

RELIGION AND POLITICS

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LIKE A LION thrown to the Christians, Allan Ashbolt, a self-confessed agnostic and humanist, went to Sydney's Moore Theological College in 1966 to address an audience made up almost entirely of clergymen. After explaining that he felt 'little antagonism towards Christianity or any other creed', the ABC current affairs broadcaster and producer went on to tell a joke about an aircraft crippled by engine failure while flying through a severe electrical storm. A terrified second pilot ran into the cabin shouting that there was little chance of survival, and that a lightning strike would be fatal. 'Pray, for God's sake, pray!', he implored the stunned passengers. So they prayed: Muslim prayers, Jewish prayers, Hindu prayers, Buddhist prayers, prayers by Christians. Only one person failed to pray. The lone Australian among the passengers sat complacently smoking a cigar. When the second pilot screamed at him, 'Pray, man, pray!', the Australian explained politely that he did not know how to pray. 'Well,' said the second pilot, 'if you can't pray, then do something else religious.' So the Australian got out of his seat and began to sell raffle tickets.

Punch-line delivered, Ashbolt made sure that his point had been taken. 'And that, I think,' he told the clergy, 'is about what the Church means to the average Australian—a place for births, deaths, marriages, bazaars and fund-raising activities.' The clergy may have been amused or embarrassed by the joke, but it would not have surprised them. Too many of their own sermons had lamented the same thing, and too many of the social critics they listened to seemed to regard it as self-evident that religion played only a small and declining role in Australian life. Even the undoubted significance of the Catholic Church as a social institution could be explained with little reference to deep spiritual conviction or devotional energy. Indeed, Ashbolt's point sounded rather like an echo of what Donald Horne had written two years earlier in *The lucky country*, when he had linked the continuing strength of Catholicism to the residual 'clannishness' of a fading Irish–Australian subculture. In Horne's words:

raising money for schools and running an intricate educational system are often the main preoccupation of many clerics in a diocese. The flavour of Catholic life



Above.
The Reverend Roger Bush seeks to associate religion with the leisure activities of Australians at the annual service for the blessing of the snow at the beginning of the ski season at Thredbo Ski Village in June 1983.

Right.
Cardinal James Freeman receives offertory gifts from jockeys Ron Quinton, Ray Selkerig and Stan Cassidy at the annual Racing Mass at Our Lady of the Rosary Church, Kensington, NSW. Sydney Morning Herald, Oct 1973.



cannot be understood except against a background of Communion Breakfast speeches on government aid; raffles, bingo games and other money raising activities; family obsessions with school fees; political pressures.

If this was a fair characterisation of Australia's largest practising religious movement, it is hard to argue with Horne's conclusion that 'Churches no longer matter very much to most Australians'. Ashbolt certainly was convinced. 'We are moving,' he remarked bluntly, 'into a predominantly non-Christian period of history ...'

But such sweeping statements cannot go unquestioned. Can habit or 'clannishness' alone explain why Catholics bother to attend Communion Breakfasts, or why Catholic parents value Catholic schooling enough to pay for it when state education is free? Can these things account for the continuing impact of religion on the wider society? It would take much more than an exploration of modern Australian politics to provide complete answers to such questions, but the role of religion in Australian political life in the half-century since 1939 is a good starting-point. Politicians have had good cause to remember that appeals to religious convictions and denominational loyalties can still generate powerful political pressures in Australia. How can this happen if Christian faith and religious institutions no longer matter very much?

Religion is complex, and the institutional strengths and weaknesses of the churches are not the only measures of its role in a society. So, too, is Australian society complex. There are many different kinds of Australians, and it is asking a lot of Ashbolt's 'average Australian' to make him or her represent them all. At best, this 'average Australian' is an *identikit* picture, superficially accurate perhaps, but able to reveal little about the private hopes and fears and beliefs of the millions of individuals who make up the Australian population. At worst the *identikit* actually disguises the truth. Australian religion has many faces which it does not resemble at all. Among Catholics, evangelicals, sectarian believers of all kinds, liberal Protestants, High Church Anglicans, Orthodox Christians, Jews, Muslims and others, we find expressions of religiosity unmarked by apathy or perfunctory observance. Thoroughly assessing the place of religion in modern Australian life would mean getting to know all such faces. Here, however, there is scope to concentrate only on the relationship between religion and politics.

THE MOVEMENT AND THE RISE OF THE DLP

At the 1947 census more than 1.5 million Australians identified themselves as Catholics. They represented about one person in five in the total population, a proportion which had risen only slightly since the 1930s. A more significant rise began after the war with the influx of immigrants from many of the predominantly Catholic countries of Europe. Over 600 000 Catholics arrived in Australia from Europe between 1945 and the early 1980s—nearly 40 per cent of them from Italy, 15 per cent from Poland, and another 30 per cent divided almost equally between the Netherlands, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. By the early 1980s one Australian in four claimed to be Catholic. The Australian Catholic community numbered more than 3.5 million, and Catholics generally were much more scrupulous churchgoers than were Protestants. In 1972 a Morgan Gallup poll discovered that the average Catholic was three times as likely as the average Anglican to have attended a church service in the previous month. But that still left much room for neglect among Catholics; and in August 1981 another Morgan Gallup poll found that 31 per cent of people claiming to be Catholic admitted that

they rarely or never went to church, and that only 37 per cent claimed to have been to church during the previous week.

