FAITH without the CHURCH?

Nominalism in Australian Christianity

The majority of Australians identify with a Christian denomination but rarely, if ever, attend a church. This book explores those people. Who are they? What do they believe? What do they think about the Christian faith? What do they think about the churches?

Faith Without the Church? uses new data from questions placed by the Christian Reseach Association in the 1989-1990 National Social Science Survey. These results will be of great interest to those who do attend church and who wonder why others don't—and to all who are seeking to understand Australian culture.

Other publications of the Christian Research Association include:

- *Patterns of Faith*
- *The Australian Clergy*
- *God through Human Eyes*
- *A Yearbook for Australian Churches*—published annually
- *Pointers*—a quarterly bulletin of church-related research.

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FAITH WITHOUT THE CHURCH? BENTLEY - BLOMBERY - HUGHES

Peter Bentley - 'Tricia Blombery - Philip Hughes

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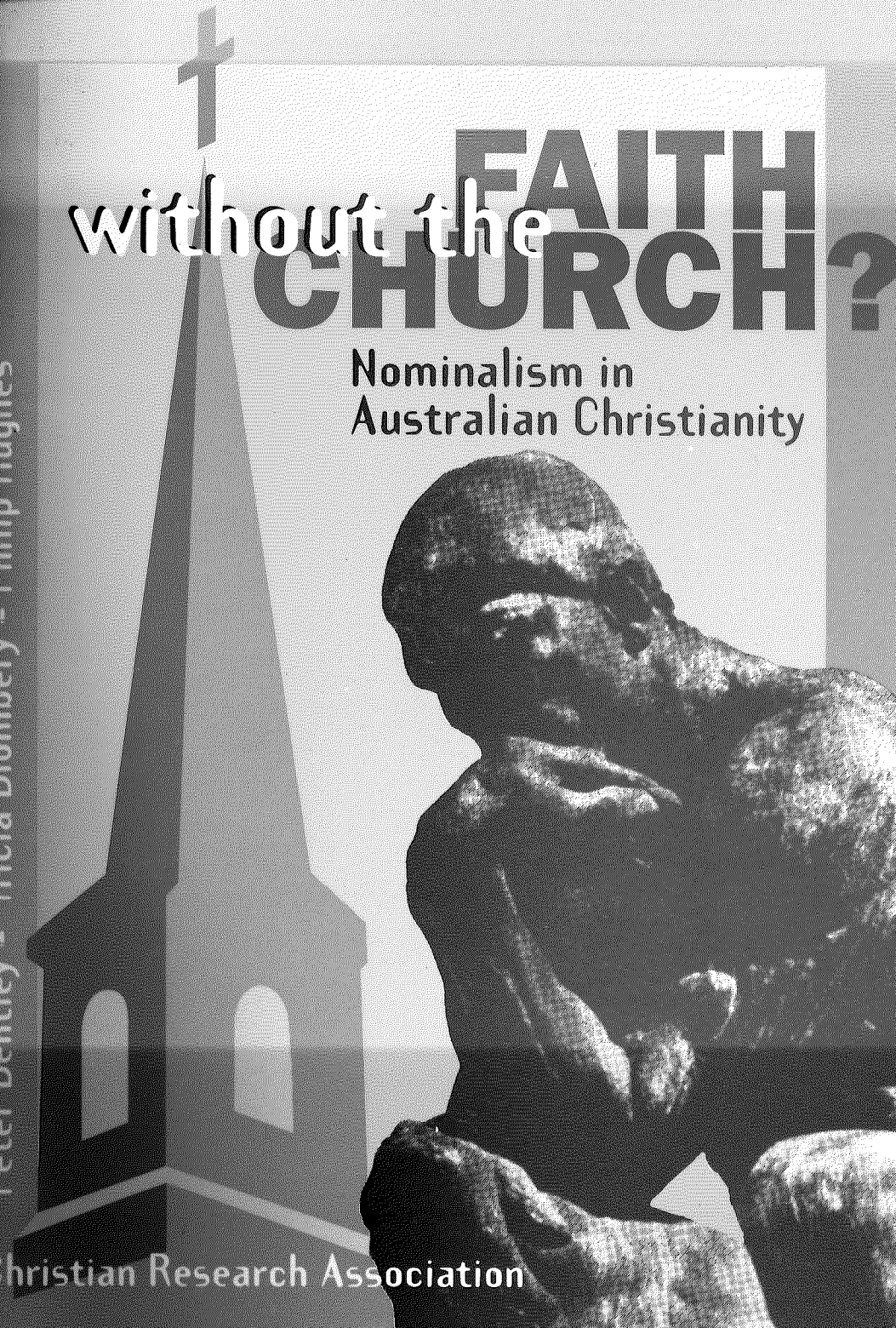

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Preface

The Christian Research Association was formed in 1985. Following the Australian Values Study Survey, conducted in 1983, many people felt there was a need for more in-depth information about religion in Australian and some church and para-church organisations were keen to gather more information.

