



AUSTRALIAN SOUL  
Religion and Spirituality  
in the Twenty-first  
Century

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## SPIRITUALITY AND CULTURAL CHANGE

An examination of both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects of Australia's religious and spiritual life shows that they have a healthy future. While continuities of practice will remain, there will be many changes. The degree of change will reflect the continued influence of the Australian religious institution, the impact of changes in Australian culture and social structure and the responses of Australian religious groups to each other and their changing situation. At the opening of the twenty-first century several cultural factors are changing the way Australians are religious and the way they give expression to their spirituality.

### The cultural shift from rationality to experience

A cultural macro-trend from the rational to the experiential and emotional as the dominant forms of authority is shaping the ways Australians express their spirituality. This shift in emphasis has been emerging for a long time. The transition is far from absolute since each of the three forms of authority and transcendence – tradition, reason and experience/emotion – plays a role in any period of history. But it is also true that in each era one form will be more dominant.

To exercise authority is to appeal to some transcendent principle or arbiter to legitimate decisions, policy and action. In the exercise of traditional authority appeal is made to position – 'she is the queen', 'he is the

pope' or 'she is the vice-chancellor' – and therefore has the authority to act, declare what is to be believed and must be obeyed. While we each appeal to authority to defend our views and legitimate our actions, this form of authority slowly gave way to appeals to reason following the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation, which increased in strength through the Enlightenment (Bouma 1991, 1992; Walls 1997: 92–105).

The Age of Reason is the label given in the history of philosophy to the high-water mark of rationality and often refers to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, reason continued as the primary basis of authority in Western social and cultural life until the mid-twentieth century (Gilbert 1980: 2–40, 63–65). Since then the emphasis on experience and feelings has increasingly taken the ascendancy in social and personal life. This transition has clear consequences for the forms religions take, which forms of spirituality are appealing, which religious groups are declining and how religious communities are organised. We live in post-rational times.

The Age of Reason emerged in reaction to forms of society that emphasised traditional authority structures and legitimacy based on position (Migliore 1991; Gilbert 1980: 63–66). Kings ruled by divine right and wielded unquestionable authority over temporal affairs while bishops ruled by divine right and exercised unquestionable authority over spiritual and ecclesiastical affairs. Each type of authority shapes the way people relate to each other, to leaders, to the transcendent and to God. The form of worship characteristic of traditional authority emphasised the distance between humans and God, between the ordinary and the divine, the everyday and the religious. In this authority system the duty of the believer was to accept the grace of God as dispensed by the clergy and not to question the authority of those placed over them by God. Hope was grounded in the certainty of the authority vested in the clergy and bishops by the formularies of the church. Bishops and kings ruled by 'divine right', in the place of God with the authority of God. For example, even today official documents issued by the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne, such as the licences given to clergy, begin with the declaration 'I, [name], By Divine Providence, Archbishop of Melbourne . . .?'

The familiar form of traditional authority is still found in Roman Catholicism, Orthodox churches and some forms of Anglican worship. The focus is on the Eucharist in which participants receive spiritual nourishment in

a mysterious way through eating and drinking consecrated bread and wine that they receive as the body and blood of Christ. As traditionally conducted the Eucharist involves experience of encountering the mystery of God in the sacrament, exposure to rational discourse in the sermon, and acknowledgement of the hierarchical authority of the clergy. However, in keeping with a reliance on traditional authority, the last element has come to take primacy in settling any debate about faith and morals. In the Eucharist the sacrificial benefit of Jesus' Passion and death are bequeathed to the recipient through the agency of the priest under the authority of the bishop.

The architecture associated with this 'traditional' approach to authority and worship not only develops the sense of distance between the worshipper and the holy but also enables worshippers to move towards and from the focal sacred point: the altar. The posture of reception is kneeling with hands reaching out to receive a physical representation of the presence of God. Great cathedrals were built to inspire awe in God. They were also architecturally designed to make clear not only the distinction but also the moral and physical distance between the ordinary person and the clergy and – even further away – the bishop. Beyond them all was the beckoning light of the world beyond lifting the eye to the promised hope. The music is often provided by a choir, themselves at a distance from the worshippers as the choir is seen as an earthly representation of the heavenly host of angels offering divine music to God on behalf of the worshippers. The type of religious organisation usually associated with this form of authority is hierarchical with bishops – including popes and archbishops – exercising control over a specified region and providing ministry through clergy, who are entirely beholden to the bishop for their position and livelihood.