Yet even these figures confirmed the existence of a large, active Catholic community within the Australian population. Throughout the period since 1939 devout Catholicism has been part of the lives of thousands of Australians. In *Rockchoppers*, a personal account of the Catholic generation which grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, Edmund Campion wrote in 1982 of his own upbringing in a 'typically Irish-Australian' family. It was a world whose horizons were literally 'defined by the church'. Childhood memories are of a profoundly pious home life, of Irish-Catholics uneasily defensive in an unfriendly wider culture, of pride in an ancient religious heritage. Life at 'Riverview' dominated his adolescence. The environment of Sydney's famous Jesuit college exuded, for the young Campion, 'a lived conviction that God's will was the only thing that mattered in life'. This all-embracing religiosity puzzled him. 'How, I used to wonder, could one want *only* to serve God—what about achievement, family, money, and all the other things awaiting one?' Yet Campion left 'Riverview' impressed unforgettably by the fact that, 'somehow, for the Jesuits, there was no conflict'. Eventually, he chose to enter the Catholic priesthood himself.

So far the story is a familiar one, for in the lives of many individual Australians, laity and clergy alike, Catholicism has always been a powerful influence. But when Campion left 'Riverview' for Sydney University in 1951 his story was complicated immediately by novel and exciting themes. Great changes had been prompted in Australian Catholicism by two processes gathering strength in the mid-1930s. One was a tendency for lay Catholics to involve themselves in aspects of church life previously left strictly to the hierarchy and the clergy. The other was a growing readiness to abandon traditional Catholic policy on involvement in wider social and political issues. In the past the Church officially had sanctioned such activities only in defence of its specific religious interests, usually in the area of education policy. The only major departure from this principle had been the vocal involvement of many leading Catholics in the anti-conscription campaigns of 1916 and 1917—a venture onto the national political stage at once exceptional and short-lived. But by the 1930s and 1940s moves were afoot to help Catholicism exert a permanent, powerful influence in Australian politics and industrial relations, and in the making of social policies and general community values and standards.

Stimulus for both changes had come from an international Papal program called 'Catholic Action', organised by the Vatican after World War I. By the early 1930s new roles for lay Catholics were emerging through bodies such as the Young Catholic Workers and the Campion Society, and in 1934 Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne chose 'The Eucharist and Catholic action' as the theme for the Melbourne Eucharistic Congress. Mannix, particularly, was anxious to encourage lay Catholics and the clergy to become partners in organised efforts to bring Christian principles to bear on secular institutions and values. The call to 'Catholic Action' fell on receptive ears in Australia, despite the initial reservations of Archbishop Kelly, in Sydney, and of some other bishops. It came at a time of growing social confidence in the Catholic community, when education and professional status were enabling a growing minority to see beyond the traditional horizons of an Irish-Australian working class. While Campion was completing his schooling, small groups of young, educated laymen were busy trying to mobilise Australian Catholicism to help build a thoroughly Christian Australian society.

In Melbourne in 1936 one such group had launched the *Catholic Worker*, a monthly journal begun with the informal blessing of the Church hierarchy, but without any official status. The *Catholic Worker* group aimed—as it would continue

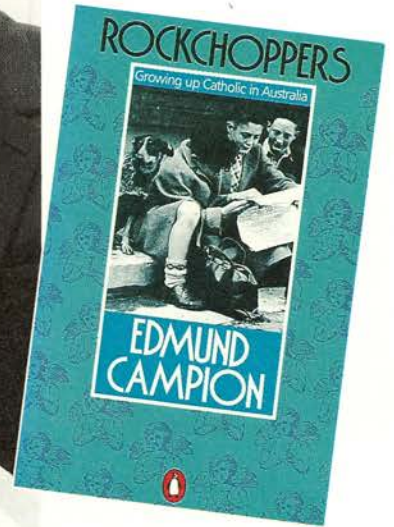


The unofficial monthly, the *Catholic Worker*, expresses its views on political and social issues, April 1943.



The Reverend Father Edmund Campion and Mr Asher Joel examine a model of the altar that Pope Paul VI would use on his tour in 1970—the first papal visit to Australia. Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Nov 1970.

In Rockchoppers, Father Edmund Campion describes the experiences of a generation of Irish–Australian Catholics.



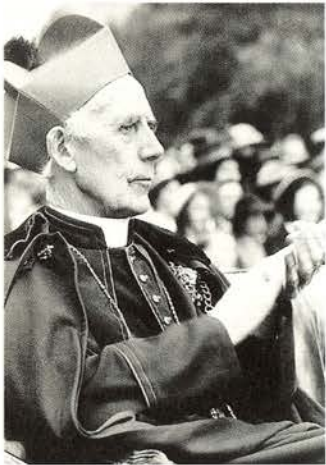
to aim for forty years—to speak with an informed, independent Catholic voice on a wide range of social, political and moral issues. It broke with the traditional pattern of lay acquiescence in clerical pronouncements. Its activities marked the beginning of a new era in Australian Catholic history, when lay–clerical co-operation, dialogue and debate would help decide the role of the Church in the wider society. In an official Catholic publication dealing with the role of the laity in the Church, Patrick O’Farrell, a leading Catholic historian, observed in 1973:

The most basic division within the laity is between old and new. The ‘old’ laity is largely . . . comprised of people whose education took place before the 1940s and whose attitudes were formed in traditional Australian modes: unquestioning deference to the clergy and religious; a conception of lay activity restricted to varieties of church wardenship; a passive doctrinal traditionalism, and a simple rosary bead piety . . . The ‘new’ laity tends to be under 45, better educated, more ‘intellectual’, more interested in doctrinal affairs, more disposed to be critical of the clergy, and more willing to entertain, or press for, changes.

It is perhaps a measure of the slow pace of change within the Church that even in 1973 the ‘new’ laity remained a striving ‘vanguard’ in Catholic communities still dominated by traditional attitudes. By 1973, however, none could deny that it played a decisive role, not only in shaping Australian Catholicism since the 1930s, but also in the wider political life of the nation.

Archbishop Daniel Mannix views the St Patrick's Day procession outside Parliament House, Melbourne, in March 1940.