The Christian Research Association (CRA) started with a project involving open-ended interviews with a wide variety of people in Melbourne and Sydney on meaning in life and religious faith. The material which arose out of those interviews was rich and suggestive. But the ideas needed to be tested for the generalisability.

The second stage of the general research of the CRA was the Combined Churches Survey for Faith and Mission. This was a large scale national survey conducted in 1987 amongst Anglican, Baptist, Catholic, Pentecostal and Uniting Church attenders. The survey focussed on their involvement in church life and the nature and significance of the Christian faith. For three years, the staff of the CRA mined the data and produced a series of eight reports on it, looking at the understanding of God, the roles and work of the clergy, the church's mission, religious television and radio programmes, the young people in the church, and patterns of faith.

The third stage is an examination of the understanding of the Christian faith amongst people who do not attend the churches. For this, we have used information gathered from questions we have placed in the National Social Science Survey conducted by the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. This is the first report from the 1989-90 survey. Further questions are being asked in the 1992 survey, and we expect more information to be available in 1993.

Meanwhile, we hope this book will be a valuable source of information about the wide spectrum of Australians who identify with one or other of the Christian denominations, but who also tell us that they rarely, if ever, attend church.

The work of the Christian Research Association is supported by a number of organisations which are listed opposite. We would like to express

our thanks to those organisations and their representatives who direct us in our research. We would also like to express our special thanks to Prof. Gary Bouma who has read the manuscript and offered helpful criticism. It should be noted that, while many people have contributed to this book, the opinions expressed in it are our own.

Peter Bentley, 'Tricia Blombery and Philip Hughes

June 1992

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Christian Australia?

For the purposes of this book, nominalism is defined as
- *identification with a Christian denomination in surveys or census, and*
- *church attendance less than once a month.*

Defined this way, most Australians are nominal.

Cathie is now in her forties. As a child she remembers going to Sunday School. It was held in the local Anglican church. As a teenager she was part of the tennis club that was connected with the church. She still considers herself to be a Christian. She is certainly not a Moslem or a Buddhist! But she does not go to church these days.

Her son has a friend at school who invited her to a children's club in a local church. They had a special Christmas service last year, and she went along to that. She enjoyed singing the carols, and the church had a warm but strange feel for her. It crossed her mind that she might go again sometime. But she hasn't got round to it yet. There is nothing to compel her to go to church, and it seems hard to find an appropriate opportunity.

The majority of Australian people are like Cathie. They would be offended if anyone suggested they were not Christians. When the census forms are distributed, they mark themselves down as being Anglican, or Catholic, or one of the other mainline Christian denominations. But they rarely, if ever attend church.

For the purposes of this book, we have defined nominal Christians as those who label themselves as belonging to one or other of the Christian denominations in the census or other surveys, but who attend church services of worship less than once a month.

For further precision in our analysis, we have distinguished two groups who are nominally Christian. The first group is those people who say they never attend church services, although continuing to identify with a denominational

church who had not been touched by our church attenders survey. This survey will be referred to as the NSSS 89 survey throughout the book.

The National Social Science Survey gave us an opportunity to test some of these ideas. This survey was distributed by the Research School of Social Sciences of the Australian National University to a national sample of Australians, randomly sampled from the electoral rolls. After careful follow-up, over 6,000 surveys were returned. This gives us some of the best survey information about religious belief and church affiliation in Australia outside the church yet produced.

Chapter 2
Historical Perspectives

The earliest days of European settlement saw very high levels of nominalism with few opportunities for worship. The scene changed markedly in the Gold Rush days and as churches were established. There have been periods of greater nominalism, such as towards the end of the nineteenth century and after World War I. However, in general, levels of involvement have reflected denominational traditions, with overall levels of 25 to 30% of the population attending church services at least once a month.