The form of authority that took shape in protest against traditional authority vested by organisations in their representatives was based on reason (Gilbert 1980: 2–40, 63–65). Appeals to reason became the way to undermine the power of bishops, princes and kings. Reason was deemed to be superior to regal and episcopal authority (Armstrong 1993). If a request was unreasonable, or an edict declared unreasonable, a citizen could disobey, resist and ultimately overthrow unfair monarchs and bishops. The appeal to reason was foundational to the American and French revolutions. The American Declaration of Independence begins with the statement: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among

these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' The French Revolution overthrew a divine right monarch in the name of *Egalité, Fraternité et Liberté*. These self-evident and universal virtues could be realised by people who were guided by reason and who refused to be limited by what they did not understand, who opposed what was not just, and who established legal systems to protect citizens from the state and to limit the exercise of state power. These legal systems were based on reason, which was shown to be powerful in its ability to unlock the secrets of the universe and provide the basis for establishing laws that reflected those rules and regularities foundational to all order in nature and society. Because of being grounded in reason these laws had greater authority than the person, the organisation, the bishop and the monarch.

This shift to reason from traditional authority was foundational to the emergence of modern societies. In an earlier time this shift lay behind the arguments and activities of the Protestant Reformation (Gilbert 1980: 63–66). Theologies become sets of reasoned propositions flowing from first assumptions to statements about the nature of humanity and our relationship to God, a god who was ultimately rational and hence understandable, rather than ultimately mysterious as had been the position of the previous era (Armstrong 1993). In the Age of Reason, God was seen as a law-giver, providing the structure to all of life through rules and regulations that everything from stars to the smallest thing, including humans, had to follow. God was rational and made reasonable demands of creation. Theology had to stand the canons of reason, and mystical expression was viewed with suspicion. Indeed this approach to knowledge contained and controlled God through reason with some forms acting as though reason was god, and the law greater than God, by declaring that God could not, or at least would not, violate the laws of nature. In such a system the creature owes the creator obedience. The central feature of worship is the sermon with the implication that religious buildings and furnishings were to be constructed so as to restrain movement of people in order to promote the hearing of the word. Music is no longer addressed primarily to God by a small group but becomes an expression of the whole congregation and is used in part to instil belief via theologically correct hymns. The posture of reception in the rational approach to God is sitting and hearing. The chief duty of the believer is to receive and believe correct theology and avoid heresy.

The Presbyterian and Congregational churches represent the high-water mark of rational Protestantism. The form of ecclesiastical governance associated with this form of authority is a regional council usually elected by clergy and people. This council, varyingly called a synod, presbytery, classis or assembly, is the final arbiter of theological and other disputes. The regional council usually also owns the property and hires and fires the clergy.

The religious life of European Australia, along with the rest of the British Empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was very much dominated by rational Protestant Christianity. According to British law, the English monarch must be a Protestant, and one of the roles ascribed to the monarch is to stand at the head of the Church of England. Doing one's duty was the core virtue during this period of the religious and spiritual life of the empire. These duties included accepting the doctrines of the church and supporting the established order as expressed in royalty, the governor-general and the prime minister.

However, a major cultural change has been in the making for some time. Cultural changes of this magnitude show early signs long before they become the dominant form in a society. Moreover, as we have seen, earlier forms do not die out completely, nor are currently dominant forms without their instances throughout history. This is a matter of shifting emphases. The reliance on experience for authority has emerged as the dominant form of authority. This first became noticeable from the mid-twentieth century and is in full force in the twenty-first. Early instances can be seen in German and Scandinavian Pietist movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in English and American Methodism and other groups that find their origins in the Great Awakening of the late eighteenth century. The philosopher and theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher developed the theological and philosophical foundations of this approach to faith, religion and spirituality at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He argued that 'true religion is sense and taste for the infinite' and that the common human experience of absolute dependence is the origin of religion (Bowker 2005: 519).

The ultimate source of authority according to the experiential approach is to be found in the individual's experience, senses and feelings. This approach to authority is essential to empirical science, which asks that we trust our senses and that we focus on what we can see, touch, hear and feel in order to learn about the universe we live in. The ethical expression of this authority

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can be stated: 'If it feels right, do it'; 'If you sense that it is OK, it is OK'. Certainly if it does not feel right, do not do it. Trust your feelings; trust what your body is telling you. Attend to the inward working of the spirit; listen to the small voice within.