FAIRFAX PHOTO LIBRARY



Among the young Catholic laymen of the 1930s none would be as influential as Bartholomew Augustine Santamaria, a law graduate who had moved on from the *Campion Society* at Melbourne University to become the first editor of the *Catholic Worker* in 1936. In 1937 he had relinquished this post to work for the Church in a more direct and official capacity, joining the newly formed National Secretariat of Catholic Action. The secretariat, established that year as an official Australian response to papal initiatives, concerned itself with various pastoral and social welfare goals. But with Santamaria's involvement it also began to interpret its responsibilities in global political and ideological terms. Deeply moved by the spectacle of civil war in Spain, Santamaria came to see the fate of civilisation hanging on an emerging international conflict between Catholic Christianity and communism, a conflict in which a major element would be the capacity of the Church to exercise a meliorating influence in the development of modern capitalism. In Australia, he decided, the decisive battleground would be the trade union movement. The communists seemed to be gaining ground there, but with its extensive working class associations Catholicism also had great potential influence. How best to mobilise the Catholic laity? That was the crucial question.

Santamaria's answer took shape over several years. He did not underestimate the power of propaganda, but—although he was later to deny this—his primary strategy was clandestine. He observed that a small, dedicated, well-organised band of Communist party members was winning control of trade unions. So he set out to match the communists, 'cadre against cadre, cell against cell, faction against faction'. If the deep religious commitment of thousands of Australian Catholics could be given political focus, he decided, the impact on Australian society would be enormous.

Santamaria's vision, faith and organisational talents soon won him powerful allies. In the early 1940s, with the support of prominent Catholic members of the

B. A. Santamaria appears in 'Malcolm Muggeridge Meets Australians' on ATN, Channel 7, on 20 April 1958. He tells the English journalist and social critic that the Catholic laity is free, and must feel obliged, to battle for Christian civilization in politics and other fields'. Sydney Morning Herald, 21 Apr 1958.



Victorian Labor movement, including the parliamentary party leader, Herbert Cremean, and with the personal blessing of Archbishop Mannix, he set up a secret anti-communist organisation called, misleadingly, the Catholic Social Studies Movement. It soon became known simply as the Movement. This shadowy, secretive instrument, which Santamaria had planned since the early days of Catholic Action, at first had no formal association with the Catholic Church. Instead, its leaders relied on the private sympathy of local parish priests to create a network of parish cells designed to alert and direct Catholic trade unionists against the communist enemy. By 1943 the Movement had spread to Sydney, and two years later the Catholic hierarchy could resist no longer the opportunities it seemed to offer for unprecedented Catholic influence in Australian society.

In September 1945, at a special meeting held in Sydney, Australia's Catholic bishops voted to give moral and financial support to the Movement, despite its clandestine character, and to exert ultimate control over it through a three-man committee. Some bishops certainly had reservations, and there was tension between the Melbourne and Sydney branches of the Church about the nature and scope of the Movement's activities. The committee, made up of archbishops Mannix and Gilroy of Sydney and Ballarat's Bishop O'Collins, was given an almost impossible task. The Movement remained Santamaria's organisation, partly because its secret character placed it beyond the practical control of its busy episcopal masters, and partly because Mannix, at least, was happy to give Santamaria an almost free hand. But if official control was marginal, endorsement was of great value to the Movement. It guaranteed the support of many parish priests who might otherwise have remained aloof, and enabled the Movement to assure recruits that the activities would have the full blessing of the bishops.

This legitimation of the Movement, and its growing power, left sections of the Church uneasy. Archbishop Norman Gilroy, who became a cardinal at the end of 1945, probably joined the committee with hopes of restraining the more extreme elements in the Movement. Wherever possible he exercised a moderating influence over the largely Melbourne-based organisation, and he was evidently concerned that direct Catholic attempts to manipulate political and industrial institutions might produce a serious social backlash and actually reduce the political influence which the Church already enjoyed, especially in New South Wales. Among Catholic intellectuals, the *Catholic Worker* group was not alone in believing that there were sound theological objections to the means the Movement had adopted, if not to its basic goals. But as the 1940s continued, Santamaria's vision and energy carried most of the opposition before it.

Life on the Sydney University campus when Edmund Campion arrived in 1951 showed plenty of evidence of the effectiveness of Movement strategies. After a campaign lasting more than two years the University newspaper, *Honi Soit*, had fallen completely under Movement influence in 1950. Movement representatives, masquerading as independents, also controlled the Students' Representative Council and the Students' Union. Similar methods were being employed on the more serious battlefield of the trade union movement, and with outstanding success. There the tactical situation revolved around a network of 'Industrial Groups' which the Labor party had established after 1945 to strengthen the influence of the party within the unions. The Movement concentrated on winning control of these Groups, and it was as 'Groupers' that members of the Movement wrested control from communist officials in the Federated Ironworkers' Association, the Federated Clerks' Union and other industrial organisations.

Campion joined the Movement in 1951, and over 30 years later he still remembered the emphasis on secrecy, and the sense of being at the centre of great

events. Even the initial approach he received was marked by extreme caution. 'Before I say anything,' said the priest who recruited him, 'I want your solemn word of honour that, whether you join us or not, you won't reveal to anyone anything I say to you tonight.' The trust was flattering, and if the secrecy seemed excessive it was hard to argue with the success of Santamaria's methods. For by the time Campion joined it the Movement was 'a serious political apparatus' well on the way to 'winning and maintaining political power in Australia'.

This heady prospect was not what Santamaria had had in mind in the early 1940s. Then the threat seemed to be the subversion and overthrow of the political order by communist infiltration of the trade unions. But by 1951 talk of an Australian revolution sounded far-fetched, and although fears of a communist invasion from Asia accompanied Australian involvement in the Korean War and kept anti-communism in the forefront of conservative thought, more moderate sections of the Movement and the Catholic hierarchy now felt that the secret organisation had fulfilled its purpose, and could be terminated in triumph. But evicting communists from trade unions had meant taking their places, and taking their places had created the possibility of winning great influence in Labor party conferences where policy was decided. New, irresistible vistas had opened up.