Have you ever heard someone assert or comment that Australia was at some stage a more 'Christian' or 'religious country'? Perhaps the 1950s was mentioned as the golden era of faithfulness or perhaps the middle of the nineteenth century. Whatever the period, a key feature which is usually lacking in these statements is any reference to statistics or established factual evidence.

The task of compiling the data is a very difficult one. If we examine church attendance figures, how do we make comparisons? Denominations and researchers use different questions, criteria and methods for collecting statistics? Groups can collect statistics weekly, monthly, yearly, and/or on the major Christian festivals. Denominations have different criteria for membership, including age. Children are recorded in some membership and attendance records and not in others.

While there are difficulties with statistics, we can still make use of the statistics which are available. But readers should be aware that the statistics provide a guide, rather than a blueprint. The following section will comment on general trends of nominalism in Australia between 1778 and World War II.

From European Settlement to 1851

It should be noted from the start that this book is not concerned with Aboriginal religion. Better qualified researchers have already produced excellent references to Aboriginal religion in Australia. It should however be noted that the inclusion of (some or most) Aboriginals in certain colonial and state censuses and federated history, or usually the exclusion of most Aboriginals, has had an affect on the overall figures, with particular reference to affiliation with non-Christian religions. It is thought that at the time of the European Settlement there were between 300 000 and 500 000 Aboriginals in Australia (Porter, 1991: 1; also Gillman, 1988: 62).

In January 1788 the ratio of clergy to the general population of the European settlement was about one to a thousand. Richard Johnson was a priest in the Church of England, but his evangelical piety and the fact that he was the solitary minister, broadened his denominational focus. Though several denominations were represented in the first fleet arrivals, it is generally thought that the majority 'were at least nominal Anglicans' (Hogan, 1987: 10). In a basic sense Richard Johnson was a practical ecumenist, who was less concerned with the Church of England, than with the planting and survival of some fundamentals of Christian belief. Johnson and other Church of England clergy provided the public face for Christianity until the arrival of Protestant clergy in the second decade of the nineteenth century and the two Catholic chaplains in 1820.

Though there had been times of official and unofficial Catholic ministry, for the most part Catholic convicts were required to attend Church of England services. As Michael Hogan points out though, the key issue was that they were denied the opportunity of Catholic worship. Yet he estimates that 'probably no more than 20% [of Catholic convicts] would have been regular churchgoers had they had the opportunity' (Hogan, 1987: 26).

A question about religious affiliation has been included in the official census since the first in 1828. The exception is Tasmania, which omitted the question in 1881. The question has been optional since 1861.

Not all states included the same group of denominations at the same time. The table below outlines these differences. All researchers owe a debt to Walter Phillips for the compilation of statistics about religion for the Historical Statistics volume of *Australians*.

Denomation	NSW	QLD	Vict	.S.A.	Tas.	W.A.
Anglican	1828	1861	1841	1844	1837	1848
Catholic	1828	1861	1854	1844	1837	1848
Baptist	1871	1868	1854	1869	1837	1891
Church of Christ	1891	1886	1857	1866	1891	1891
Congregational	1856	1861	1854	1855	1837	1848
Lutheran	1881	1868	1854	1846	1891	1891
Methodist	1841	1861	1841	1844	1837	1848
Orthodox	1891	1871	1854	1891	1891	1891
Presbyterian	1841	1861	1841	1844	1837	1848
Salvation Army	1891	1886	1891	1891	1891	1891

Source: Walter Phillips: 'Religion' in *Australians: Historical Statistics*
Note: In Tasmania Baptists and Congregationalist were first noted in 1837, but regular recording only took place from 1861.

Table 1. Year of Census when Denominations First Recorded

Although there are statistics available which provide a breakdown of religious affiliation, it should be noted that these statistics do not provide a guide to religious observance. They do not provide information about the extent of a person's faith or attachment to a particular denomination.

For example, the 1828 Census of New South Wales records a population of 36 598 of which 8226 are Catholic. Patrick O'Farrell notes that a better approximation might be 10 000 out of 40 000 (O'Farrell, 1977: 20). It seems from the evidence that few Catholics were practising what would have been regarded officially as a proper expression of the Catholic faith.