The Western cultural revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s centred on reactions against the domination of reason-based duty, against the head-dominated, cold, calculating qualities of the rational. From the perspective of experiential authority, reason was judged to be too cold. While experience led to an appreciation of diversity, the demands of reason seemed to lead to the fruitless search for the one best form of everything from statecraft to sex, from family to assembling automobiles, from child-rearing to worshipping God. Moreover, the focus on reason promoted wordiness, verbal excess as opposed to awe, silence and reflection. The rise of Buddhism in Australia reflects this seeking for the mystical and experiential encounter with the more-than-everyday life.

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#### *Tibetan Buddhists in Melbourne*

*At 7.30am a minibus pulls up outside the Mechanics Institute in one of Melbourne's beachside townships. Out piles a group of Tibetan monks. They have arrived to conduct morning meditation, and dozens of locals are waiting for them. The monks hail from the Gyuto monastery in northern India and for the past ten years have been travelling through outback and suburban Australia bringing their religion, ritual, philosophy and wonderful harmonic chanting to the lives of ordinary Australians.*

*For their visit the hall has been transformed into a place of worship and reverence. Brightly coloured bunting and splendid tapestries adorn the walls; prayer flags fly across the ceiling; an altar replaces the stage, framed by vivid fabrics and finely formed butter sculptures depicting the eight auspicious symbols. An image of the Dalai Lama, the exiled leader of Tibet, hangs above the altar.*

*The monks have been invited here to create a sacred sand mandala. Mandalas are metaphors for life, and the monks spend every day of their visit intricately crafting these elaborate spiritual 'artworks' with fine grains of coloured sand. The mandala is the main feature of the monks' visit and, as the work evolves, the visitors are caught up in the ritual of its creation.*

*Each morning begins with meditation. The monks sit in front of the altar in the lotus position. One monk known as the chant master begins chanting a low sonorous*

note, then the other monks join in. For the next hour the visitors, not all of whom are Buddhist, are transported on the rhythms of the chanting of ancient scriptures. Prayer and meditation meet. With the deep harmonic sound resonating through their body, participants are encouraged to clear their minds of worldly attachments and open their hearts to compassionate and selfless love for all living beings.

In part it is this philosophy of living peacefully with others and the planet that attracts Australians and other Westerners to Tibetan Buddhism. They are drawn to the stillness and outward simplicity of the religion, its lack of dogma, its foundation of tolerance, non-violence and ethics, and its clear explanation and understanding of life's suffering. Often they seek out Buddhism after some personal trauma or turmoil or as a result of their disillusionment with materialistic culture. In the rituals and performances of the Gyuto monks, through practices like meditation, through the teachings (dharma) of the Dalai Lama and other Buddhist teachers, they find what really matters in life. And while most of those interested in Tibetan Buddhism used to be middle-aged middle-class women, practitioners are now much more diverse.

At the end of the week the monks dissolve their sand mandala and funnel the fine grains of sand into a ritual vase. Then, to the sound of long, low blasts on Tibetan horns, crashing cymbals and banging drums, the monks, resplendent in their maroon robes and yellow hats, lead a procession to the beach not far away. Men, women, children and a few dogs follow behind. With prayers and symbolic acts, the sand is emptied into the sea as an offering to the local spirits of the water and is washed away on the tide.

Sylvie Shaw

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We are now witnessing a reaction against the merely verbal and the rise of demands for open, participative, experiential religion. The rise of Pentecostal Christianity and New Age religious groups provides the strongest evidence of the impact of this major cultural change on Australia's religious and spiritual life. The search for experiential grace, the quest to feel saved, to be whole, to experience ecstasy, in short, to feel right, is very strong and is met in these groups. Pentecostal Christianity, which has had its most recent origins among American working classes and oppressed minority groups, is now widely accepted by middle-class groups. Pentecostal Christianity and many of the New Age religious groups are religions of self-help, offering success theologies, focused on wholeness for the person and requiring emotional honesty rather than intellectual rigour – celebration, not cerebation.

The flavour of this experiential and feeling-grounded religiosity is given in the following description of *Star Wars* spirituality. In the 2001 census 71,000 Australians nominated some *Star Wars*-related response when asked to declare their religion. Many have scoffed at the idea of *Star Wars* and other science-fiction or cinema-based spiritualities, yet others (Barron 2003; Staub 2005) take them seriously, arguing that they offer a consistent cosmology, ethical framework and mythic consideration of the nature and destiny of the universe.

