834. This tradition was continued in Australia through the judicial role of Anglican clergyman such as Samuel Marsden (1765-1838).

It was these traditions of a state church that were brought to Australia in 1788, as compared with the separation of church and state enforced by the Baptists and Congregationalists who colonised New England 150 years earlier. In the United States, Virginia, had already disestablished the Anglican church in 1786, before Australia was founded. But by 1788 the absolute monopoly of the English church had already been modified, both in practice and in law. The Scottish Church was, in any case, established north of the border, but Scottish influence was weaker in early Australia than in Canada or New Zealand at the same time. Ireland was quite anomalous. The great majority was Catholic or Presbyterian, but the (Anglican) Church of Ireland was given official status until 1869.
The greatest challenge to the official dominance of the Church of England came from Nonconformists—Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Quakers, and Presbyterians. They had already gained considerable freedom to worship during the century following the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688. Such tolerance was not extended to Catholics and Jews until later. But adherents of both of these religions enjoyed more effective citizenship in Australia than in the United Kingdom from early in the 19th century. The variety of Christianity was legally recognised by the New South Wales Church Act of 1816, which began the process of subsidising the major denominations from public funds. Shortly after, German Lutherans in South Australia were added to the denominational mix in a new colony that had evangelistic origins. One advantage Australian Nonconformists enjoyed was the absence of a conservative House of Lords as in the United Kingdom, which persistently defended the monopoly and practices of the Church of England, whose bishops sat as members.

The battle over established state religion was won in Australia very quickly and easily, even if the Church of England remained numerically dominant until the 1970s. The Australian Constitution of 1901 is widely quoted as preserving the separation of church and state. This is not indisputably the case, nor is it true for the state constitutions that preceded federation. The actual wording of section 116 is:

The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, 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.

This has not prevented the Australian government from spending vast sums of public money on religious schools since the 1960s. It did not prevent the states and territories from imposing rigorous restrictions on Sunday observance, or from providing free land for religious buildings. Nor did it prevent the Constitution from calling on “the blessing of Almighty God”, nor the Parliament from opening its sessions with a prayer. The separation of church and state has been much more liberally interpreted in Australia than in the United States. In practice, it corresponds closely to the situation in the United Kingdom, where church and state are formally united. Section 116 has become a “religious myth”. Nevertheless, there is a widespread belief in the proper limitation of religion in public affairs, leading, for example, to criticism of the appointment of the Anglican archbishop Peter Hollingworth as Governor-General in 2001.

RELIGION AND MORALITY

From Australia’s earliest days as a convict colony, the British authorities were anxious about the moral condition of their subjects. The Christian denominations saw their role as threefold: justifying authority, improving the moral calibre of the settlers and acting as missionaries to the Indigenous population. The preponderance of males among the convicts and soldiers presented special problems in the prevalence of prostitution, “irregular” marriages and exploitation of Aboriginal women. Early attempts to remedy the male predominance included offering assisted passage only to females in the 1810s. But this did not answer the needs of employers. Family migration was instituted at the end of that decade, and continued to characterise all government-funded and controlled migration for a century and a half.

Women were described as “God’s police” by the Catholic immigration reformer, Caroline Chisholm (1808–77). They had the responsibility of tempering the passions and sins of men. As the Earl of Aberdeen wrote to Governor Bourke in 1835, disparity of the sexes “renders the accession of females of virtuous and industrious habits in the highest degree essential”. Assisted migrants were expected to provide a reference from their local Anglican or Nonconformist minister, or from Presbyterian or Catholic equivalents in Scotland and Ireland. This was most rigorously applied to single women, who were mainly brought out as domestic servants, with the prospect of marriage and family formation. No passage was available for unmarried couples or for single parents, although they were not prevented from paying their own way. From the 1840s, free passages were made available for clergywomen sponsored by the major denominations.

These policies were starting to correct the gender imbalance, but were seriously disrupted by the huge numbers of male immigrants in search of gold from the 1850s to the 1880s. The pioneering areas, especially in the tropics, continued to have a male majority until well into the 1960s. The Northern Territory still had a substantial male majority in 2006. While settled farming districts were usually well organised by religious and were morally conservative, this was much more problematic further out. However, following the gold rushes, there was an extensive period of construction of churches, often with the wealth produced by gold mining.

Thus, the moral role of religions has centred around sexual behaviour, alcohol and gambling—all highly significant in a male-dominated society. Other moral issues, such as honesty in business and public life, have tended to attract less religious attention. Presbyterians took a major role in business, agriculture and public life in Victoria, and Methodists did the same in South Australia. Melbourne became the banking and financial capital of Australia, partly due to its reputation for probity. But this was sometimes at the expense of Catholics, who were excluded from banking and commerce and from Masonic relationships. Elsewhere the Protestant establishment was often derided as “worse”, or as an elite, because of its attempts to control gambling and the liquor trade through legislation. These controls almost inevitably led to the corruption of police and politicians, through scarcely as dramatically in the United States.