When Father John McEncroe arrived in Sydney in 1832 he estimated that there were between 16000 and 18000 Catholics, but McEncroe also commented that 'not one half of whom hardly ever see a priest' (O'Farrell, 1977: 33). William Ullathorne 'was told that he had more communicants on his first Easter Sunday than there had been in the whole of the previous year' (O'Farrell, 1977: 33). O'Farrell also postulates about the size of the practising congregation.

'Could it have numbered a thousand? Perhaps it was very much smaller, even - on the evidence of the Sydney *Herald* in 1831 - as few as fifty?' (O'Farrell, 1977: 35).

Catholics in Tasmania faired even worse. Father Philip Conolly had gone to Tasmania in 1821, the year after he arrived in Sydney as one of the official Catholic chaplains. However, over the next fifteen years Conolly did not consolidate the Catholic ministry, rather he alienated the Catholics in Tasmania to the point of protest. They wanted to be sent a better priest (O'Farrell, 1977: 32). In 1833 it was estimated that out of Tasmania's population of 45 000, about 5000 were Catholic. O'Farrell records that William Ullathorne, a English Benedictine priest visiting Tasmania in 1833 found 'what he took to be the wreckage of Father Connolly's ministry, the neglect of the primitive church building, its filth and disorder, pastoral work untended, the sacraments seldom approached, the laity alienated, the priest himself strange, usually absent, occasionally affected by drink.' O'Farrell further records that by 1835 'many Catholics had fallen away. Of those who were still prepared to acknowledge their religion, a number had not practised it for thirty or forty years: they had to be instructed like children' (O'Farrell, 1977: 32).

Religious expression in the first thirty years of the colony was volatile, disparate and unpredictable. Very often, the lack of ministers and priests, church buildings and associated features (schools, services etc) hindered institutional affiliation and the personal practice of a particular denominational religion. If there was not a priest available in your local area, then church attendance was probably not even considered as a possibility.

The arrival of other denominations

During the early period of the European settlement, the smaller Protestant denominations were for the most part non-existent. Certainly it took several decades before the smaller groups formed those structures and practices which are associated with established colonial churches, rather than missionary outposts.

Methodist class meetings commenced in 1812, and the first minister, Samuel Leigh arrived in 1815. It is worth noting that Australia remained a mission district of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society from Leigh's arrival until 1855, by which time they had 108 ministers and 19 897 members (Humphreys, 1986: 44).

Presbyterian services began in Tasmania in January 1822 and in New South Wales the first Presbyterian minister, John Dunmore Lang, arrived in 1823. Institutional bodies were not formed until the 1830s.

Congregationalism had an impromptu start with the arrival of London Missionary Society missionaries in Sydney in 1798, but it was not until 1828 in Sydney and 1830 in Tasmania that work was established permanently.

Baptist work began in the 1830s, but unlike other churches it refused state aid. Like other smaller denominations they were 'beset by problems of distance, lack of finances, shortage of capable personnel and other difficulties... Furthermore, the practice of congregational church government and the autonomy of each church as a separate entity made centralised denominational development difficult' (Gillman, 1988: 134). The first Baptist union or association was formed in Victoria in 1862.

Lutheran work began in Australia in the late 1830s with the arrival of three groups of immigrants from Germany. Two groups went to work with Aboriginals in Brisbane and South Australia. The third group settled near Adelaide. Lutheran numbers continued to grow through migration until about 1880, when there was a break until after the First World War. Congregations were formed in Sydney in 1866 and 1854 in Victoria (Gillman, 1988: 151-52).

Churches of Christ work dates from the 1840s in South Australia, 1852 in New South Wales and 1853 in Victoria. The churches in Victoria were largely made up of British immigrants drawn to the goldfields (Gillman, 1988: 160). Cooperation between individual Churches of Christ grew with the first conference formed in Victoria in 1866.

With the introduction of assisted immigration in 1831, the next quarter of the century witnessed an explosion in population numbers, reaching 437 665 in 1851. It is worth noting that by the conclusion of transportation (1868) about 180 000 women, men and children had entered Australia as convicts (convict transportation had ceased to New South Wales in 1840), but to postulate that the convict heritage and especially the male dominance of the convicts (there were about 25 000 women out of 180 000) left a permanent stain on Australian cultural and religious life is purely conjecture and ignores the changes which immigration has continually brought over two hundred years (see Grocott, 1980: 285-6).