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#### *Star Wars spirituality*

*The Star Wars epic is now complete. Seventy-one thousand Australians responded to the 2001 census in ways that reflect association with characters from Star Wars: Jedi Knight, Jeddists, Sith Lord and others. The repeated spiritual theme of the Star Wars movies is 'Trust your feelings'. Amid the plotting and scheming of each of the movies and again in The Revenge of the Sith, Obi Wan Kenobi is asked by Yoda, 'What do your feelings tell you?' and 'What are you feeling, now?' He was told to 'Sense the Force' and 'Follow the Force'. Solutions are not found in reason – thinking things through – but through emotional congruity and sensitivity. The interconnection of each with all provides a sensible web, which, if the strivings of self and anxiety of achievement are set aside, the person can trust their feelings to lead them, where others fall and fail. Neither are solutions to be found in strength, power or technology, but in tuning in to one's feelings and being open to sensing those of others. Remember how Luke Skywalker had to learn to use the weapons of the Jedi – following feelings, intuition, being one with the Force? While rage and ambition may sharpen the attack of the Sith, the fully trained Jedi warrior is clear of these dark emotional forces that warp the capacity to be attuned to the feeling dimension with the Force itself.*

Gary Bouma

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The Pentecostal movement that is sweeping the world today is the clearest organisational representation of experiential and emotional authority in Christianity (Martin 2002; Anderson 2004). From an experiential/emotional perspective, the duty of the follower is to feel the grace of God, to feel saved, spirit-filled and full of joy. Indeed it can be said that the shift has been from an emphasis on orthodoxy – correct belief – to orthopassy – correct feelings.

The architecture associated with this form of authority is the mega-church, which has a large platform accommodating a musical ensemble that plays a form of contemporary popular gospel music. The sermon will be designed to elicit emotions and will be facilitated by multimedia images projected on to large screens. Music is congregational, expressive, often involving full body movements and hand-waving. Ecstatic utterance and exuberant expression of faith, trust and joy are encouraged and, in the large numbers accommodated in mega-churches, can become infectious. The form of ecclesiastical organisation characteristically found in Pentecostal assemblies is independent congregations governed by an elected or appointed board that owns the property and hires and fires the clergy. The degree to which the board is controlled by a charismatic clergy or by elected representatives of the congregation varies from case to case.

The rise of Pentecostal forms of Christianity has led to the emergence of a new basis for assessing the 'correctness' of the religiosity of a group or person. The form of religion associated with traditional authority focused on rituals, such as the conduct of the Eucharist or the Mass. The celebrant and those participating, including the congregation, had roles set for them in the prayer books or missals. The critical issue centred on correct practice: doing things in the right order, in the right manner, with hands held this way and facing that way and bowing at this point. The search was for orthopraxy – correct practice. Orthopraxy pleased God; getting it wrong displeased God and those who judged these things on earth. With the shift to rational forms of spirituality and worship, the focus shifted to correct belief – having orthodox theology. Creeds and canons were established, but whatever was written or said was assessed for its orthodoxy, and heresy trials were conducted to determine whether a sermon or publication was correct. Bishops would declare that a book published by a Catholic scholar was *nihil obstat* – nothing obstructs publication. Pentecostal forms of Christianity demand another form of correctness: correct feelings. It is not acceptable to express unhappiness in a Pentecostal assembly. Sadness, grief and guilt are but momentary transitional feelings on the way to ecstasy and praise. Pentecostal forms of Christianity do not demand orthopraxy or orthodoxy so much as orthopassy.

The following case study gives a picture of one form that experiential religion takes.

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### Pentecostal prayer and praise

*It is six o'clock on a cool Saturday night in Sydney but, inside, the church service is just heating up. With rock music thumping, and worshippers jumping, the pastor implores the followers to open their hearts to God. Pounding rock music and animated preaching are the foundation of this Christian Community Revival Church, a charismatic evangelical Christian church in an outer suburb as yet without a permanent home. But the hall is packed to the rafters with young people, from teens to twenties, from 'Anglo' to Asian, their voices and hands raised in praise and adoration. The production is slick, well crafted and professional. There are no outward signs that this is a church service rather than a rock concert: no crosses, no altar, no religious attire and no denominational logos. With the band, the singers and the preachers all dressed in jeans, only the song lyrics appearing over the live video on the giant screen behind the stage signal the religiosity of the occasion. The venue pumps with high energy from the start, but the pace changes from bouncy pop to pulsating anthem rock, as worshippers are urged to come forward and make a commitment to transform their lives through Jesus Christ.*

*When Guy Sebastian won Australian Idol in 2004 many young people became interested in Pentecostal Christianity from interviews with Guy in which he talked about his deep connection with the Paradise Church in South Australia. And while this church does not credit Guy's popularity directly with the growing interest among young people in charismatic worship, they acknowledge that he has played a major role in promoting evangelical Christianity among Australian youth.*