Public morality was sustained through restrictive legislation, much of it now repealed. Clergy of all denominations took responsibility for supervising their followers, through admission to the Catholic Church, through house visits by several denominations, or even by the public denunciation favoured by Scottish and Welsh Presbyterians. But as the reach and effectiveness of the clergy declined, the various moral campaigns led by people like Rev. Fred Nile or the visits of Billy Graham emerged as alternatives. These campaigns and visits usually included denunciations of immorality, but probably only reached those who were already enrolled in religious denominations. The Salvation Army and the Methodists had a long tradition of preaching against alcohol. But a serious challenge was presented by the universal influence of the mass media, which used increasingly varied outlets to broadcast entertainment with a high content of crime and sex. Religious denominations had very little impact in preventing this. The media was protected by the notion of free speech and by politicians who relied on it for their publicity and election campaigns. Moral campaigns against the media, like those of Mary Whitehouse in the United Kingdom, had little impact, although she visited Australia and inspired a local Festival of Light. Politicians were much more interested in accusations of political bias by the public broadcasters than by their impact on individual behaviour. By the end of the 20th century, programs containing sexual activity and obscene language were freely available on evening television, with only a mild warning for those who might be offended.

Tax revenue from alcohol, tobacco, racing and gambling was a major factor in limiting state restrictions on activities that religious leaders were only able to discourage for their own co-religionists. One inhibition on religious leaders taking a broader approach to moral issues, such as warfare, organised crime, refugees, poverty and social justice in general, has been the quick responses to criticisms that these are matters for resolution by party politics and the state. This is typified by the restriction of “conscience votes” in parliaments by the parties to predominantly sex-related and medical issues. The media took special delight in detailing the sexual sins of the religious when these were revealed. For example, their coverage of Pope Benedict’s visit to Sydney in July 2008 concentrated on his apologies to victims of predatory sexual abuse, while those opposing the visit saw fit to distribute condoms as their protest.
PRESEVING AND DEFENDING MORALITY

Religions are only able to impose universal morality in theocracies such as Calvins Geneva or in Saudi Arabia or Iran. Theocracies are now very rare, and have no relevance to Australia. Religious denominations could, however, exercise considerable control over public morality and legislation because of their influence on the people. This has been the case in Australia since the beginning of elected representative government in the 1840s and 1850s. The legal system expanded to control marriage, alcohol, the Sabbath, homosexuality, the age of consent to sex, honesty in business, contracts, oath of office and in court, obscenity, pornography, blasphemy and the common-law offences of murder, violence, rape and theft. These control measures were all supported by the churches. Their gradual dismantling in the late 20th century was strongly opposed by many of the religious, but with diminishing effect.

As there were no religions political parties in Australia, all changes in the law regarding property, labour and rural interests had to gain the approval of secular parties. These were the predominant organizing influences on Australian politics for a century. Protestant influence was strong in the conservative parties and Catholic in the labour parties. There was also the limitation of a widespread belief that religion and politics should not mix. So the determining factor in retaining or amending the legal control of morality was the judgement of politicians about public opinion. Popular attitudes were often shaped by the mass media, which reached Australians more effectively than in most other democracies. The contradiction arose that the media echoed highly moral attitudes on some issues, while increasing its sales and income by exciting public interest in crime, sex and violence. With the spread of television after 1956, conservative morality began to crumble too rapidly in the eyes of religious traditionalists. Declining attendances in the established churches coincided with this shift in public opinion.

Thus, by the 1970s the role of the religious had become defensive and focused to some extent on organisations designed mainly by Christians to stop or slow down the ‘rot’. These included groups such as the Festival of Light, Rights to Life Australia and, more recently, the Australian Christian Lobby (ACL). The ACL was founded in 1995, specifically to lobby politicians on moral issues. Its main impetus came from Pentecostalists, and to a lesser extent from Baptists. Its vision statement declares that ‘most Australians and certainly all Christians, have simply had enough of the increasingly rapid erosion of traditional family values and ethics in Australia’. Its strategy is to activate the Christian ‘constituency’, to support suitable candidates without nominating themselves and to lobby governments and legislatures in favour of Christian principles. A later development with similar objectives was the Family First Party, which ran candidates and secured a Senate seat in Victoria in 2004 on a combination of preferences for Steven Fielding. This party also had strong Pentecostal support through the Assemblies of God. Its recent victory on a very small primary vote aroused considerable interest. In 2007 the national election, Family First gained only 2 per cent of the vote, and the Christian Democrat of Rev. Fred Nile less than 1 per cent.

Political groups such as the Festival of Light, the Christian Democrat Party, Rights to Life, Pro-Life Victoria and the Australian Christian Lobby have never been able to disturb the conventional party system. When compared with similar movements in the United States, these political groups were of limited influence in national politics, though rather more influential at the state or territory level, from where much legislation on moral issues originates. All were recruited from active Christians of differing denominations. Secular candidates opposed to aspects of gambling had rather more electoral success. The continuing opposition of the Catholic Church to contraception, abortion and divorce had diminishing influence, even among Catholics.