There is no doubt that convicts had an effect on the life of the early colony, but even some of this was positive. Patrick O'Farrell relates the successful efforts of Bishop Polding, Australia's first Catholic bishop, who

arrived in Sydney in September 1835, in introducing a campaign for spiritual renewal among Catholic convicts which led to decreased crime, social benefits and greater observance of Catholic practice (O'Farrell, 1977: 42-43).

Michael Hogan notes, 'As the free settlers and successful emancipists contributed to a process of gentrification at the top of New South Wales society in the early years of the nineteenth century, it was natural that church attendance should increase significantly. By then there was a partly indigenous class structure, and conventional religious observance was one of the badges of the gentry.' Hogan went on to state that 'By 1850 probably one-quarter of the population attended religious services each week - a figure that compares favourably with modern statistics' (Hogan, 1987: 21-22).

Hugh Jackson estimates that in 1850, the year before the first comprehensive colonial census, about 21% of the population were usual attenders (Jackson, 1987: 188). Gillman puts the figure at 22% (Gillman, 1988: 44).

From 1851 to Federation

The next fifty years also witnessed dramatic growth, with the population reaching just over three and three-quarter million in 1901. The goldfields of Victoria drew people of varied nationalities, and it seems, religious backgrounds. Between 1854 and 1857, the category which included Buddhism and other Asian religions experienced an increase of 919%. In comparison the Church of England experienced only 58% (Phillips, 1981: 422).

As well as the benefit of larger numbers from which denominations could draw, the Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian denominations benefited from state aid to religion, particularly for the building of churches and the payment of clergy stipends, from the 1830s to the 1850s and 1860s.

The census of 1861 reported that 'the decrease in the relative proportion of the members of the Church of England is accounted for by the exercise of much greater care in the collection of the information, and stricter attention in the compilation, so as to obviate the objections raised on former occasions to the effect, that all unspecified Protestant religionists were put down to the Church of England.'

Another feature which spanned a significant part of the growth period of the nineteenth century was the provision of state aid to denominational education. In 1880, New South Wales became the final state to phase out educational funding. The main church to be affected in one sense by these

decisions was the Catholic Church. The Catholic population had experienced growth through the provision of assisted migration. From 1839 to 1851, 48% of those assisted to New South Wales (and Port Phillip district) came from Ireland (Hogan, 1987: 63). As Michael Hogan points out, the Catholic Church was isolated by the moves to cut off state aid to education. In 1833 there were 11 Catholic schools and in 1858 there were 174 (Hogan, 1987: 54,92). In Victoria in 1867, a report outlined that the Catholic make-up of Catholic schools was 55% compared to 39% of Anglicans in Anglican schools.

Interestingly, Hogan states that by the end of the century, some twenty years after state aid to education had ended, there was a higher percentage of Catholics in Catholic schools than had been in 1860 at the height of the state aid. This was achieved by a restructuring of the operations of the schools (now totally staffed by religious) and increased and consolidated lay support (Hogan, 1987: 94-95;114-15).

Hugh Jackson demonstrates that in some of the years to federation, there was an increase in the number of usual attenders at Sunday services. For instance, one of the restricting features of the colonial period was the availability of seats for people if they wanted to attend church. In Victoria in 1851 this has been calculated at 14 seats for every 100 Victorians, while in 1890 it was 54 seats per hundred. He notes that 'increasing the provision for public worship was almost always rewarded by attendance'. In 1851 about 14% of the Victorian population usually attended church, while in 1881 this had risen to 34% (Jackson, 1987: 104).

Again much of the increased attendance is reflected in certain denominations. Jackson quotes a survey conducted in *The Daily Telegraph* in 1887, in the Northern and Southern (more well-to-do) areas of Melbourne. In the Northern area, only 12% of Church of England adherents attended church on that Sunday, while 27% of Presbyterians and 78% of Wesleyans (and others) attended (Jackson, 1987: 105).

We should also note the impact upon the churches in the nineteenth century of the influx of worshippers from England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The churches were 'churches of immigrants' (Jackson, 1987: 5). Jackson notes records of church attendance in the Liverpool, England area in 1881. Church of England was 18%, Protestant - 65%. One study of church attendance in Melbourne revealed that the average attendance 1881 - 1891 ranged from Church of England - 19% to Wesleyan Methodist - 87%, with Baptists - 48% and Presbyterians - 42% (Engel, 1984: 37).

