INTRODUCTION

Humans have practiced various forms of religion for many thousands of years all over the world, including on the Australian continent. However, Australia has been a settled, urbanised and basically Christian society for only 220 of these years. The great majority of its people are not able to trace their local origins for more than 150 years, and almost a quarter of them were not even born in Australia.

Yet, all the major forms of religion are represented in Australia. Many religious origins can be traced back for at least 2000 years or more, in some other part of the world. In the meantime, the indigenous religions of the continent have largely disappeared and the majority of the Indigenous population has adopted beliefs from elsewhere. Australia demonstrates clearly that religious beliefs and forms can change quite rapidly, while aspects of much earlier faiths developed elsewhere can also be retained. Religion is thus conservative and fluid, reactionary and innovative. Nor can any one faith be absolutely true to the exclusion of all others. Religions are true for those who believe in them, although religions have often changed their forms and beliefs quite dramatically, have drawn ideas from other religions, grown and declined, reached out and shrunk away.

Fortunately, Australia, in its brief modern history, has escaped the long record of attempts to force religious beliefs upon others by means of violence, and even warfare. However, it has not entirely escaped the charge that in replacing Indigenous society with one that is much more expansive, much more cosmopolitan and much more in touch with the great religions of the world, it has also destroyed ancient cultures and systems of belief.

With rare exceptions, religion in Australia originated elsewhere. In many cases, it is also controlled, funded or recruited from elsewhere. Consequently, the articles in this volume do not reiterate histories and theologies extending into the distant past, except where they form a backdrop to the more recent past and the present. There is already a vast and expanding religious literature which does that, growing out of hundreds and even thousands of years of texts, debates, schisms, victories and defeats occurring elsewhere. Many religions are literalist in deciding current issues on the basis of past formulations. Catholic, Jewish and Islamic theologians regularly do so, but they are not alone. A strong current of conservative literalism runs through all the major religions. This needs to be understood both as a strength and as a weakness. Without dwelling unduly on battles that took place long ago, in many cases the contributors here have found it necessary to provide some historical and theological background. There are also several relatively new religions, many originating in the United States during the formative years of modern Australia, which need to be set in their historical and theoretical contexts. In most cases, the apparently new religions build on much older beliefs and practices.

This volume, then, is not an encyclopedia of world religions – there are several of these – but of a variety of religions as they have impacted upon and been influenced by Australian society. That society has normally been described as pragmatic and secular, with its main motivation being to maximise personal well being and security. On this argument, Australia has not been a deeply religious society. Many of its immigrants in its formative years did not come from deeply religious societies either, but from an industrialising and urban Britain. But this was never entirely true. Some parts of the United Kingdom were more actively religious than others, especially around the 'Celtic fringe', extending from Cornwall and Wales through to Ireland and Scotland. While London convicts were notoriously

irreligious, the much greater numbers of assisted immigrants were drawn, to a large extent, from rural districts of England, Scotland and Ireland, where religious beliefs were still strongly entrenched.

The history of modern Australia starts in the period of the Enlightenment and the French and American revolutions, spans the years of conflict between advancing science and defensive religion, reacts to the major secular and totalitarian regimes and moves into the era of mass media, scepticism and religious indifference. It has had no established religion, and its Constitution, in section 116, expressly forbids any attempt to impose one. But it has also created a system of close collaboration between the state and religious institutions such as schools, hospitals and welfare societies.

The religious struggles that raged around the United Kingdom, from the Reformation through to Catholic emancipation, not to mention their continuing impact upon Europe, had little direct influence on Australia. It was not like the United States in this respect, and comparisons between the two societies are often quite misleading. However, this relatively materialistic and irreligious inheritance did not mean that religion was irrelevant or marginal. From the 1850s through to the 1920s there was a wave of church building, religious organisation, spiritual revival and religious debate in the United Kingdom, which had its counterpart in Australia. Melbourne in the 1880s was alive with such manifestations. By the early days of Federation, after 1901 every significant town or settlement had an Anglican, Methodist and Catholic church, with Presbyterians nearly as strong and Lutherans and Methodists well established in South Australia. The Census showed above 95 per cent claiming some form of Christian loyalty, though active participation was not measured. As evidence of this, the older, inner-city areas of Australia contain as many empty Victorian Gothic churches as there are in the towns of the United Kingdom and Ireland. The Salvation Army played on as many street corners, and Catholic school children marched on St Patrick's Day, as loyally as in Dublin and New York.