As the influence of the media and changing lifestyles have affected public and individual morality, religious have been forced either to compromise with changes of which they do not approve or to stand firm at the cost of losing support. This dilemma has affected a major church most acutely in the case of the Anglicans. The Anglican Communion is widespread, like the former British colonies (including the United States) in which the church was originally established. But it lacks the central authority of the even more widespread Catholic Church. The archbishop of Canterbury remains first among equals, but Anglican traditions have emphasized compromise and dialogue within the Communion and with other Christian denominations. Declining support in English-speaking societies has accompanied growing membership in less-developed countries, especially in Anglocaphic Africa. The ‘southern’ churches, which were largely created by evangelical missionaries, have generally been more conservative on moral issues than the British and North Americans. In Australia, a fault line runs directly through the church, with the largest and most powerful diocese, in Sydney, being more conservative and evangelical than most of the others, especially in its opposition to the ordination of women.

These divisions slowly came to a head after the Lambeth conference of 1998, which passed resolution 1.10 on ‘human sexuality’, recognising a ‘life-time union between one man and one woman’ and advising against the blessing of same-sex unions or ordaining anyone involved in a same-sex union. Matters reached a crisis point with a gathering of more than 1000 clergy and laymen in Jerusalem in June 2008 as an alternative to the planned Lambeth conference later in the year. It was organised by the Global Anglican Future Conference (GAFCON) and chaired by Archbishop Akined of Nigeria. Rather than the issue of female ordination, which had divided the Anglicans, the breaking point was the acceptance of same-sex marriages and the ordination of a homosexual priest as bishop by the Episcopal Church of America, and similar decision by the New Westminster diocese in British Columbia (Canada). This was deployed by a meeting of Primates at Lambeth Palace in October 2003, but no further action was taken. In the eyes of Archbishop Akined, ‘a sizeable part of the Communion is in error and not a few are apostate’.

Apart from the strong African presence, GAFCON was attended by Archbishop Peter Jensen of Sydney, who had previously indicated that he would not attend the Lambeth conference and was chairman of the organizing committee. Thus, in Australia, as in the United Kingdom, there was a strong possibility of major disruption on issues relating to sexual behaviour.

CULTURAL MAINTENANCE

Religions tend to be conservative and thus to preserve their beliefs, practices and symbols through several (and often many) generations. As virtually all non-Indigenous religions in Australia originated elsewhere, this has also meant maintaining a whole range of different cultures and languages. Services have regularly been conducted in a wide variety of languages, including many which have almost disappeared, such as Gaelic, Irish, Arameic, Hebrew, Assyrian, Swabian, Church Slavonic and Yiddish. Latin, of course, was extensively used for religious purposes until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, and its return was encouraged by the Pope in 2007. Many major languages have also flourished partly because of their convertibility to one religion or another, such as Arabic, Greek, Spanish, Vietnamese, German, Serbian, Tamil, Amharic, Punjabi, Ukrainian and Macedonian. Many religious organizations hold weekend schools to teach the languages appropriate to their religion. Those with full-time schools or seminaries help to sustain knowledge of Arabic, Hebrew, Latin and Greek. Moreover, religious taking advantage of immigration to expand their followings provide services in a range of languages, such as Sano in, Tongan, Maori, Korean, Chinese and Persian.

Religion and language are frequently at the core of immigrant culture and are essential in maintaining cultural diversity. Australian public policy on cultural diversity has shifted significantly since federation.
While religious freedom was generally maintained, certain aspects of religious cultures were not well defended. Lutheran schools in South Australia were forbidden from teaching German during the First World War, despite many services and texts being in that language. Seventh Day Adventists campaigned to get section 116 into the Australian Constitution so that they could preserve the Sabbath as the Sabbath. But they, along with Jews, were unable to do business on Sundays under state and territory laws, which have now largely disappeared, to the advantage of the much-larger Islamic population. The Australian Sabbath, rigorously applied in South Australia and Victoria, was arguably the most severe restriction on religious freedom for those who did not have Sunday as their day of rest. It was, of course, imposed in conformity with the Mosaic commandment to keep the Sabbath, but also with the Christian practice of keeping it on Sunday. Presbyterian insistence on keeping the Sabbath was especially strong in Victoria, though nowhere as rigid as in the Scottish Highlands and islands, from which many early Victorians came.