For New South Wales, between 1870 and 1900, J.D. Bollen has shown that there was a larger number of people attending church in 1870 than later in the century. Bollen used figures from the *New South Wales Statistical Register* to demonstrate that in 1870, the average church attendance was 35%, in 1880 - 30%; 1890 - 28% (Bollen, 1972: 185).

Frank Engel notes that also in Victoria 'there was a steady decline in the relative size of the churches to the community'. He interprets this by referring to F.B.Smith '"While the churches held the core of the faithful, they no longer made gains in the community"'. Smith provided the following statistics: 1863-1874 - church membership increased 5% above the population; 1874-81 - the increase was only 0.4% above the population and from 1881-91, it dropped behind by 2%.

Smith himself summed up the fluctuations in affiliation by saying:

> 'I suggest that the rise and decline of church activity and religious controversy can be understood best in terms of generation. First the flowering, and then the gradual extinction of the gold-rush migrant generation and finally their supersession by the Australian-born...' whom he saw as either more aggressive and radical or as taking life easily and knowing just enough about religion not to trouble about it (Engel, 1984: 37).

The following comparison provides a useful insight, though because of the different years, it should be only taken as a guide. Though the years 1870 and 1871 cannot be compared in terms of raw statistics, it is interesting to note that according to the *New South Wales Statistical Register* in 1870 there was an average attendance of Church of England of 48 851, while the 1871 Census recorded an affiliation of 229 243 (c 21%). Methodism recorded an average attendance of 38 998 in 1870 and in the 1871 census an affiliation of 39 566 (c 98.5%). Similarly F.B. Smith in a study of 'Religion and Free Thought in Melbourne' found that the Wesleyan Methodists in Victoria had an effective church attendance rate of 99% for 1863-1874 (Engel, 1984: 37).

These figures reflect those quoted by Jackson above and demonstrate that denominations had vastly different attendance records. These attendance records were linked to denominational expectations and traditions of church attendance. As Judd and Cable note 'the principal offenders in causing the gap between professed and effective attendance were the Anglicans. Only 22% of Anglicans in 1871 were churchgoers; by 1881 the percentage had dropped to sixteen. All of

the other large Churches returned much higher proportions' (Judd and Cable, 1987: 120).

It is worth noting the experience of South Australia, with regard to the Protestant churches. In 1846 the Methodists recorded an affiliation of 2 246 and in 1860 this had leapt to 22 210, an increase of 888%. The Lutheran Church also grew dramatically from 1524 in 1846 to 11 235 in 1860, an increase of 637%. In comparison the Church of England grew 264%. In 1876, Methodists were 26% of the South Australian population (more than double their national percentage and an increase from 18.8% in 1860) and were almost equal with the Church of England - 26.3% (37% in 1860) (Phillips, 1987: 424).

As Western Australia expanded, between 1891 and 1901, several of the smaller denominations recorded explosive growth far above the population growth of 269%: Baptists: 283 - 2914; Churches of Christ: 98 - 1064; Lutherans: 216 - 1702; Salvation Army: 4 - 1690.

One of the reasons usually provided to explain the decline in church attendance rates in New South Wales and Victoria in the last quarter of the century is, as the infant country expanded in commercialism and interests, there arose a greater pressure on the whole notion of sabbath keeping or sabbatarianism. While there was legislative consolidation during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Hugh Jackson relates that popular opposition to the Sunday restriction grew as well. The existence of the Sunday Liberation Society was evidence of the wider appeal of the established movement to oppose sabbatarianism. Hugh Jackson notes that 'Protestant ministers who from the early 1870s had resisted Sunday leisure activities had done so in large part because they believed that these would lead in the short or long run to thinner congregations'. Jackson wonders whether their fears turned out to be justified? He notes that after thirty years of debate, the public museum and art gallery in Melbourne were opened on Sundays (1904) (Jackson, 1987: 111-12).

Cable and Judd use the issue of 'Sunday observance' to comment on the changing environment of Sydney Anglicans. From the mid nineteenth century, the laws restricting Sunday activity had been 'conspicuously and progressively ignored'. They comment that Sunday transport and trading in the 1890s were accepted popular activities and point out that while trains and steamers were available for sightseeing and amusement, trains actually made churchgoing easier. Overall they observed that 'while some Anglicans maintained opposition to all non-religious activity on Sunday, others came to terms with the changing times and accepted most aspects of Sunday recreation, with the exception of

organised sport. But whatever their viewpoint, it was clear that the Lord's Day would never be the same' (Judd and Cable, 1987: 146-147). It is quite probable that most of the people who took advantage of day trips away would never have been regular churchgoers anyway.