None of this necessarily meant that Australians were fanatically religious, or believed in or understood the finer theological points upon which the various Christian denominations disagreed. As elsewhere, religious loyalties were determined not by faith alone but by family traditions, communal and social solidarity, conversion through mission work, marriage, school attendance and other social factors. Each division of Christianity constituted a social network within which it was possible to live safely and comfortably in the sure and certain knowledge of resurrection. Baptism, marriage and burial within a denomination were considered normal behaviour, and breaking out of these confines could result in social isolation and rejection. But this was not just a system of coercion, as in many other religious systems, or even in some deeply religious parts of the United Kingdom. There has always been a religious marketplace in Australia whereby individuals and groups can decide to change religion, as converts, through intermarriage or simply by moving up the social strata. Much Christian activity was devoted to persuading other Christians to exchange denominations, as it still is. Contemporary Australia has not been a rigidly divided society along religious lines, but it is not a perfectly open marketplace of conflicting beliefs either. Traditions and conventions determine religious loyalties to an important extent, though much less rigidly than a century ago.

Thus, an important element in understanding local religion is to look at its social role and development. This is one major aspect of the studies included here. The multiplicity of Australian religions – now extending beyond Christianity – is largely due to the ethnic multiplicity of an immigrant society, which draws its people from wider and wider circles. It also reflects the absence of an established ruling class that imposes its religion upon the lower orders. Despite the social superiority assumed by the Anglican Church in the past, the rich and powerful in Australia have been – and continue to be – drawn from people of Chinese background, Presbyterians, Jews, Methodists, Baptists and Orthodox. Catholics have now been drawn into social eminence, to the

extent that many hold leadership roles in the conservative political parties, which was unheard of as recently as the 1960s.

Even in rural areas, the predominance of one denomination is much more rare than in the United Kingdom and most of Europe. Catholics and Protestants normally lived in the same settlements, even if they worshipped at different churches and socialised within their own denomination. This is still evident from Census data on rural Australia, where Catholics and Anglicans frequently claim almost equal proportions of the population in country towns and rural districts. In the large cities, in which the majority of Australians live, there are more distinctive concentrations, as there were in earlier times. But these are often based on social factors as much as on religious preferences. Poor Irish Catholics originally lived in many of the same areas now inhabited by poor Muslims. But the strict religious dividing lines between Sydney's North Shore and its southern suburbs, and between areas to the north and the south of Melbourne's 'Yarra line' are fast breaking down. Catholics are now the largest single denomination in nearly all Sydney and Melbourne local government areas.

Religions offer solace and comfort to individuals, and sustain moral values that are important in preserving a civilised society. Not all do so to the same extent, and not all individuals feel the need to be involved in them or to believe in their messages.

The contributors to this volume were asked to comment on two aspects of religion and society: the social bases of denominations in the past and the present, and the social functions of religions in providing services and education. While the majority have a background in the faiths about which they write, this was not compulsory. Social scientists often comment on societies to which they do not belong, and historians habitually analyse societies that existed before they were born. Religions are manifestly human creations. Whether they are also guided by divine inspiration is a matter of faith. Whether a specific religion remains true to the intentions of its founders is a matter of theological analysis of the relevant texts and decisions from the past. What is attempted here is, rather, an analysis of the social role of religion in modern Australia, a society which did not become fully established until after most of the major religions of the world were already in place.

There is already a vast literature on religion, including a substantial body of historical work on religion in Australia. This has provided the basis for our researchers.