The Movement could now aspire to join the fight against international communism by influencing the decisions of Australian Labor governments on defence and foreign policy. Santamaria, now director of the national secretariat of Catholic Action, an important public body, as well as secret director of the Movement, was well placed to implement the secretariat's vision of transforming Australian society on the basis of Catholic social principles. In December 1952 he wrote confidently to Archbishop Mannix that, for the first time in any Anglo-Saxon society since the Reformation, a government would soon be in a position to implement Catholic policies. The Movement was close, he said, to being able to 'completely transform the leadership of the Labor Movement'. Electoral success for Labor might not come in 1954, but it would come at some time, he predicted, and the government would be committed to the social and industrial policies of the Movement and infused with Movement members and sympathisers. Such were Santamaria's hopes and expectations in the early 1950s.

Yet the Movement failed. The leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor party, Herbert V. Evatt, turned on it in October 1954, accusing it of having 'become increasingly disloyal to the Labor Movement and the Labor leadership'. In the ensuing faction fighting the Movement's leaders were, as Santamaria put it later, 'abandoned in the moment of dire necessity' by many members of the Catholic hierarchy. And in 1957, endorsing this cautious approach taken by Catholic leaders in Australia, a decision taken in Rome ruled against formal Catholic involvement in any political party in Australia. But these setbacks did not tell the full story of the failure, for they were themselves the results of less obvious circumstances.

Between 1951 and 1954 some prominent members of the Movement in New South Wales had already begun to leave, concerned that an official involvement in party politics was both unwise and improper, especially if conducted by clandestine means. Ironically, the very success of the Movement made it increasingly vulnerable to such concerns. Faced with the prospect of genuine political power, Catholics were forced to look more carefully at consequences as well as principles. When they did so they saw, among other things, that the triumph of the Movement might well mean the defeat of certain traditional Catholic interests in the New South Wales Labor party. For while the party, an amalgam of competing factions, had learned to live with compromise, the Movement operated on the principle that those not with it must be against it. It not only created needless

Herbert Vere Evatt, the Leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party who publicly exposed the activities of the Movement in October 1954. Sydney Morning Herald, 30 Nov 1955.



enemies, but persuaded them that they were fighting for their political lives. So its decline was even quicker than its rise had been. And what was left behind was a Catholic Church tense and bewildered; a residual 'Movement', the National Civic Council, still led by Santamaria; and the Democratic Labor Party—the DLP—a right-wing splinter organisation that doomed Labor to federal political oblivion until 1972 by persuading a body of traditional Labor voters to give their second preferences to the non-Labor parties.



The story of the Movement provides such telling evidence of the vitality of Australian Catholicism that we can only wonder why Horne and Ashbolt could suggest just a few years after its collapse that religion had only marginal influence in Australian life. Presumably they believed either that the Movement was not *really* religious—that the Catholicism of its devoted followers was only a convenient cloak for their anti-communist politics—or that the life somehow went out of Australian Catholicism with the ending of Santamaria's dream.

The first view is untenable. The Movement *was* a profoundly religious organisation, with strong devotional, pastoral and theological foundations. Campion's clearest memories of his own involvement are of fortnightly meetings in his local parish. They were always opened with prayer, followed by a solemn pledge of secrecy which members repeated meeting-by-meeting. Then came 20 minutes of 'gospel discussion' in which an episode in the life of Christ was explored. The aim was for those present 'to get close to the personality of Christ, to consider him as a model for their lives and to draw practical applications from the gospel'. The political business of a meeting was never divorced from the spiritual and devotional values which provided the Movement with primary inspiration and ultimate goals.

While the Movement cannot be dismissed as not really religious, the idea that its collapse seriously weakened the Church does have some plausibility. Its defeat certainly accelerated the decline of Catholicism as an independent influence in Australian political life. A Labor-Catholic alliance within the Irish-Australian working class had guaranteed the Church a traditional influence in politics that, while informal and direct, had been powerful and pervasive. The Movement crisis damaged this alliance irreparably, even in New South Wales, where the spectacular electoral damage inflicted by the DLP on Labor in Victoria and Queensland was avoided. In supporting the DLP those Catholics who left the mainstream Labor party in the mid-1950s were moving to the conservative side of politics. But even where support for the DLP was weak, hierarchy and laity alike tended to retreat, after the Movement fiasco, from explicitly Catholic political involvements and pronouncements. This made it easier for socially mobile Catholics to rationalise new, conservative political alignments. With the Catholic hierarchy wary of political involvements and the Labor party wary of Catholic influences, ordinary Catholics were freer than ever before to make political choices for secular reasons.

Yet the collapse of the Movement was no more than a catalyst in this process: the Labor-Catholic alliance was already dissolving for other reasons. A trend, evident before 1939 but quickening after World War II, saw more and more Catholics becoming professional people, businessmen, managers, earners of middle and upper-middle incomes. Among practising Catholics the trend was particularly pronounced. A recent survey has shown that while the total Catholic population remains on the whole slightly below the national average of incomes and status,

'Churchgoers among Catholics are likely to be middle class and well above the Australian average'. Immigration as well as upward social mobility has transformed the Catholic population. Not only is the typical Catholic no longer Irish-Australian and working class, there is in fact no longer any obvious Catholic social type. Australian Catholics come from all sections of the society, and the only defining characteristic of the Catholic community as a whole is the faith itself.

Thus to the extent that the strength of Australian Catholicism in earlier generations depended on Catholics being a cohesive and self-conscious minority in a somewhat alien wider society, the Church *has* grown much weaker since the mid-1950s. It has certainly grown less prominent and less vocal on social and political issues where there is no longer any obvious 'Catholic' or 'religious' position to be represented. But whether this means that there has been a weakening of the faith depends partly on assumptions about what the role of religion should be. People like Horne and Ashbolt, viewing religion mainly as a social activity, have concluded in recent decades that Australian Catholicism is becoming less and less relevant to the mainstream of Australian life. Their conclusion is easy to understand. An institution recently so active in the political arena, so busy trying to shape industrial relations, social policies and moral values generally, appears to have reduced its role and concentrated its energies in only one area of Australian consciousness and behaviour.