*Interest in attending this church spreads by word of mouth and personal invitation, and once young people experience the dynamism of the service, they want to return. Along with congregations from the Paradise Church in Adelaide and Hillsong Church in Sydney, which attract thousands of parishioners each week, every year more than 20,000 young people attend the annual conferences in one of the capital cities. The church deliberately targets 14–25-year-olds with its particular mix of energetic experiential worship and preaching that moves people towards self-transcendence and self-transformation. The intention is to inspire through emotionally engaged worship and use this energy to transform people.*

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Gary Bouma

## Implications of cultural change

The transition from rationality to experientialism has profound implications for Australia's religious and spiritual life. Those denominations of Christianity that developed a rational approach to the exclusion of tradition and emotion, such as the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Uniting and the Reformed, are experiencing rapid declines in membership and attendance. Presbyterians and Anglicans who were largely rational Protestants, with the noteworthy exception of liturgical Anglicans (Hilliard 1994), attracted large congregations and held much social and political power in Australia up to the 1960s, but this is no longer the case. Catholics have increased their presence, but this is largely due to migration. The fact that Pentecostal Australians are beginning to assert their influence in a variety of ways reflects this transition in ways we will discuss later. Where formerly powerful rational Protestant groups continue to attract a following, they will usually have adopted certain aspects of Pentecostalism, which are often referred to as charismatic movements, within existing denominations. Where successful, these usually lead to the establishment of mega-churches as separate congregations within the denomination.

### Impact on the churches

The transition from rational to experiential authority has radically altered the Australian religious landscape by changing both the relative position and the internal operation of the churches. The Catholic Church has been reformed and re-reformed as Vatican II opened the hierarchy to the influence of reason-based arguments in a way not previously seen, while maintaining a strictly traditional authority structure. It has lost many clergy and religious – most in order to marry – and recruitment fell off in part due to the removal of clergy and religious from a position of moral superiority by Vatican II (Schoenherr & Greeley 1974; Schoenherr & Sorenson 1982; Hoge, Shields & Verdieck 1988). In a sense the traditional structure ceased to 'feel right' for many, who then left. On the other hand, there is nothing more experiential than a well-conducted Eucharist. The Catholic Church has maintained a higher degree of balance in the tension between the three forms of authority while always retaining traditional authority as its primary and ultimate mode. This retention of more of the three forms of authority within the

one religious organisation has been one of the continuing strengths of the Catholic Church whereas Protestant groups tend to focus more narrowly on one dimension. The Catholic pattern of large parish churches built in association with parochial schools has been an effective strategy for coping with fluctuations of suburban demographic composition and the mobilisation of resources required to sustain parish life.

Formerly prominent Australian churches of British origin – Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and others – had moved to institute rational authority as the ultimate base for their worship and governance (Gilbert 1980). Some from these groups vigorously contest the transition. For example, the Rt Revd Dr Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, wrote in the *Guardian* (16 July 2005, p. 25) defending the value of reason over against feelings: ‘Reason is in short supply right now, and that is always dangerous. Reason is on the side of the angels. When someone says in a debate, “What I feel is . . .”, the chair should intervene. What people feel is neither here nor there in a debate. What matters is what they think . . .’ He was arguing for greater clarity in the debate about female bishops. Unfortunately, reason does not clarify this issue. Reason presupposes starting points and moves from assumptions, and much of this is based on feelings and experience or, in this case, the lack of it. But his defence is characteristic of those who hold to reason as the solution to the issues of the world, and he holds forth its promise.

The cultural shift from reason to experience undermined more radically their *raison d’être*, with the result that community-based churches, focused on preaching and with congregations in the 1950s of about 200 people, are being replaced by three forms of congregation. First, mega-churches, with congregations in the thousands, have emerged. They offer a much more emotionally charged worship style, draw people from a much wider geographic area and provide a wide diversity of religious and social services tailored according to social characteristics of participants: age, gender, family stage, and level of induction into the faith.

Second, there remain the small dwindling shells of neighbourhood churches struggling to attract congregations between thirty and eighty members, unable to pay their bills and ageing at a rate that will see most closed in the next twenty years. With these closures, the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Uniting experiment with establishing English village-type

parishes in the suburbs of Melbourne and Sydney will have been shown to have failed to provide a sustainable strategy for organised spiritual life in part because of the shift from rational to experiential authority and in part because these suburbs have yet to develop the demographically diverse population required for sustained village life. Rather, these suburbs are going through age cycles that leave churches at the end of the cycle with elderly congregations that do not appeal to young families who – when they do come – look in and feel that this is not their scene and move on.

