Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

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

Moreover, where Australian religion and spirituality are being taken seriously, they are being taken seriously in a distinctively Australian way. These Australian characteristics include a tentatively curious exploration involving listening, attending, venturing with the whole person and being true to one's experience. They also involve being unsure about foreign categories or techniques, being hesitant in the presence of certainty, doubtful when faced with a faith declared with too much surety, and often happier with the questions

than with what some pose as answers. Australian spirituality, both indigenous and more recently arrived, is grounded in place and land. Australian sacred places can be found in the bush and in the cities and towns. They are there; they are used, but may become apparent only when threatened.

A shy hope in the heart

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

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

The setting – Australian society

To understand religion and spirituality, it is necessary to understand their sociocultural contexts. Religion and spirituality are different in postmodern

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

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

Postmodern

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

I find it helps to remember what modernity was supposed to be. The search for the single best product, the one way of life, the single unifying religion, the most productive economic order or the most efficient

organisational style characterises the modern. Modernity was also characterised by dichotomous thinking: us vs them, black vs white, East vs West, right vs wrong, poor vs rich and left vs right. Modernity offered and sought a single meta-narrative; what Berger (1967) referred to as a Sacred Canopy, an integrative story or religious belief that united into one meaningful whole all of life, linking the activities of each group, unit and person in a society.

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

Echoes of this time, of modernity, are heard today in calls for a single culture, assimilation to one way of being Australian, a single religion to unite and legitimate the state, and some arguments that there are limits to multicultural diversity. Nostalgia for the unified, single purpose, one for all and all for one, the adrenalin rush of the call to total war drives some calls for unity – read uniformity and singularity – in the policies of churches, educational organisations and governments. Moreover, modernity continues strong and healthy in the United States, which is one of the reasons the term is so debated. Postmodernity does not fit with the experience of those sociologists who live in societies characterised by high industrial modernity. Pax Americana seeks to insert its view of democracy as the only view; it imposes its foreign policy using 'us against them' imagery and all but the word 'crusade'. Modernity can also be detected in much of what passes for contemporary corporate management: declare your goals, aims, objectives; have a single big ambition; design all activities towards achieving a single goal, and integrate divisions, departments and units.

Australia sits differently. This ancient land, recently called Australia, is diverse, for tens of thousands of years comprising hundreds of indigenous societies and cultures, and of late being populated by many ethnic groups, including the English, Irish and others who at one time took themselves as normal and referred to others as 'ethnics'. Even in my short sojourn of just over a quarter-century in Australia, I have witnessed the adoption of Italians and Greeks into the 'normal' and out of the 'ethnic' category. Australia has many religious groups. The Church of England is no longer hegemonically normal. Even as the Catholic Church became ethnically more diverse, it also became mainstream both in its self-perception and in its social location. Australia is multicultural and multifaith. Being consciously multifaith is part of being a postmodern society.

Secular

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

The secularity pointed to by much twentieth-century theorising was driven by an ideology of secularism (Beckford 2003). However, religion has not withered away, although those seeking evidence of decline can certainly find it in the falling fortunes of what were in the twentieth century referred to as mainstream religious groups. In the West, this mainstream was

either Protestant (the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia), Catholic (France, Brazil, Spain, Italy) or Orthodox (Russia, Greece, Bulgaria). But of course neither the West nor the USA was ever the whole picture, although at times they certainly give the impression that they were, if not the whole picture, then certainly an advanced position on the path we were all to tread sooner or later. However, the evidence that irreligious secularity is not the future of us all has become increasingly clear at both the centre and the fringes. The 'inexplicably' high level of religious participation, belief and influence in the USA continues to be an empirical thorn in the side of secularisationists – those ideologically committed to the inevitability of irreligion for developed societies (Davie 2002). Meanwhile, religious revitalisation accompanies economic development in Latin America, Asia and Africa in ways that suggest it would be useful to revisit Max Weber's 'Protestant Ethic Thesis'.

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

Diverse

The global movement of people and ideas has transformed Australia's religious and spiritual domain and produced a rich diversity. Australia's multicultural society provides a tolerant – within describable limits – context for the exploration and expression of spirituality and religious practice. There is much more diversity in Australia's religious life than there was at the high watermark of modernity in the 1950s. As we shall see,

there are more denominations of Christianity, a wider diversity within each denomination of Christianity and a richer diversity of other religious groups. For example, the Catholic Church was transformed by the immigration of large numbers of Italians who brought forms of Marian devotion and veneration of saints not as prevalent in the Irish-dominated church that received, if not welcomed, them (Lewins 1978). This example is critical because it demonstrates that ethnicity is associated with forms of religion and spirituality. The global movement of people carries with it the global movement of spiritualities as well as religions and cultures.

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

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

Defining religion and spirituality

Defining religion and spirituality has exercised the minds of philosophers and sociologists for centuries. Weber refused to try. Others have only to be challenged by those who differ. Beckford (2003) cuts this Gordian knot by the very sociological argument that groups and societies define what counts as religious or spiritual and that these differences in definition, and indeed

the process of definition itself, provide critical clues to the nature of the religious and its role in a society. Certainly there have been debates over what is to be labelled religious in Australian society. The emergence of new religious movements such as Mahikari and Tenrikyo (Clarke 2006; Bouma, Smith & Vasi 2000) has challenged the established religious order of societies and raised such questions as whether these groups are religions. Some of these questions are answered in court cases, the most famous dealing with Scientology.

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

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

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

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

Seeking cleansing, clarification and enlightenment via Scientology

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

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

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

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

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

Sylvie Shaw

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

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

Aboriginal spirituality

*The Aboriginal spirituality website maintained by the National Museum of Australia (*www.dreamtime.net.au/indigenous/spirituality.cfm*) presents an understanding of the spiritualities of Indigenous Australians and provides helpful examples of spirituality. One of the key terms is 'the Dreaming'. According to Merv Penrith (Elder, Wallaga Lake, 1996), 'The Dreaming means our identity as people. The cultural teaching and everything, that's part of our lives here, you know? . . . it's the understanding of what we have around us.'*

> *The Dreaming has different meanings for different Aboriginal people. It is a complex network of knowledge, faith and practices that derive from stories of creation, and which dominates all spiritual and physical aspects of Aboriginal life. The Dreaming sets out the structures of society, the rules for social behaviour and the ceremonies performed in order to maintain the life of the land.*
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> *It governed the way people lived and how they should behave.*
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> *Those who did not follow the rules were punished.*
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> *The Dreamtime or Dreaming is often used to describe the time when the earth and humans and animals were created. The Dreaming is also used by individuals to refer to their own dreaming or their community's dreaming. During the Dreaming, ancestral spirits came to earth and created the landforms, the animals and plants. The stories tell how the ancestral spirits moved through the land creating rivers,*