In short, modern Australian Catholicism appears to have become less 'political'—more narrowly 'religious'—in its relationships with the wider society. There has been a liberal Catholic impetus towards moral adjustment and theological dialogue, and a search for new ways to win and retain support in the face of apparently increasing social apathy. Liberal Catholics have spoken, with varying degrees of boldness, of bringing religion up to date, of modernising its language, its liturgy, its organisation, and of reinterpreting the traditional faith in contemporary terms. Their every initiative, however, has met a conservative reaction, a conviction that modern tendencies should be resisted by the Church, not accommodated within its worship and theology. Conservative believers, including most of the bishops, fear that attempts to restate historic truths and adapt ancient traditions will degenerate into heresy, error or unacceptable compromise.

These dilemmas are neither new nor uniquely Catholic, and they are certainly not confined to Australia. Coming to terms with the increasing secularisation of modern society is perhaps *the* fundamental issue confronting religious beliefs, values and institutions throughout the modern world. But since the defeat of the Movement's boldly aggressive strategy of infiltrating secular politics, the tendency has been for a more defensive Australian Catholicism to look inwards, to focus its energies on a quest for theological, ecclesiastical, liturgical and pastoral relevance. Since the 1950s its main involvements in national politics have been confined to the activities of liberal Catholics as protesters against the Vietnam War—a role in which they were partners with Protestant activists—to the mobilisation of the Catholic opinion in defence of public spending on denominational schools, and to support for public campaigns on moral issues, especially abortion.

RELIGION, NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY

Like the Catholic Church with its historic Irish-Australian associations, all Australian religious traditions remain essentially derivative. A major function of Australian religion, and the main source of whatever political influence the Churches have been able to exert, has been a capacity to express and reinforce associations with an 'Old Country'. Among the most loyal Catholics in the



Catholicism has given cultural continuity to Australians with roots in Catholic Europe.

Traditionally, the main associations have been with Ireland; more recently, links with the Catholic cultures of Mediterranean and central Europe have been vital. Here Father Ronan Kilgannon of the Franciscan Novitiate, 'Maryfields', near Campbelltown, NSW, leads the Way of the Cross ceremony on Good Friday 1979, watched by Italian-Australian worshippers.

FRANCISCAN PROVINCIAL
OFFICE, NSW

post-Irish era of Australian Catholicism are migrants from Catholic Europe for whom the Church offers the same kind of cultural continuity with the old world which it once offered to Irish Australians. Catholic leaders have learned, sometimes after initial errors, that the best way to win support from the Italian community is to use Italian chaplains, and to permit the creation of 'little Italies' within the wider Catholic community.

Similarly, in earlier decades the stately liturgy of the Church of England had preserved the comforting familiarity of 'Old England'. Census figures have always indicated that the Anglican Church is the largest religious denomination in Australia. At the 1981 census more than 3.8 million Australians claimed to be Anglicans, a figure which exceeded by almost 25 000 the number answering 'Catholic' to the question about religious adherence. Yet a survey of church attendance in the same year showed that while only 16 per cent of these Anglicans went to church at least once a month, 46 per cent of those professing Catholicism did so. About 610 000 Anglicans were monthly churchgoers, compared with almost three times as many Catholics—over 1.74 million. In terms of genuine religious adherence, Catholicism had been the stronger for decades, despite its own institutional difficulties. Factors that had little or nothing to do with religious belief or devotion had led many Australians who rarely, if ever, entered a church, to give 'Anglican' as a routine reply to questions about religion.

Among these factors the most important was the residual influence in Australia of privileges long enjoyed by the Church of England in England. Historically, to be English was to be Anglican. The Church of England was by law established, and any other kind of religious loyalty involved 'nonconformity', social as well as religious. This mentality was transplanted to Australia even though the Church of England was never actually established by law in the Australian colonies. Its informal 'establishment'—even in the minds of many modern Australians—indicates the highly derivative nature of Australian religion, and shows that while many other aspects of Australian culture have evolved genuinely national characteristics, religion, especially Anglicanism, has done so only slowly and reluctantly. The pomp and ceremony required to enthrone Archbishop John Penman in Melbourne in 1984 was redolent of the history and symbolism of an ancient, distant religious culture.

The rituals and ceremonies of the Anglican Church of Australia retain close links with the traditions of the Church of England. Pictured (above), the new Archbishop of Melbourne, David Penman, is given the formal recognition of the bishops of the Victorian Province at his enthronement. Below, the new Archbishop receives the traditional pastoral staff from Bishop David Shand. In his ensuing sermon Penman spoke in political terms about the 'recent debate on migrant issues', explaining: 'I am firmly committed to multiculturalism with all its positive benefits for Australian society.' Photographs by Barry Huggett.

ANGLICAN MEDIA, MELBOURNE



Australian Anglicanism has nevertheless grown less alien during the past half-century. In 1939 only nine of its 25 bishops had been born in Australia, while all but one of the remaining sixteen were English born. This was at a time when four of every five bishops in the Canadian Anglican Church were Canadians. But in 1966, for the first time, a man born in Australia, Marcus Loane, was elected Archbishop of Sydney; and by 1967 Australian-born bishops outnumbered the English-born by nineteen to six. In 1978 the Church of England in Australia introduced *An Australian prayer book* for use alongside the traditional *Book of common prayer*, and in August 1981 it changed its name to the Anglican Church of Australia.