There is also a major resource of factual information. Australian Census data is superior to most others in that it has included information on religious adherence for over 150 years. But this data must be treated with care, especially when dealing with the four basic categories of Religion, Birthplace, Ancestry and Language. These are used extensively in this encyclopedia, but always on the proviso that they reveal only a broad picture, rather than significant detail. Many respondents to the Census do not answer the optional Religion question, while some do not answer the Ancestry question, either. Even when allowed two ancestries, many Australians could claim many more if that were permissible. Birthplace is also not given by a minority, while Language spoken at home assumes that only one language is spoken, when that may not apply in many families. Nevertheless, Census data is invaluable when looking at such social issues as the ethnicity, social position, residence, age, gender and many other attributes of the religious. The data used here is from the 2006 Census and has been expertly processed at the Canberra regional office of the Australian Bureau of Statistics by Valdis Juskevics. It assumes that most Australians subscribe to a defined religion, an assumption which may also be dubious. Those who are not religious at all may state either No Religion (18 per cent) or not answer (11.2 per cent).

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Committee and my two research assistants, Gillian Evans and Elizabeth Gilliam. Basic information on Australian religions is now available through the internet, to a much greater extent than ever before. A very useful reference work by Rowland Ward and Robert Humphreys, *Religious Bodies in Australia* (1995), provides a great deal of introductory information. A valuable CD-ROM was produced from the 2001 Census by Rev. Philip Hughes of the Christian Research Association, and made available to all schools by the Australian Government. It is hoped that this encyclopedia will usefully add to this information and provide a source for studying Australian religion as a whole, and its many component parts.

JAMES JUPP

AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA

With the outstanding exception of Australian Indigenous religions, it has always been a challenge to define what is distinctive or unique about the practice of religion in Australia. When Charles Dilke (1843–1911) visited Australia in 1867, he observed that religious practice differed from what he had observed in the United States, because it lacked the 'multiplication of creeds' that was said to be the result of the absence of a central, established church. Instead, Australians were strongly conservative in their religious affairs, and their pattern of devotion favoured the major churches followed by their parents in the United Kingdom or Ireland. In matters of religion, Australia has formed part of the United Kingdom rather than the new world; there have been few Australian prophets and fewer Australian founders of new sects and religions.

In general, religion in Australia has been a rather subdued and private practice, lacking both the intensity and virulence with which it has been imbued in other settler societies. This has meant that Australia has, to a large extent, been spared the violence and civic disorder associated with religious division in other countries. However, although religious belief has generally not been promoted with passion, it would be inaccurate to suggest that it has played an insignificant part in Australian life. Outright secularism, anti-clericalism and atheism have been rare in Australia, but so has passionate, public religious avowal. Despite the lack of enthusiasm, it was through religion that settlers – and the communities they founded – articulated new Australian cultural identities that expressed both continuity with the old world and adaptation to a new land. It was a primary means through which European settlers in the 19th century, and the settlers from all over the world who followed them in more recent decades, became Australian. With the theme of 'becoming Australian' in mind, this introduction provides a narrative survey of religion in Australia, beginning with the oldest beliefs of all, those of Australia's Indigenous people.

INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS IN AUSTRALIA IN 1770

The Australian continent has always been a religious landscape that supports a great variety of religious traditions. When the east coast was incorporated into the British empire by Captain James Cook (1728–79) in 1770, Australia was fully occupied by approximately half a million people, divided into 250 different language groups and tribes, as well as the multitude of spiritual beings and forces they observed. Across Australia, modern ethnographers recognise up to 10 major cultural blocs, each with their own distinctive religious traditions, expressed formally through myth and ritual and also saturating everyday life.

Elements common to Aboriginal religions include the centrality of the 'Dreaming' (from the Pitjantjatjara: *altyerre*), which can be defined as a time – or rather a state – of creative force for the enactment of religious ritual, law and customary life, and major myths from specific regions, such as the Rainbow Snake of Arnhem Land and the Wandjina of the north-western Kimberleys, which concern the bringing of creative forces including monsoonal rains. However, there is no single Aboriginal traditional religion. Popular conceptions of a generalised Aboriginal 'Dreamtime', which might include the worship of the Rainbow Serpent or ancestral spirits such as Baiame or Bunjil, do not reflect pre-European religions in Australia so much as their

creative adaptation by Aboriginal people and Europeans to the trauma of occupation, cultural loss and modernisation.