Other cultural practices have been treated more tolerantly. As Israel Gelfert (1970) argued, Jews were always subject to prejudice in Australia, but not to the extent of oppression and discrimination common in Europe. The issue of kosher and halal butchery has been resolved in favour of the Jewish and Islamic practices. Jehovah’s Witnesses and Muslims, among other pacifists, felt the force of public opinion during the First World War but did not have to face widespread military conscription or imprisonment, as in the United Kingdom or other combatant nations. By the Second World War, when conscription was introduced, attitudes towards conscientious objection were much more liberal, although the Jehovah’s Witnesses were illegalised for more than two years.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Religions have been a major factor in maintaining cultural and linguistic diversity. They have also been significant in more concrete cultural manifestations such as architecture, festivities and celebrations, music and liturgy. The prominent buildings of Australian towns have usually been churches, hotels, post offices and, in earlier times, prisons. The remarkable speed with which religious buildings were created has left a large inheritance of churches, vicarages, presbyteries, nunneries and monasteries, which in a society that has no medieval heritage. The great majority of these reflect influences from overseas, which, in turn, often incorporated revivals of earlier traditions. Non-European influences were slight until recently, although some of the earliest synagogues favoured the ‘Egyptian’ style. By 1900, there was a handful of Chinese and Greek buildings, and some Catholic churches adopted the Italianate style. Lutheran churches in South Australia were modelled on German originals. The main influences came, however, from the British Isles and Western Europe. The most-favoured models were the Anglican church, with its spire or tower, the plain Nonconformist chapel, and the more grandiose cathedral favoured by Anglicans and Catholics alike and the classical style based on Greek and Roman originals. All of these occur in large numbers in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Among many deliberate copies of English originals is the Anglican Church built at Bouldia (New South Wales) by the agricultural and shipping entrepreneur Thomas Mort (1816–78). British models came to dominate Ireland once Catholics acquired the wealth and positions needed to build major churches, having lost all their historic buildings to the Reformation, as in Great Britain. As the core of religious building in Australia was between the 1840s and 1920s, medieval models were particularly favoured, being in the Victorian-era tradition of the Gothic revival. Neo-Gothic designs, such as the Oxfordshire church of St Mary’s at Wallingford, the See Yat in South Melbourne. Equally elaborate, if even smaller, are the Hindu temples of Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra, many in the Saiva Tamil tradition, which emphasises external decoration.

There have been Muslim mosques in Australia since 1960, the first two being in Adelaide and Perth. Only recently have Muslim buildings become prominent. Among the largest is the Gallipoli mosque in Auburn (Sydney), which is modelled on the Ottoman mosques of Istanbul. Also of Middle Eastern origin are the various Orthodox churches in the Greek and Russian traditions. These are often highly decorated inside, as in the original Orthodox churches. Two outstanding examples are the Russian Orthodox church in Carlton (Melbourne) and the Free Syrian church in Canberra. While some of these started life in secular buildings or former churches, their communities have sought to reproduce the original culture and eventually to build an appropriate church. The Syrian Orthodox monastery, located near Canberra, is a major example of a religious building based on a strictly Balkan model but located in an unmistakably Australian bush setting.

PRESERVING TRADITION

These buildings from different traditions add colour and variety to their Australian surroundings, while catering to the needs of their congregations. Their clergy or priests contribute to this with highly elaborate vestments and complex liturgies. These are at the opposite extreme from the plain and simple buildings and clergy adopted under the influence of evangelical or Nonconformist influences from the British Isles or, more recently, from the Baptist and Pentecostal traditions of the United States. The Catholic Church and its various Eastern rites continue to use vestments and liturgies derived from a distant past. Anglicans have long been divided on these practices, which were highly controversial in mid-Victorian England. But it is worth remembering that cultural maintenance is not just concerned with foreign languages, food and architecture. It has also been strongly evident in Australian religious practices and institutions.

Traditionalism is widely found among religions that rely on more than a single revealed source. Here, the emphasis is on preserving old ways sanctioned by centuries of religious usage, such as dress codes, food taboos, social hierarchies and the repetition of myths and stories from an distant past. This is most apparent among South Asian populations such as Hindus, Muslims, Jains, Sikhs and
Buddhists, but less so among practitioners of traditional religions from China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, where dress codes are more Westernised. The visible signs of religious traditions are much less apparent in Australia than in their source countries or in the United Kingdom and some countries of Europe, which have had large immigrations from South Asia.

Religious dress was confined to priests, monks, nuns, and other religious professionals in Australia until comparatively recently. It has declined among these groups from the 1960s, to the point where many put on religious clothing only for religious ceremonies. Thus, others who maintain dress traditions all the time are especially visible. These include Hasidic Jews in East St Kilda (Melbourne) who, as elsewhere, maintain clothing inherited from 18th-century Poland and Ukraine. Christian examples include Old Russian Believers in Queensland, Hutterites and Christian Israelites. All of these have been very small in numbers.

The abolition of the White Australia Policy in 1972 led to the arrival of Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhist monks, many of whom do retain the traditional dress codes of their original countries and religious communities. The wearing of these dress codes, such as turbans for Sikh men, have religious significance. The wearing of a head covering, the hijab, by Muslim women has been particularly controversial. But the full facial and body covering of the Afghan or PakistaniBurqa is very rare in Australia. The often-hysteric demands that the hijab should be banned are not similarly directed against the wearing of beards and skull caps by conservative and orthodox Muslim and Jewish males. Nor has the wearing of the Sikh turban been as controversial as in the United Kingdom and Canada. Attempts to exclude turbaned males from RSL clubs have provoked the response that Sikhs fought bravely and in large numbers with the British Army in most wars of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The wearing of traditional religious clothing is not necessarily a sign of religious fundamentalism, but it may create some problems for the wearers. These include hostility, or even physical violence, against individuals seen to be different, especially in an atmosphere of fear of Islamic terrorism.