Finally, the third form of twenty-first-century religious congregation are house churches, private chapels and informal forms of worship and spirituality that are less reliant on the formal organisations of churches, synagogues, temples or mosques for their expression and maintenance. While some of these informal gatherings are sponsored by formally organised religious groups, many are not and spring up as people who are disaffected by religious organisation seek some form of group context in which to share their stories, explore their experiences and find mutual support for their views of the transcendent. They also appeal to those who are looking for a low-demand way back to things religious and spiritual.

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#### Wellspring

*Friends of mine who have been completely disconnected from the church but are of a vague Christian background recently reported that they had become part of a group of about a dozen people who meet periodically in each other's homes to keep some time of quiet, to discuss issues, to pray and to share a meal. They meet by arrangement, not at fixed intervals, but about eight times a year. Some reading is proposed for each meeting. They have spent time going through The Bible as a Novel. Participants found this helpful as they could identify the origin of phrases they had heard, or stories they knew, but had not known they were from the Bible. My friends had explored a few churches, enjoyed what they encountered, but either did not feel it was their scene or were unable to relate to the demand for weekly participation. Church participation also presupposed much knowledge and experience they did not have. The group they meet with is supported by a group called Wellspring, which has branches in major cities and offers a wide range of spirituality, counselling and consulting services.*

Gary Bouma

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Some describe the transition to the experiential as privatisation. While the move to meeting in homes and attending to the feelings of persons may be described as private, there are also public dimensions and consequences to this form of religious authority. This is not the relegation to the private of the once public by the market or by the forces of secularisation. It is a shift in the zone of the production of religious goods and services as well as the zone of consumption. It is a turning away from one form of organisation of the religious market – a form that has been dominant since the mid-nineteenth century, a form dominated by religious professionals and hierarchy. These changes, of course, like many of the changes affecting religious life, are not limited to the religious sphere since health industries and other service economies are likewise being transformed by do-it-yourself approaches.

Religious belief and spiritual practices do not seem to be disappearing from Australians (Evans & Kelley 2004), but participation in formal religious services certainly is declining. Meditation, spirituality, yoga, body-building and self work, both with obvious religious trappings and without, seem to be attracting large numbers (Tacey 2003). The focus in these activities again is not on propositional theology but on providing an experience, enabling direct connection with the transcendent and feeling in touch with self, other and the universe.

#### Impact on clergy

Contemporary forms of spirituality are often conducted without specialist professionals. This reflects a cultural trend away from reliance on patriarchal professionalism and the rational to the authority of the self, feelings and experience. It also reflects the movement away from subservience to system and hierarchy and towards personal agency. We live in post-professional times. There is no more awe and unquestioning submission before the white lab-coated or ecclesiastically dressed professional. The professions are grounded in the rational, they know the rules as they pertain to certain areas of life and, for a fee, they will tell you what to do and what is good for you. The professions are the high priestly cadres of the Age of Reason. Now 'do it yourself' medicine, religion, self-development and accounting have become widespread and increasingly popular. Some of us are eager for the day of DIY law: the law seems the last profession to retain its absolute professional authority. Now, however, there is

a great distrust of the professional, the one who knows what is good for you and is likely to enforce their will by doing unto you what is good for you according to their understanding without consultation. The consumer has begun to ask, 'What is he hiding?' and 'How is he misusing his power?' The use of the masculine is deliberate as this model of professional practice is a form of patriarchy that disempowers the other and is grounded in disrespect for the other. Increasingly consumers are saying, 'I don't need this, I will do it myself' or seeking an alternative source for what they need.

This trend to self-reliance and increasing wariness of professionals poses a great problem for clergy. They are no longer valued or respected for their position alone. Nor is their education, although often excellent, widely respected as it was until recently either not certified or conducted outside university structures and the subject matter not as respected as the sciences. Catholic clergy have usually been educated to a substantially higher level than Protestant clergy, whose professional preparation in the British Commonwealth is usually at the level of a primary school teacher. Few Protestant clergy are respected for their ability to make real a sense of the presence of God.

However, today people seek direct encounter with the transcendent. They want to experience the numinous and the presence of God. Many forms of spirituality promise that each person can do this by themselves through meditation or some other spiritual exercise. The role of the new spiritual professional is not to produce lifelong dependency on the professional but self-capacity to engage the beyond. People are not convinced that clergy can or are willing to help them do this. The way religious professionals conduct their practice today must be more engaged and give ample evidence that they are experiencing what those who seek their help wish to experience. Their service must be grounded in experiential authority. This has profound implications for ministry and ministry training, but most religious groups are a long way from taking this on board.