The highly differentiated forms of Aboriginal religions were not recognised by European settlers and were not described by ethnographers until the second half of the 20th century. In south-eastern Australia, where the sites of earliest and densest European settlement were located, colonial missionaries described religions focused on major ceremonies in honour of high gods, such as Baiami of the Kamilaroi and Wiradjuri (New South Wales), Daramulun of the Yuin (New South Wales), Ngurunderi of the Lower Murray people (South Australia), Bunjil of the Wotjoballuk (Victoria) and Mungan-ngaua of the Kurnai (Queensland), though many scholars now accept that these cults post-date the arrival of Europeans and reflect anxieties of the invasion period. In northern Australia, there were the fertility religions, including 'Mother Earth', of the Cape York Peninsula and Gulf region, possibly influenced by contact with Melanesian peoples. The dreaming narratives of the Central-North, such as the creative journey of the Wawilag Sisters, have become widely known through their depiction in multi-panel bark paintings, which were among the first Aboriginal artworks to be collected internationally. The Kimberley region is famous for its rock art featuring the distinctive Wandjina rain deities. In the heart of Australia, the complex totemic traditions of the Central and Western Desert regions, including the practice of circumcision and sub-incision of these regions, are sometimes seen as the most original and ancient of Aboriginal belief systems. In addition, the south-west, Lake Eyre, Tasmania and the Torres Strait Islands all have, or used to have, distinctive religious traditions.

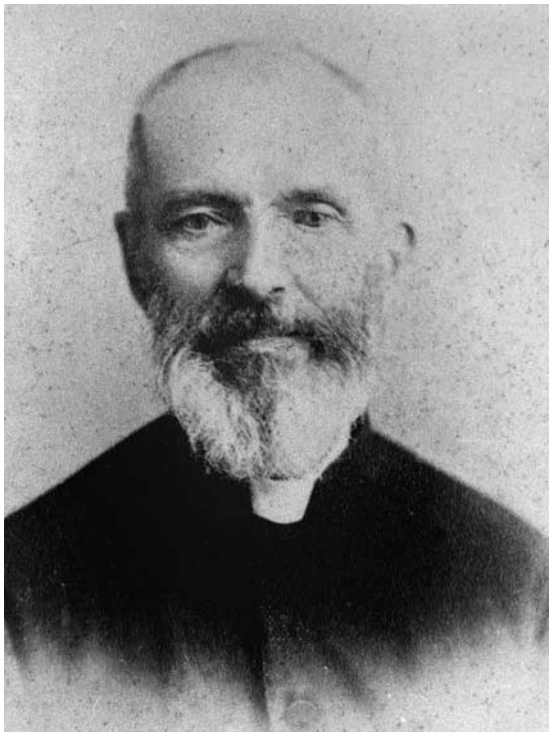
Following on from European occupation, there were a number of Aboriginal religious movements that expressed reactions or adaptations to European colonisation and to contact with the Muslim Macassans in northern Australia. These include the Baiame *waganna*, or dance, observed by missionaries at Wellington Valley, New South Wales, and which may have been a response to the smallpox epidemic that swept south-eastern Australia in 1829–30, and the Molonga travelling cult, which appears to have begun in the Gulf of Carpentaria in the late 19th century and was later observed by Daisy Bates (1863–1951) in South Australia. There were adaptations to Christianity, such as the black Jesus *Jinimin*, associated with the Woagaia cult recorded by the Petries in Lagrange, Western Australia, in the 1960s, but Aboriginal traditional society was generally more resistant to missionary approaches than comparable societies elsewhere in Asia and the Pacific. Just as Aboriginal people showed relatively little interest in European religions, so, too, Europeans were slow to examine and appreciate the complexity and difference of Indigenous Australian religions. Overall, while interaction with traditional religions is a major theme in the expansion of Christianity on all other continents, this is not the case in Australia until comparatively recent times.

BRITISH BACKGROUND TO AUSTRALIAN RELIGIOUS SETTLEMENT

Australian religion has been deeply influenced by the British origins of most of its settler people and a continuous history of cultural and commercial exchange and migration. Yet, in the face of a general secularist tradition in the writing of Australian history, the historian Manning Clark (1915–91) was the first to give substantive emphasis to the role played by religion in the settlement of Australia. In the first of his six-volume *A History of Australia* (1962), Clark argued that the forces of the Enlightenment, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism were instrumental in the formation of Australian society and character. This remains an appealing thesis, which recognises the significance of religious conflict in Europe at the time of Australian colonisation, even though Clark himself did little to develop it beyond a founding idea. Conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism was significant for both home and

colonial societies, and continued to have an impact in Australia until at least the 1960s.