In an era of growing Australian national consciousness such trends were probably inevitable and positive. Indeed, when David Millikan turned his 1981 ABC-TV series, 'The sunburnt soul', into a book, he subtitled it 'Christianity in search of an Australian identity' and concluded that the adaptation of religion to the Australian environment had been much too slow. All the major Protestant denominations have voiced a similar apprehension, but it has been most acute in the Anglican Church. Peter Bennie, an Anglican clergyman and the warden of Sydney University's St Paul's College, told readers of *Quadrant* in 1972 that having 'strong roots in an alien and remote past' had made Anglicanism particularly foreign to 'Australian nationalism'. He saw this as 'the primary reason for the slow but steady decline in the Anglican proportion of the Australian community'.

Bennie was right to see religion as one of the forces retarding the emergence of distinctively Australian institutions, rituals and symbols. 'Although Australia has developed an identity of its own,' the sociologist, Hans Mol, wrote in 1969, 'the churches have never become Australian in the sense that the American churches have become American.' He might have added other examples. The evolution of Latin American Catholicism has gone hand in hand with the emergence of distinctive national cultures; in South Africa Dutch Protestantism has been adapted by the Afrikaners to serve purposes which Protestants elsewhere have disavowed. In each case religion has developed unique national characteristics which set it apart from its parent religious culture.

In encouraging Australian religion to evolve in a similar way, Bennie and others may have identified the best long term strategy for the churches; nevertheless, the argument for making Anglicanism (or religion in general) more Australian runs counter to precisely those historic links and associations that have given religious institutions political and social influence. Historically, it has been those traditions able to express and exploit ethnic loyalties that have been most influential in Australian society, and the same type of relationship between religion and politics is likely to remain important, at least among religious groups able to capitalise on the powerful new phenomenon of multiculturalism. The Greek Orthodox Church is well placed to exercise political and social influence as a focus for traditional loyalties within a Greek-Australian community more than 700 000 strong in the mid-1980s. 'I would not say it is equally important to be Greek or Christian or Orthodox,' the Greek Orthodox Primate of Australia, Archbishop Stylianos, said in 1983. 'But it is a false alternative. It is like asking me "What would you prefer to lose, your eyes or your legs?" I need both.' Politically, like a succession of Irish-Catholic archbishops up to and including Mannix, Stylianos combined the roles of ethnic and religious leadership.

Christian and Moslem traditions imported from Lebanon and other Middle Eastern societies represent more extreme examples of a similar kind of political influence, threatening to introduce new and potentially violent religious and political forces into Australian life. In terms of religious practice, Islam is already a major religion in Australia. Australian Moslems numbered 150 000 in 1980, and

Of all Australia's non-Christian religions, Islam is likely in the long term to exercise the greatest political influence, but it has been the small Ananda Marga sect which has precipitated the sharpest controversy in the recent past. Here, in September 1978, Neil Lindsay Narayana, a member of the sect, chants and prays outside the Goodsell Building in Sydney during a protest against the treatment of sect members jailed for their alleged involvement in the bombing of Sydney's Hilton Hotel during the 1976 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Sept 1978.



their numbers were increasing rapidly. The majority came from Turkey or Lebanon; the rest from Yugoslavia, Albania, the Arab Middle East, Pakistan, Malaysia, Indonesia and elsewhere. Most were deeply committed to their faith, and their sectarian energy gave Islam a religious significance and potential political importance far beyond its numbers. As *Migration action* observed in 1980, Australian Moslems were 'increasingly absorbed by the turmoil of international events'.

THE CHURCHES AND THE VIETNAM WAR

Apart from leadership roles within ethnic communities, since the demise of the Movement only the Vietnam War has offered religious organisations the chance to play a significant role in Australian politics. In previous wars, religious issues had become variously embroiled in wartime politics. Without generating controversy, the leaders of the major churches had tended to endorse Australian military commitments, and their support had been a valuable, almost taken-for-granted aid in securing patriotic consensus. Anti-war politics among churchgoers had tended to be limited to pacifism and conscientious objection, and had arisen mainly in smaller sectarian bodies such as the Quakers, Plymouth Brethren, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh Day Adventists and Christadelphians. Clergymen from other denominations joining pacifist movements in wartime were often unpopular among their colleagues, the laity and the society at large.

The great exception had been the politics of conscription during World War I, when Irish and nationalist sympathies in the Catholic Church persuaded large sections of the Catholic laity and many leaders within the Catholic hierarchy, including Archbishop Mannix, to campaign actively against plans by the wartime government to introduce conscription for service abroad. Twice, in October 1916 and again fourteen months later, referendums proposing compulsory military service were defeated by the electorate. During these conscription controversies, religious leaders, organisations and rhetoric played a prominent part in national political life, and possibly influenced the electoral verdicts. Not until the Vietnam conflict was there any comparable intrusion of religion into national politics.

Most opponents of Australia's involvement in Vietnam were neither sectarian believers nor pacifists. They were people troubled about the morality of the particular war being fought in Southeast Asia; and religion was not usually the main basis for their judgment. Yet religious beliefs, values and organisations were important in the anti-war movement. Religious leaders initiated ecumenical and denominational protests, and sometimes gave their blessing to secular campaigns against the war. In March 1965 a letter to the prime minister, R.G. Menzies, signed by nine Anglican bishops and four retired bishops, sought 'to lead public opinion' in encouraging the government to seek a peaceful settlement. The protest widened. Sydney's best-known Methodist spokesman, the Reverend Alan Walker, set up a Canberra Vigil Committee to co-ordinate ecumenical anti-war protest, and in May 1965 assembled 100 clergymen from all states and most denominations in a 'Vigil for Peace' in front of Parliament House in Canberra. This was part of a mounting grassroots campaign against the war. During the next seven years many clergy, priests and lay Christians joined in the politics of protest, using the pulpit, the press, the courts and the streets as forums to oppose government policy.