RELIGION AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Australia has not been widely recognised as an intellectual powerhouse, despite its major contributions towards scientific and technical developments and academic philosophy. The labour movement, which elsewhere has often attracted and fostered intellectuals, was described over a century ago as adopting ‘socialism without doctrines’ or the ‘10 bob a day’ program. Many of the educated clergy were from the British Isles, and brought derivative ideas with them. The same was true of the universities and major schools, at least into the 1960s, when there was a rapid expansion in higher education. The most substantial religious influences came from evangelicalism, Irish Catholicism and Non-conformity. While all of these had intellectual traditions, none were remarkable for innovative or critical thinking. Indeed, Australia is one of the few Western democracies in which the term ‘intellectual’ is often considered abusive. The dominant ideology has been a form of populism that elevates the common sense of the ordinary person. At its highest levels it draws from the liberal pragmatism often seen as typical of the Church of England.

Strong evangelical traditions tended to support Bible literalism and to inhibit innovative or critical thinking. In the absence of many Europeans familiar with them, European ideologies had little impact. The higher Catholic clergy was certainly familiar with Roman debates. But the bulk of parish priests, nuns and brothers were in the more mundane traditions of rural Ireland, from which many of them came. Lutheranism came to Australia from rural areas of eastern Germany and was concerned, like Scottish Presbyterianism and English Baptism, with the role of the state in religious affairs. Calvinism certainly had an influence on the Scots and the Welsh, but mainly in terms of rigorous puritanism. The strong influences from the United States were often messianic or fundamentalist and at variance with the mainstream of intellectual discourse in the United Kingdom and Western Europe.

Within the once-dominant Anglican tradition there was much room for discussion between evangelicals, high and low churchmen and Anglo-Catholics, but this tended towards sectarianism and even factionalism. Anglican and Catholic bishops frequently had a university education obtained overseas, but this was much less common for other denominations or for the lesser clergy, well into the 20th century. The clergy were among the better educated of the colonial population. Until late in the 19th century, all graduates of Oxford, Cambridge and Trinity College, Dublin, were expected to be communicants of the Church of England. Thus, most of those with a broad education were strongly influenced by Christinity for at least the first century of modern Australian history. Among them were missionaries taking an active interest in the declining Indigenous population, such as the Catholic Bishop Rosendo Salvado (1814–1900) of New Norcia monastery in Western Australia, the Congregationalist James Lancelot Threlkeld (1788–1819), who became an expert on the Aboriginal languages of the Hunter region, and Lutheran pastor Friedrich Wilhelm Albrecht (1894–1994) of the Hermannsburg mission in central Australia.

Individuals and groups of the religious thus played a significant role in public debate and in the development of education and knowledge. Charles Perry (1807–91), while Anglican Bishop of Melbourne, founded both Melbourne Grammar and Geelong Grammar schools and took an active part in the foundation of The University of Melbourne. Similar institutions were founded by Anglicans in Sydney and Adelaide. But the Anglicans had less success in creating a network of rural primary schools, compared to those of the Church in England. With the development of publicly funded schools, the Church concentrated on its secondary schools, which remain among the most prestigious in Australia. Other denominations created similar schools, such as Presbyterian Ladies’ College and Methodist Ladies’ College in Melbourne and Riverview (essex) in Sydney. Only the Catholics persisted with primary education on a national scale, but smaller networks were maintained by Lutherans, Seventh Day Adventists and non-denominational, parent-controlled Protestant schools.

Among public intellectuals, Catherine Helen Spence (1835–1910) moved from Presbyterianism to Unitarianism under the influence of a consistent advocate of electoral reform and female suffrage. Another radical former Presbyterian was Charles Strong (1844–1942), founder of the Australian Church and consistent radical advocate for 60 years. He was removed from his position at Scots Church, Melbourne, for arguing for the compatibility of modern science and religion and for opposing subalternarianism. The Scottish Calvinist tradition, in which Spence and Strong were brought up, also produced the even-more-radical John Dunmore Lang (1799–1878). Lang was a preacher, polemicist, politician and organiser of immigration whose constant advocacy of unpopular positions made it impossible for him to remain within the confines of the Presbyterian Church in Sydney. He was also a republican and Australian nationalist, and a dedicated opponent of the Catholic Church.

If Scottish Calvinism was among the more rigorous theological positions, Calvinism has been able to draw on the widest range of ideas and influences in its long history, ranging from St Thomas Aquinas to St Augustine, and from the Jews to Opus Dei. John Bede Polding (1794–1877), the first Catholic archbishop in Australia, was trained in one of these traditions, as a Benedictine. But the Irish character of the Australian church soon became dominant.