In the 18th century, Anglicanism was endorsed as the national religion throughout the British Empire, in various official and unofficial ways. Officially, the *Act of Supremacy* (1534, re-enacted 1559) had established the British monarch as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England; the *Act of Uniformity* (1559) required public adherence to the liturgy of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. It was not until 1824 that the repeal of the *Test Act* (1672) removed the requirement that anyone who held civil office, including colonial officials such as the governors of New South Wales, had to take an oath of adherence to the Thirty-Nine Articles, which set out the doctrinal basis of the Church of England. The United Kingdom of England and Ireland was created by the *Acts of Union* (effective from 1801), and this notionally created a single parliament, with a single Protestant faith and a single monarch. This was a powerful idea, and one that had a long-term appeal throughout the United Kingdom, as a source of imperial unity. However, the extent to which it was more than an ideal of a unified religious polity that extended throughout all of the British Isles and her overseas colonies, which by then included New South Wales (1788), is debatable. Even in the United Kingdom, there were two established churches: the Episcopal Church of England and Ireland, and the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, each with quite different modes of church governance. Outside these established churches, there was a wide range of dissenting Protestant traditions, which had their origins in the English Civil War (1642–51) and had benefited from the freer environment of the American colonies to plant deep roots in the first British Empire, as Dilke had noted. Of these, the major dissenting denominations active in the Australian colonies were to be the Congregationalists, Baptists and the Society of Friends (Quakers). Catholicism was also a significant presence in the British Isles: in Ireland, the population was largely Roman Catholic and deeply hostile to penal laws that proscribed their religion and required them to provide financial support to the minority faith of the Protestant ascendancy.



Benjamin Glennie (1812–1900) was a pioneer of Anglicanism in rural Queensland from 1848 to 1876.
PHOTO: STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND.

Despite such divisions, British Protestantism had broad-based popular appeal in the colonial age, and united adherents of both the established churches and dissenters. In the 1730s and 1740s, Protestantism in the British Isles, the American colonies and parts of Europe was renewed in an international religious movement that emphasised personal piety, revival and conversion. This movement had a profound impact on the Congregational, Presbyterian and Baptist churches, some impact on established Anglicanism and led eventually to the formation of separate Methodist churches. The expansion of evangelicalism, the term that eventually identified the major features of this movement, corresponded to the expansion of the British Empire around the world. In some respects, evangelicalism can be seen as the founding religious movement of the

Australian colonies and its major religious success story. As the evangelical revival gathered force, hostilities between older Protestant and Catholic religious forces were also played out in Australia. In the year of the arrival of the First Fleet, an attempt to mitigate the severity of the penal laws against Catholics through the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* (1778) precipitated extensive rioting. Anti-Catholicism, reflected in the importance of the Orange Lodges and freemasonry for members of the military who served in colonial regiments, was an important strain of British nationalism. While the colonists languished, hardly remembered by the government that had established them in their exile, the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars (1799–1815) – in which Catholics and Protestants were largely to be found on opposing sides of the conflict – did little to ameliorate old fears of Catholic rebellion or diminish the attachment to the British Empire as Protestant.

The Enlightenment, the third major cultural movement contemporary with the founding period of Australian history, also influenced colonial religion. Clark was among those who argued that the main impact of the Enlightenment in Australia was its promotion of a secular vision of government detached from the church, extending in some cases to virulent anti-clericalism. However, the British and Scottish enlightenments lacked the sharp anti-clerical bite imparted by the French *philosophes*. Enlightened views of British religion extended to millenarian hopes that the extension of Christianity to the Pacific world discovered by Captain James Cook would usher in a perfect society before the return of Jesus Christ and the end of the world. While such aspirations were more actively directed towards the Christianising of the islands of the South Pacific, initially by the agents of the London Missionary Society (formed 1795 and dominated by Congregationalists), New South Wales was used extensively by the missionaries as they travelled to and from the island mission fields. Overall, enlightened government encouraged toleration and even-handedness to the religion of the colonial citizenry, and supported the greater religious pluralism that is a notable characteristic of the Australian colonies, when compared with the British metropole.