Further undermining trust in clergy is the fact that we value what we pay for, and clergy in the British Commonwealth have not learned to charge. If we get it for nothing, it must be suspect. There is a tension between commercial values and the provision at low cost or no cost of any service, including spiritual direction, providing encounters with God or devising liturgical marking of events and meaningful interpretation of life.

### Implications for theology

The transition to experiential authority has considerable implications for the way we think about God, for theology and for the way we imagine God. Under the previously dominant mode, reason and law prevailed and God was seen as a distant law-giver, one who laid down the rules – the basic propositions – and all else was a logical consequence. Failure to follow the rules was law-breaking and God, the law-giver, was well within his – yes, it is a patriarchal theology – rights to punish. According to the substitutionary atonement theory held by evangelical Anglicans in Sydney and other evangelical groups, the only way out was a legal pardon won through the sacrifice of God's son.

Today a theology that does not feel right is doomed and, like it or not, it does not feel right to see God as having to punish his son instead of us. Such behaviour is seen as emotionally immature and is unacceptable as it does not make emotional sense. In its place come feel-good theologies that insist that God wants you to be rich and good-looking and to live in a large house with all the latest gadgets and appointments. God as the great 'know-it-all' is not the God in demand today. Rather people seek the God who has experienced it all, who has been where I am going and who knows what it feels like because God has been through it. Whereas previously our ideas and images of God had to conform to the theological precepts of the church, now theologies must be emotionally satisfying and produce joyful members who give generously to the church. While these changes and tensions are perhaps more obvious in Protestant churches and the Catholic Church retains a greater balance, the cultural shift colours the thinking throughout.

### Post-secular times

During the latter days of the predominance of reason in the last half of the twentieth century, it looked as if secularity would drive all religion into oblivion through the advances of science and intense critical rational reflection on the mysteries of the spiritual life. Now with the rise of the experiential and emotional bases of authority, secularity has given way to a great wash of spirituality, including religious revitalisation in places where it was least expected and various forms of global fundamentalism (Berger 1999; Thomas 2005; Martin 2005). Spirituality is basically openness to the more-than, the transcendent; being open to the beyond-us, the beyond within

us, the beyond around us. Spirituality is everywhere. Look at the bookshops selling crystals, Celtic runes and amulets, books on astrology and offering holistic massage, therapeutic oils and candles – everywhere there are candles. Candles and incense have escaped the sanctuaries of churches and are found in homes, offices, celebrations and private inner sanctums. To see the post-secular nature of the early twenty-first century look at the personal growth ads, offers for meditation, inner growth, the boom in the numbers saying they are Buddhists. Look also at the movies: *Star Wars*, *Sixth Sense*, *Dogma*, *Ghosts*, *Matrix*, *Holy Smoke* and the Harry Potter series, to say nothing of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien intended his work to be profoundly religious but without being tied to any official or recognisable religion. George Lucas clearly intends the spiritual cosmology of the *Star Wars* movies to be central. These and other movies develop ideas and images of powers beyond those normally encountered in daily life, issues of commitment and morality, problems of redemption, reconciliation and restoration to community; and questions of the future, purpose and destiny of humanity and the universe.

Fundamentalism and revitalised religious life is also characteristic of post-secularity. While some see these as attempts to return to an earlier time, they are usually very much contemporary and forward-looking religious movements. Religious revitalisation occurs when those within existing groups begin to intensify their practice and belief following a period of comparative laxity in practice and ethics. Islam has been experiencing a time of revitalisation. Even in Australia, more Muslim women wear religiously identifying dress today than ten or twenty years ago. This is more evident among younger women as the current generation of young Muslim adults set themselves off against what they perceive as lax parents (Bouma 1994; Bouma, Daw & Munawar 2001: 66–72; Yasmineen 2001). Within Christianity religious revitalisation can be seen in the rise of the Christian Right in the USA, in the spread and growth of Pentecostal forms of Christianity and in the rise of Catholic groups such as Opus Dei. The rhetoric of revitalisation movements usually includes a high level of tension with the wider society, which is seen as immoral and corrupt, and tension with officials of existing religious organisations within the religious tradition who are accused of having sold out to the secular and immoral wider society and of having abandoned the central precepts and traditions of the religion. Members and leaders are subject to scrutiny as each strives for purity and condemns those judged to

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be lax, heretical or inadequate in their conformity to the newly heightened standards.