Later leaders such as Cardinal Moran (1830–1911) and Archbishop Mannix (1884–1963) were in a relatively modern tradition, created well after the Reformation and the British Isles rather than Europe. While Moran spent over 20 years in Rome, his major writings were historical accounts of the Irish, British and Australian churches. Once established in Australia in 1885, Moran took up a wide range of public issues including support for the labour movement. Mannix, too, was associated with that movement for
many years of his life, until the issue of communism severed the link, at the same time splitting the Australian Labor Party in Victoria.

The intellectual life of the Catholic Church developed most actively in Victoria during the 50-year tenure of Mestroni, which began in 1913. The foundation of Newman College at The University of Melbourne provided a base for intellectual activity, developed by the Campanion Society in the 1920s. Catholic Action, which emerged from this, developed as a significant intellectual force under the leadership of B.A. Santamaria (1915-98) and with its influential paper the Catholic Worker. Its success led, however, to a rift with the original founders of the Catholic Worker. Intellectuals such as the poet Vincent Buckley criticized Santamaria, while others, such as James McAuley, gave him full support. This was a divisive period in Australian Catholicism, which was eventually referred to Rome for adjudication in 1972. This obliged Santamaria's Catholic Social Studies movement to be transformed into the now National Civic Council.

RELIGIOUS CONSERVATISM

While Australian religions have responded to social change and even initiated it, they have also been conservative on some issues, as is true for religions elsewhere. Each major religion includes fundamentalists who resist many social changes as incompatible with their faith or with the views of their founders. Bible literalists among Christians and Qur'an literalists among Muslims are two obvious examples. As suggested above, subalternianism was a significant force in Australia at least until the 1960s, drawing its strength fundamentally from attitudes introverted from South Africa, Wales and Cornwall, and thus strong among Presbyterians and Methodists. Opposition to alcohol, gambling and dancing was strongly advocated by the same forces, and was enforced among their adherents. Opposition to alcohol is also obligatory for Muslims and vegetarians for many Hindus and Buddhists. From the earliest days of settlement, Australian male society was noted for its reliance on alcohol, as were both urban and rural manual workers from the British Isles. This was countered by the churches through such initiatives as signing the pledge to abstain or forming a Band of Hope or branch of the Rechabites. It was also countered by restrictive legislation, short of outright prohibition, but which included the ability to ban liquor outlets in specific local government areas and Sunday and evening hotel closing. Protestants took a major role in urging and sustaining such legislation, especially in Victoria and South Australia, where Methodist and Presbyterian influence was strong.

Issues of sexual morality have also been consistently at variance with changing social attitudes, most notably in the official Catholic persistence in opposing contraception. Very few Australian Catholics have adhered to this view since the 1960s, as is true throughout the developed world, where Catholic birth rates are either the same as for others, or even lower. Some Catholic immigrants, notably the Dutch in the 1950s and the Maronite Lebanese more recently, have been exceptions to this generalisation.

In a secular society with strong heterodox traditions, religious conservatives often find themselves in opposition to the majority and at risk of losing their own followers as 'backsliders'. A substantial shift in social attitudes and behaviour seems to have occurred in the 1960s, as it did elsewhere. Regular religious attendances began to drop and the numbers prepared to admit to being religious began to rise. The contraceptive pill made a substantial difference to gender relationships, as did the rise of feminism. The rapid increase in tertiary education following the establishment of new universities was an important factor. Homosexuality was gradually accepted, to the extent that the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras became a major international tourist attraction. Opponents such as Rev. Fred Nile could only pray for rain on the day, with limited success. These relatively rapid changes were most apparent in the major cities. Queensland and Tasmania, with their large rural populations, provided fruitful grounds for fundamental and Bible-literal preaching. In 2006, Queensland had the largest number of Apostolics, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Lutherans, Spiritualists, Wesleyan Methodists, Outreach Centres, Anglican Catholics and several small Pentecostal groups. Rural society, however, has moved as a dominant influence on the rural way of life. Catholic legislation was steadily dismantled, despite the delaying tactics of conservative politicians and many religious leaders. Issues such as homosexuality and divorce began to affect the religious communities themselves. While same-sex marriages were consistently thwarted in state, territory and Commonwealth legislatures, immigration policy did recognise same-sex couples for family reunion in limited instances, an almost unique concession outside the Scandinavian states.

There was also some tension between the major and fundamentalists on intellectual issues, including the debate on the origins of the world and the human race. These were quite muted compared to the United States controversies, but had some influence through the religious school systems. In Australia, government funding for private schools does not allow state dictation of the content of teaching. However, this is, in effect, governed by the examination systems. 'Creation science' has had little impact and neither has marxistic predictions of the end of the world. However, some small denominations have started to use creative teaching as a way of widening their audience on these issues. They frequently use material originating in the United States. More significant disputes have centred on the moral issues involved in cloning and stem cell research, where the Catholic church has taken a strong stand, one shared with many Protestants. Here, as with contraception and abortion, the argument centres upon the definition of 'life', rather than fundamentalist or Bible-literalist approaches.