Yet the churches were deeply divided over the war. Fewer than half the Anglican bishops had signed that letter to Menzies in March 1965, and when in April 1967 the Catholic Bishops' Conference issued its own 'Statement on Peace' the main purpose was to clarify Catholic dogma, not to criticise government policy. Two years later 38 Catholic bishops supported a call by the Australian Council of

Churches for the law on conscientious objection to be changed to provide for objections to particular wars. In general, however, the Catholic hierarchy discouraged anti-war protest, and came into conflict with many younger priests and radical lay Catholics, some of whom saw opposition to the war as a religious duty. Catholics for Peace, a group established by such people in Sydney in 1967, published a journal, *Non-violent power*, to propound a combination of Christian and Gandhian principles and techniques of active, peaceful dissent. Pax Christi was an equivalent body for radical Catholics in Melbourne. The Methodists and Anglicans had their own organisations for assisting conscientious objectors and voicing anti-war protest, and the silent vigils of the Save Our Sons movement attracted strong ecumenical support.

Religious leaders and dissenters professing Christian objections found that the most effective protest was possible in alliance with liberal and socialist anti-war agitators. Teach-ins, pamphleteering, lectures, group discussions and historical research helped to educate public opinion; petitions and delegations to parliamentarians were used to influence political decisions, as were legal challenges to government policy and attempts to hinder administrative procedures associated with recruitment and conscription. Religious bodies often exercised an important organisational function within such campaigns, provided them with vocal leaders, and 'even more importantly' offered a legitimisation of anti-war dissent, which more extremist forms of protest lacked.

At the high point of the protest, when in May 1970 a well-organised 'moratorium' movement brought between 125 000 and 150 000 people onto streets all over Australia, government and press predictions of widespread violence and extremism were confounded. An editorial in the *Melbourne Age* acknowledged that the scale of the protests gave 'enlarged meaning to the notion of peaceful public dissent', and observed that 'a legitimate expression of opinion by a substantial section of the population', including eminent religious leaders, could not be written off by the government as 'the antics of communist-inspired fools'.

Yet while the anti-Vietnam movement saw the churches exercise significant influence in Australian politics, their involvement created internal dissensions that perhaps hastened the withdrawal of religion from the centre of national life.

Opposition to the Vietnam War. Among the placards greeting President Lyndon Baines Johnson in Sydney on 22 October 1966, one reads 'All the way with Christ and Humanity—not this L. B. J. Insanity'. Photograph by Vic Summer.

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Although many Christian opponents of the war were not radical in either a social or a theological sense, the more liberal elements within the churches certainly shaped the role of religion in the anti-war movement, perhaps because the theologically liberal felt most at home with the secular activists who dominated the movement. By 1968 Catholic opponents of the war had become targets in a general conservative reaction to the liberalisation of the church following the Second Vatican Council, which met in Rome in 1962–63. Charles Bowers, a Sydney priest active in Catholics for Peace, was threatened with suspension from his priestly duties in August 1968 because of his anti-Vietnam associations. Later, after leaving the priesthood voluntarily—along with almost half the young men ordained with him in 1965—he reflected on the ‘massive haemorrhage of membership’ from Catholicism in Sydney during the late 1960s. Liberal Catholics, he said, had lost confidence in a church unable ‘to take a moral stand on the Viet Nam issue’.

While it is difficult to decide how much divisions over Vietnam weakened the churches, the fact of decline in the decade after 1966 is beyond dispute. All the major religious bodies were affected. A survey conducted in 1966 discovered that about 23 per cent of Australians had not been to church during the previous year. Only a decade later the figure was over 50 per cent. Meanwhile, the 30 per cent weekly churchgoing rate, which had held with only slight fluctuations from 1939 to 1966, had fallen to around 20 per cent. A million and a quarter Australians had ceased to be churchgoers within ten years; and whereas in the past virtually every Australian had at least professed to believe in God, by the second half of the 1970s one in five admitted to being an unbeliever.

The capacity of the churches to influence the political affairs of the wider society was only one casualty of this process. The dilemma that all religious groups face in an increasingly secular society is whether to try to adapt beliefs, practices and modes of organisation to the tastes and concerns of modern life, or whether to emphasise the spiritual failure of modern culture and offer a strict, old-fashioned, conservative religion as an alternative to it. For a church to resist modern, secular tendencies is for it to adopt a position not unlike that of the religious sects. The disadvantage of this position is that most people reject sectarian affiliations; the advantage is that those who accept it become deeply committed members. Seeking accommodation with an increasingly secular society involves another kind of danger. Modern ecumenical Christianity, some of its critics have remarked, has been so concerned to adapt to secular values that its essential religious character has disappeared.

The effect of this dilemma, in Australia and elsewhere, has been a polarisation within the churches, with advocates of accommodation regarding those who resist as being hopelessly out of touch with modern reality, and advocates of resistance regarding their critics as having compromised the true gospel. As we have seen, within the Catholic Church in Australia there has been a conservative reaction to the liberal tendencies of the period following Vatican II, especially from 1968 onwards. Among Protestants, too, conservative believers have had the greatest impact on Australian religious life in the 1970s and 1980s. In the Anglican Church, for example, the most uncompromising and demanding element—the evangelical faction—has maintained or strengthened its position while Anglicanism as a whole has lost ground. Indeed, in all Protestant denominations the flourishing congregations have been those appealing to ‘born again’ Christians, people committed to a personal, conservative evangelicalism sometimes enlivened by pentecostalist enthusiasm (‘speaking in tongues’).

Conservative, evangelical enthusiasts have become a formidable social and political force in such organisations as the Festival of Light and the Right to Life Association. Their strength lies as much in the depth of their commitment as in

A large crowd listens to Billy Graham at the Sydney Showground, 23 April 1968. The Reverend Fred Nile, later prominent in the Festival of Light, was Graham's crusade director.