These high-demand religious groups exercise great control over their members, developing quite intensely interacting communities that can be self-isolating from the world around them (Antoun 2001). This isolation is partly due to their insistence on separation from the world to promote purity, partly due to the rejection they experience from those whom they condemn as inadequate or beyond the moral pale and who in turn judge members of revitalised groups as excessive, extreme or worse, and partly due to the sheer demand on the time of participants, which make it nearly impossible for members to sustain relationships outside the religious group. One of the consequences of this isolation is a growing distance between the religious group and the wider world; with the distance comes mutual ignorance and fear; with the distance usual social interaction declines, leading to an increase in the likelihood of inappropriate interactions: public condemnations, legislative repression and violence. The violence may emanate from within the group and be directed against some offending aspect of the larger society: abortion clinics, homosexuals or casinos. Suicide bombers often have been trained, equipped and motivated by intense, isolated and fundamentalist offshoots of Islam. On the other hand, the violence may emanate from the larger society and be directed against the religious group, as in the case of Waco, attacks on the family, religiously based vilification and harassment.

Fundamentalism is not so much a return to 'that old-time religion' as it is a distinctly postmodern and post-secular form of religious revitalisation characterised by an intense focus on what is declared to be a simple literal reading of the sacred text, which is then applied simplistically to life (Antoun 2001). Fundamentalism seems to be quite 'modern' and rational with its intense focus on text. However, the way this is communicated and applied uses leading-edge technology and forms of religious organisation that are much more twenty-first century, riding the waves of globalisation and much more fluid than the rigid hierarchies and bureaucracies of modernity and the Age of Reason.

#### Post-book times

One of the key drivers in the cultural shift from reliance on authority founded on reason to experiential forms of authority has been the transition from

the print media of communication to electronic forms: radio, television, computer, Internet and video. Print was essential to rational authority. The invention of the printing press shifted the knowledge industry from monasteries focused on copying to universities focused on the production and transmission of, and commentary on, knowledge. Laws, theologies, creeds and prayer books could be printed and read by the 'gatekeepers' of society. Literacy was power when most could not read but were told it was 'in the book' by clergy, lawyers and political leaders. Printing led to the standardisation of worship formulae, rites and even sermons. Clergy could be directed to use the printed formularies and none other.

With industrialisation print media became mass media as newspapers, magazines and inexpensive books put this form of communication into the hands of the masses. This, coupled with increasingly universal education, introduced the peak of the Age of Reason: 1850 to 1950. People going to churches would have taken their own copies or would be given Bibles and hymnbooks. Sermons and theological debates were printed in the daily press. Heresy trials were held in order to give public displays of taking correct theological thinking seriously. Given that thinking cannot be observed, what was attended to, monitored and enforced was the correctness of what appeared in print. Truth was seen as fixed, eternal and printed.

With the rise of electronic media of communication through the twentieth century, the skills and patterns of communication associated with print have been bypassed. Audio and video presentations are more experiential and less verbal. The imagery used changes and develops in more fluid ways and, once in printed books and papers, the images remained fixed. Children have been raised primarily on electronic media since the early 1960s. Most churches that have not changed with the media revolution appear to be losing members. Pentecostal forms of religion have had little difficulty adopting the styles and technology of the new media. In this context truth becomes more of an experience. Experience gives rise to an internally held trusting basis for hope, rather than something external that is appropriated through a rational affirmation.

Many of the current debates within religious organisations relate to this major transition from print media to electronic media of communication. Some groups seem to have sacralised print and seek to exclude other media. Immigrant communities use both print and electronic media in a variety of ways. Electronic media make it possible to keep in touch with a transnational

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community with a relatively small Australian base. Staying in communication with religious developments in the home country may help to keep some diasporic communities religiously fluid. On the other hand, religious groups that rely on text find the electronic media a challenge to maintaining orthodox teaching.

## Conclusion

Religion and spirituality operate in a cultural context. Many religious leaders today find that profound cultural changes in the nature of authority and the expectations of religion and spirituality challenge their assumptions about their roles. People trained in the 1960s and 1970s have had to reinvent themselves to engage a much different world, use different technology to engage people and appeal to a different form of authority if they are to engage at all. Many institutions that train clergy still produce graduates suited to a society and culture that has now passed for more than a quarter-century. Most religious organisations continue with structures that were established in the mid-nineteenth century, singing hymns of the same era and pushing agendas set long ago.

The pace of change is bewildering and the scope of change such as to leave no comfortable place to hide. However, religious organisations are responding to this situation in a variety of ways. Some are reactionary, others retreat, but many are creatively rising to the challenge. Meanwhile spiritualities burgeon.