As a general rule, Australians have been liberated from many restrictions and discriminations because of the expansion of secular attitudes, and the moderating of fundamentalism and Bible literalism, which was often representative of evangelicalism and Non-conformity well into the 20th century. These liberalisations were often opposed by the major denominations, with one of their greatest victories surrounding liquor licensing laws that survived from the First World War into the 1960s. But, in contrast to the United States, prohibitionism never introduced. The more recent move with controlling the use of illicit drugs owes more to public health and safety concerns than to religious influences. Instead of imposing restrictive prohibitions, the state has emerged as a benevolent defender of individual rights and a generous benefactor to religion. Religion and the state have found complementary roles, within a relatively tolerant and diverse society.

HEALTH, EDUCATION, WELFARE AND COUNSELLING

Apart from these broad relationships, religions take a major role in servicing the public in ways that are detailed elsewhere in this encyclopedia. These include the provision of hospitals and schools, charitable work and individual counselling on matters of concern, including death, disease, addiction and family problems. All of these are traditional religious functions, often supplementing the work of public agencies, which in turn have historically taken on many of these functions as well. In Australia, state and territory agencies moved early into many of these activities. They had the resources to do so in a thinly populated society that had massive problems of communication and constantly shifting centres. The early establishment of the convict system in New South Wales and Tasmania was especially important in this regard. Australian society was organised from the start, rather than inheriting traditional religious functions as elsewhere. Indeed, Indigenous religions were regarded as unchristian and vicious. Much effort was expended on breaking them down, with consequent social dislocation, which is still a problem today.

Thus, the Australian picture was rather different from that in the developing societies from which Australians came in the early days after 1788. There were
no rural networks like those that had provided parish relief in England and often organised emigration to Australia and elsewhere. There was no religious obligation on all to provide charitable contributions, as there is in Islam. It took about 50 years for religious involvement to be important enough to ensure that children attended schools, that health care could be available in an emergency or that there would be priests, brothers and nuns available to counsel the distressed. Once society settled down, religions took a major role as they did in more established societies. Without their work, Australia would have been a much poorer and more brutal society than it was. But equally, without state involvement and funding, the efforts of the churches alone would have been inadequate. Thus, a partnership was established which remains crucial today and has even increased in importance. Pragmatic and rational economic considerations suggest that this is a valuable solution to increasing demands for services in a growing community. However, the debate continues about the extent to which public funding for religious institutions and activities is compatible with a rational and secular society. Between the 1850s and the 1960s, it seemed as though the former social and educational functions of religion had passed into the hands of the state. Since then there has been a reversal, but one in which there are reciprocal arrangements and understandings.

JAMES Jupp

TIME, PLACE AND SOCIAL STATUS

Australia has been fortunate in having details of religious adherence recorded in its Census for over 150 years. This distinguishes it from the United Kingdom, which had only one census of religious attendance and places of worship, in 1851, until religion was included in its 2001 census. The United States still does not record religion officially because of a rigid interpretation of the constitutional separation of church and state. One early concern in Australia was to trace the relationship between Protestants and Catholics because of the large numbers of Irish convicts and assisted immigrants coming in the first few decades after British settlement. At that time, the Irish numbered nearly 30 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom, and were consequently strongly represented in Australia. Other considerations also justified the collection of religious information. These included the role of the churches in providing education, and their subsidy from public funds under the NSW Church Act (1836).

Hospitals, orphanages and cemeteries were often segregated along religious lines. Until 1971, the great majority of Australians nominated a religion, although answering the Census question was optional. Over the past 40 years a considerable number no longer do so, and this makes the data less compelling. However, they are certainly more reliable than the British religious census of 1851, when figures were provided by the churches. By 2006, the Australian Census was listing 120 distinct denominations, the majority of them being Protestant. The main restriction on such elaborate figures is that the old Census records have been regularly destroyed for the past century, making it impossible to calculate cross-references other than those provided in the printed texts. These can, however, be calculated from the current Census, from computerised versions that preserve individual anonymity.

The Census figures on religion have several uses apart from simply recording levels of adherence at a particular point in time – now every 5 years, previously every 10.

Most obviously, the Census offers an idea of the relative size of religious followings, and their progress or decline over many years. What they do not normally show is the degree of active adherence, evident from such information as attendance at religious ceremonies, confirmation or baptism in a religion or conversion from another, or the intensity of feeling and depth of belief of those identified. These questions can be answered by professional surveyors, such as the National Church Life Survey and the Christian Research Association. Some questions, such as church attendance, were already being asked unofficially as long as a century ago. Another valuable statistic indicates the districts in which religious denominations or followings are strong or weak. While Australia is often seen as rather uniform in many social respects, it does have areas of strong and weak followings, both in rural areas and in metropolitan suburbs. They usually indicate previous patterns of immigrant settlement, and can often be traced over long periods. Some religious concentrations move over time, especially in the major cities. Others remain rooted in rural areas for generations. Since the opening up of sources of immigration since the 1910s, data on religion can also show the varied birthplaces of religious derived from outside the British Isles or the English-speaking world. Such detail is not usually available for previous historical periods, and neither are such social data as age, occupation and income. These can be calculated from recent censuses, and are of considerable utility for those planning schools, hospitals or
to the enthusiastic adoption of Christianity in New Zealand and Polynesia, the Indigenous population has been harder to convert. One exception has been the Torres Strait Islanders, who are predominately Anglican. Early mission work by Lutherans in central Australia was also influential. Public policy gave the responsibility for managing Aboriginal affairs to Christian missions, but these were often authoritarian and alienating. From the 1960s, the Christian missions withdrew from this work, and secular and state agencies took over management of Aboriginal affairs. Several syncretic faiths arose, combining Christian and Indigenous themes, such as the Kamapila-Karawadi cult in Amboina Land and the Elcho Island Adjustment Movement. These are usually localised, and there has been no national movements comparable to the Ratana church among Maori and the cargo cults of Melanesia. Most have developed north of the Tropic of Capricorn in the Northern Territory and in northern Western Australia.