FOUNDING DENOMINATIONS AND CLERGY, 1788–1851

Religion came to Australia as part of the official establishment of the early convict settlements and, by and large, that meant the religion of denominational Christianity. Under a tradition of supplying British military establishments with chaplaincy services, Rev. Richard Johnson (1753–1827) was appointed colonial chaplain on the recommendation of the Eclectic Society, an evangelical discussion group which included the philanthropist and reformer William Wilberforce. The great majority of the early convicts, officers, marines and free settlers were adherents of three churches: the United Church of England and Ireland ('Anglican'), the Church of Scotland ('Presbyterian') and Roman Catholicism ('Catholic'). At the time of British settlement, Methodists were beginning to form their own Connexion, districts and circuits that functioned alongside the dioceses and parishes of the Anglican Church. Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Catholicism and Methodism continued to dominate religious life in the Australian colonies for at least a century and, by the time the colonies secured responsible self government, between 70 and 90 per cent of the population regarded themselves as belonging to one or other of these denominations.

The pattern of religious settlement did differ slightly from colony to colony. New South Wales, for example, had rather more Catholics than elsewhere; Victoria had rather more Presbyterians; in South Australia dissenting Protestants such as the Congregationalists and Baptists and, later, the Methodists, were important. German Lutherans had an impact in both South Australia and parts of Queensland. Apart from the Aboriginal people, who probably made up the majority of the Australian people prior to the gold rushes, the non-Christian population remained small. However, there were English Jews among the earliest convict arrivals; Chinese

Buddhists and 'Afghan' Muslims also came to pursue economic opportunities after the gold rushes.

Initially, the colonial chaplains were regarded as servants of the state whose salaries were provided in consideration of their performance of a range of religious and civic duties. The chaplains not only supplied religious services, but were also given responsibility for schools and education and, more controversially, faced pressure to allow their services to function as opportunities for a general muster and the pronouncement of official notices. The second colonial chaplain, Rev. Samuel Marsden (1765–1838), the son of a Yorkshire blacksmith, supplemented his religious duties with remunerative work as a farmer and magistrate, secular activities which were not unusual among rural clergy in Britain, but earned him considerable acrimony as 'the flogging parson' in popular regard. More formal moves to provide an established clergy for the colony came in the wake of the three reports of Commissioner John Thomas Bigge (1822–3), who recommended that there be an extension of the existing support for colonial clergy and schools.

The other Protestant churches also received a certain degree of state support. Methodists, Baptists and Congregationalists were encouraged by evangelical governors such as Thomas Brisbane and Richard Darling in New South Wales, and Sir George Arthur, the first governor of Van Diemen's Land. Arthur supported the visits of the Quakers, James Backhouse (1794–1869) and George Washington Walker (1800–59), who were commissioned by the Society of Friends to undertake a nine-year tour of the colonies in Australia and South Africa and report on moral and social conditions. The Catholic Church was tolerated from early on, and Governor Richard Bourke (1777–1855), a Dublin-born Protestant, was instrumental in securing the passage of the *NSW Church Act* (1836), which gave parity of funding to all Christian churches and, effectively, dis-established the United Church of England and Ireland. Churches that objected on moral grounds to state aid all missed out, which left a significant number without any support from the government. In response to prolonged and reasoned opposition, state aid to all the churches was systematically abandoned in the Australian colonies. The absence of state support for the churches was to be one of the features of the colonies that distinguished them from the British Isles.