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Resisting the values of an increasingly secular society. Jim Laughton and Carol Raward, both of Randwick, hold placards during a Festival of Light rally against moral pollution in Hyde Park, Sydney, in April 1984. The crowd was estimated at twenty-five thousand. Sydney Morning Herald, 7 Apr 1984.

their numbers. In this, and in their hostility to prevailing social attitudes and public moral standards, they seem bent on redirecting mainstream Protestantism towards a more or less sectarian role in modern Australian life. They are poles apart from those within their own denominations who support the liberal policies of the Australian Council of Churches and place their hopes for the future in ecumenical solutions. Ken Payne, a conservative Baptist pastor from Frankston, near Melbourne, said in 1982 of mainstream Australian Protestantism: 'In these days, the Church has lost its voice and become ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. Its message is almost silent.' All the denominations were involved, he said. Australia had become a nation 'morally bankrupt', yet a declining Christianity seemed bent on adapting itself to contemporary standards. 'If the true Church continues to hibernate and stand aloof to what is being done,' Payne concluded, 'and does not soon protest its righteous indignation and speak in a clear and audible voice, Australia's day of fickle, liberalistic and depraved freedom will come to an end.'

Such views, strengthened by the influence of the 'born again' revival in the United States, have ensured that religion remains a force to be reckoned with in Australian society in the 1980s. The American influence has been deep and in many cases systematic. Since the first Australian Billy Graham Crusade in 1958, modern American revivalism has left an important mark on the character of Australian evangelicalism, creating links between evangelical Protestants often considerably more important than denominational loyalties. If his critics are right, Billy Graham did not make anything like the number of new, lasting converts that his statistics on 'decisions for Christ' suggest. But if he had only limited influence on Australian society at large, Graham's impact on the morale and organisation of evangelicalism in Australia has been immense. Bruce Wilson, a Christian intellectual and writer, who in 1985 became an Assistant Bishop in the Canberra diocese of the Anglican Church, was converted during the 1958 Billy Graham Crusade; the Reverend Fred Nile, a leader of the Festival of Light, gained his first major organisational experience as director of the 1968 Crusade in Sydney. Such men typified hundreds who have stressed evangelical co-operation across denominational boundaries, and inspired the kinds of social and religious movements which contribute greatly to the vitality of Australian Christianity.

The Festival of Light was launched in August 1973 at a meeting in Scots Church, Sydney, and relaunched (apparently in search of publicity) at a press conference in February 1974. In a country which seemed less and less Christian, it called on genuine Christians to 'stand up and be counted', to defend old-fashioned moral values and preserve the 'Judaic-Christian ethic' as the basis of Australian life. Functioning as a vociferous pressure group on a range of moral questions, often with the support of well-known overseas figures like Mary Whitehouse and Malcolm Muggeridge, the Festival of Light captured considerable public attention. Like similar movements in the United States, it attempted to meet secularisation head on—both within the churches and within the wider society—by influencing public policy. Nile and other founding members formed the Family Action Movement as a vehicle for carrying the Festival's concerns into the arena of New South Wales politics. Nile himself secured 200 000 primary votes and won a place in the state legislative council in 1981.

By the middle of the 1980s, however, the Festival of Light and similar bodies seemed to have reached the peak of their potential influence. At the 1984 federal elections, under the new title, 'Call to Australia', Festival of Light interests secured 10 3532 primary votes in New South Wales, 24 606 in Victoria and 21 806 in South Australia. Their demonstrations seemed smaller than a decade earlier, and despite their best efforts, the drift of social legislation and law reform in Australia



Pope John Paul II speaks on Land Rights to an audience of Aborigines at Alice Springs on 29 November 1986.

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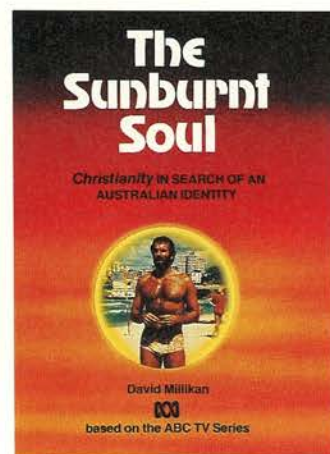
Below.

David Millikan calls for a more informal image for Australian Christianity.

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continued in the direction of liberal values and secular concerns. When a rally was held outside the New South Wales Parliament late in 1984 to protest against the passage of legislation for the reform of laws governing homosexuality, the Christian leaders behind placards reading 'Say *no* to sodomy, say *yes* to God and goodness' represented only the most conservative elements within Australian Protestantism. The Very Reverend Lance Shilton, the conservative evangelical Dean of St Andrews Anglican Cathedral in Sydney, was there alongside Fred Nile, but the only other denominational representatives present were from the Baptist, Lutheran, Continuing Congregationalist and Full Gospel Pentecostalist churches. This was the vanguard of resistance to secularisation, comprised of people who believed that in a country no longer 'Christian', Christianity as a whole had to accept the unpleasant reality of standing aloof, sect-like, from dominant assumptions, values and patterns of behaviour.

Some of the leaders of the larger denominations had considerable sympathy with the Festival of Light. Archbishop Sir Marcus Loane, leader of the Anglican Church in the strongly evangelical Sydney diocese, had been affiliated with the Festival in its early days, resigning only when the formation of the Family Action Movement seemed to him to be too overtly political. As the leader of a church which traditionally had enjoyed close links with the political and social establishment, Loane was doubtless loath to identify too closely with the politics of protest—even right-wing protest based specifically on traditional moral values. Yet in the 1980s it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that religion, once an integral part of the mainstream culture, has become a subcultural element in Australian life. It follows that the religious groups exercising the greatest political and social influence in the future will speak in the strident tones of an intensely committed sectarianism. Some will be Christian, others may be Moslem; all will have something in common with the early church, that persecuted minority which, to realise its goals, had to turn the world upside down.





*Satellites bring radio and television services to outback
Australia, 1986 (above and opposite).*

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