The influence of Indigenous beliefs is not effectively measured by the Census. In 2006, only 5378 claimed to practice ‘Australian Aboriginal Traditional Religion’. Aboriginal Evangelical Missions enrolled a similar number. However, as both of these undermine influence people with some traditional beliefs, as do the mainstream Christian denominations, it is probable that elements of Indigenous beliefs and practices continue without being officially recorded. Sacred sites are officially recognised and invocations on them must be negotiated. But the impact of Christian and secular influences has greatly affected adherence to traditional religions. In the Torres (Queensland) local shire, where 80 per cent claimed Indigenous ancestry, 45 per cent were Anglicans and 15 per cent Pentecostals, compared with 0.2 per cent claiming to adhere to traditional religions. In Halls Creek (Western Australia), where 80 per cent claimed Aboriginal ancestry, 60 per cent were Catholic and 0.5 per cent followed traditional religions. In the whole of the Northern Territory, 2414 out of 188,078 (1.3 per cent) subscribed to traditional religions.

We are left with a variety of religions and none that have specific origins or are globalised. In 2006, one-quarter of Australians avoided classification by not answering (2,231,957) the question or declaring ‘No Religion’ (1,641,818). Those who openly criticise religion are not numerous, including 62,735 atheists, agnostics, humanists and rationalists, with rationalists being the only longstanding organised group. Other beliefs include 30,000 subscribers to witchcraft or Wiccans, paganism, druidism, pantheism, Satanism and assorted New Age rituals. An older belief, originating in the United States, is in spiritism, with 9845 followers in 2006. Religions with origins outside the major regions outlined above include Ratana (Maori New Zealand) and Rastafarianism (Jamaica). Australia does not have the extreme variety of the United States. But it has come a long way from the simple division between Anglicans, Nonconformist Protestants and Catholics, which characterised the early years of colonial settlement.

JAMES JUPP

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER RELIGIONS

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER RELIGIONS

Aborigines are a deeply religious people.
Professor W.E.H. Swain (1979: 100)

Our ngajji need protection. We can’t just get up and move. This is our place. Our stories are here. Our Old People are here.

Creative ancestors: Laying down the law and the founding drama

The founding drama: Across the continent, creative heroes of the stature of Ngarinyin mark out the country of the various languages, land-holding groups, lineages, clans and families, differentiate species of plants and establish key ceremonies and institutions. In the Torres Strait Islands, cultural heroes, like Mals in the eastern islands and Kunyuma in the western islands, lay down the law of the land. Pre-existing ancestral presences, such as the Umgumbhikula, refine the landscape and its inhabitants into the form it has today. Fertile women, such as the Djungawerl sisters, give birth at specific places. As anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose (1996: 35) writes:

The Australian continent is criss-crossed with the tracks of the Dreamings: walking, idle-walking, chattering, flying, chasing, hunting, weeping, dying, giving birth. Performing rituals, distributing the plants, making landforms and water, establishing things in their own places, and making relationships between one place and another. Leaving parts or essences of themselves, looking back in sorrow; and still travelling, changing languages, changing songs, changing skin. They were changing shape from animal to human and back to animal and human again, becoming ancestral to particular animals and particular humans. Through their creative actions they democratized a whole world of difference and a whole world of relationships which cross-cut difference.

Anthropologist and diplomat W.E.H. Stanner (1905–81) called this long-ago creative era the ‘founding drama’. It was a time when the pioneering activities of the ancestral heroes established a moral code that informs and unifies all life. It was a time when the ancestors gave form, shape and meaning to the land, seas and skies. Here, a rocky outcrop indicates the place where the ancestral dog dug her puppies; there a low ridge shows the sleeping body of the emu; the red streaks on the cliff face recall the blood shed during a territorial dispute; ghost guns stand as mute witnesses to where the Lightning Brothers flashed angrily at their father, Rain; the lush growth of the bush berries is the legacy of prudent care by two old grandmothers; the clear, sweet water holes make the home of the Rainbow Serpent. The country continues to ‘come up green’ because the Law is followed. Sacred places, where the ancestral heroes passed, entered the ground or were transmogrified into a feature of the landscape, must be approached according to the Law.