By the 1840s, religious developments in the British Isles were again affecting Australia. Methodism continued to rise in importance, particularly among artisans, workers and miners, many of whom were attracted to the prospects for free emigration, which opened up after the establishment of the Colonial Land and Emigration Commission (1840) provided subsidies for qualified emigrants. The 'disruption' of the Church of Scotland (1843), during which about a half of the laity and a third of the clergy left the established Church to form the Free Church of Scotland, was quickly mirrored in rival Presbyterian churches in Australia. The Oxford Movement had an impact on colonial Anglicanism, causing division between low, or evangelical, and high-church, or Anglo-Catholic, parties, including some defections to Roman Catholicism. After 1850, the revival of Catholic devotional life in Ireland ensured a steady supply of devout, mission-minded Irish clergy for the Australian colonies. Despite the efforts of English Benedictines to set their mark on the Catholic Church in Australia, Irish bishops and clergy soon dominated the colonial church, extending what has been described as the Irish spiritual empire.

COLONIAL CLERGY PROVISION AND EDUCATION

Provision of clergy by the British for the major churches was one of the most important reasons why, in contrast to the United States, religious and cultural dependence and attachment to the United Kingdom persisted for so long in Australia. The complexity of the arrangements for the training and dispatch of colonial clergy is a good indication of the scale and importance of this activity for the effective establishment of the colonial churches. For the Anglican majority, chaplains were initially provided

through the agency of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). Religious literature, including tracts and bibles, was supplied by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The SPG withdrew its aid once the colonial church became self-supporting, but it remained a significant force in the provision of clergy and funds to rural dioceses in frontier regions until the early 20th century. Funding for Anglican bishoprics, which were essential to the expansion of institutional Anglicanism, was made available through the Colonial Bishoprics Fund (established 1841). The colonial committees of the British Methodist Conference and the free and established Churches of Scotland provided clergy for the Methodist and Presbyterian churches in Australia, respectively. Evangelical clergy for Anglican dioceses were supported with funds from the Colonial and Continental Church Society, though on a smaller scale than the state-funded SPG. Congregational ministers came through the Colonial Church Society. In addition to these formal mechanisms for the migration of clergy, bishops and higher clergy of all denominations recruited directly while travelling in Europe, and sought recruits through employment agents or by corresponding with individuals. Clergy were also trained in colonial missionary colleges in the British Isles and, to a lesser extent, in theological colleges in the colonies. Of the theological colleges that specialised in the training of missionary clergy, the most significant were St Augustine's College, Canterbury, for Anglican clergy and All Hallows' Missionary College, Drumcondra in Dublin, for Catholic missionary priests. Many of the higher clergy of the Catholic Church were supplied, not directly from Ireland, but through Rome and the Urban College of Propaganda.

With such an assured flow of British-trained clergy, it is not difficult to understand why it took so long to see the emergence of a native ministry in Australia. Early attempts by Bishop Broughton (1788–1853) to establish an Anglican theological college in Sydney were not successful, but with the aid of a bequest from Thomas Moore (1762–1840), a wealthy settler who left his property to aid the Diocese of Sydney, Bishop Frederic Barker (1808–82) was able to endow Moore Theological College. This sowed the seeds for a tenacious evangelical grip on the Anglican diocese of Sydney. Congregationalists and Baptists, who depended on the local congregation for community and finance, were more successful in training an Australian ministry, though the influence and numerical success of dissenting Protestantism never matched that achieved in the United States. On the other hand, although they had few theological training colleges, the Methodists were particularly successful in building up an Australian ministry, and this reflected their willingness to train candidates in the field and to draw upon the gifts of their many enthusiastic laymen.

While clergy carried the weight of professional church work, lay people were also important as organisers of church organisations, teachers, nurses and administrators of church-owned schools, hospitals and charitable institutions. Secondary colleges were established by most of the churches, and these provided religious formation as well as an educated laity. Laymen were also significant in the work of the universities that emerged in the late 19th century. However, religious influence on Australian universities, which were founded as secular institutions without faculties of theology or religious representation on their boards, was slight. With the exception of the Presbyterians, the denominational colleges attached to the universities of Sydney and Melbourne did not provide for the training of clergy but provided a religious environment in which to nurture the professional classes more generally. As a result, the great majority of Australian clergy received their formation outside the universities, and this may have contributed to the higher status enjoyed by university-educated clergy from the United Kingdom and the cultural conservatism of the churches. By the end of the 19th century, the drive to recruit clergy and educate lay professionals for the colonial churches had been so successful that the number of clergy counted in the colonial censuses of 1901 showed that the proportion of clergy