Attendance at mass for Catholics was a particularly important obligation for Sunday. Though it was legitimate to not to attend if it was near impossible (the church or priest was too far away), by the 1870s there was a growing number of priests which enabled most people to attend mass on Sunday if they so desired. Jackson also points out that 'the obligation to be at mass on Sunday did not extend to receiving communion. But when communion was taken, and this was required at least once a year, a fast had to be observed beforehand' (Jackson, 1987: 119-21).

Attendance at mass by Catholics was recorded at 19.2 in 1850. There was a substantial increase by 1870 - 40.1 and then decline by 1900 - 31.4 (O'Farrell, 1977: 280), levels well below those of the Wesleyan figures quoted in Jackson.

It is commonly thought that the Methodist structure enabled an easier adaptation to the changing and volatile environment of the gold rush and boom days of Victoria.

The 1891 census witnessed the emergence of the Salvation Army. (It had first appeared in Queensland census of 1886). A note in *A Statistical Account of the Seven Colonies of Australasia* said that it was 'probable that the ranks [of the Salvation Army] are largely recruited from the different Protestant denominations'. Interestingly the Salvation Army and the Unitarian Church were the only two religious bodies to record a numerical decrease from the 1891 census to the 1911 census.

During the nineteenth century it could also be argued that some attendance at church was related to social need. In 1894 a survey of Adelaide churches found that more women than men attended services. Jackson comments that 'going to church remained socially important to many married women because their opportunities for meeting people outside the home were so restricted' (Jackson, 1987: 118-19).

Overall it seems that after the 1850s there was a rise in the average church attendance, and then a decline levelling out to about 28% by the end of the century (Gillman, 1988: 44). Frank Engel comments that

> the legend, then, of Sydney and Melbourne being church-attending populations in the latter part of the nineteenth century is just that - a legend. It was a minority which went to church, but the influence of a minority can be considerable... The fact remained, however, that of every ten people approximately seven had no regular connection with a church (Engel, 1984: 38).

From Federation

The churches experienced different fortunes in the early part of the twentieth century. The new century not only brought in a new political system and the beginnings of new parties, it also saw the emergence and/or consolidation of smaller religious groups and denominations. The five main groups in the nineteenth century, Anglicans, Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist, Baptist, became part of a burgeoning array of churches, a smorgasbord of Christian traditions, from which intrigued and interested seekers could sample. The census patterns reflected these changes. In the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, more churches and religious groups would enter what had been a privileged reserve for the semi-established few. As church attendance numbers fell for some of the older Australian denominations, other churches, especially some of the newer churches, increased, thus maintaining the overall percentage of regular church attenders. Interestingly, Uidam comments that 'when we look at the church records we find some concern on nominalism, but no report on decline' (Uidam, 1982: 47). Actual church membership seemed to be relatively stable and in some churches was growing. (See Table 2)

Richard Broome relates church concern about nominalism to the publication of the religious figures for the 1901 census. 'Protestant clergy expressed alarm at the vast difference between their nominal strength and those actually attending church' (Broome, 1980: 4).

In the census records, the Lutheran Church suffered a basic numerical decrease from 1901: 75 021; 72 395 in 1911 to 57 519 in 1921, reflecting the fall in immigration from Germany during the last years of the nineteenth century.

The Salvation Army, which had experienced dramatic growth in the 1880s, suffered significant numerical decreases in NSW: 1891 - 10 315; 1911 - 7 413 and Victoria: 1891 - 13 512; 1911 - 7799 (Census figures).

In comparison, another new church, the Seventh-day Adventists, established in Australia in 1885, experienced rapid growth in New South Wales toward the end of the nineteenth century and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, from 83 affiliations in the 1891 Census, 1177 in 1901 to 4337

in 1921. This represented an increase of some 5000%, compared to the population which had increased 71%.

It seems that there are fewer statistics available for church attendance rates in the first part of the twentieth century than the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Walter Phillips comments:

> All the colonial governments collected returns of church attendance for a time, but only New South Wales and Victoria published them consistently throughout the nineteenth century. Both the governments and most denominations gave up publishing this information early in this century ... Church or communicant membership is a more significant indicator of religious commitment, and it is interesting to compare the number of members or communicants claimed by each denomination with the number that claim affiliation with those denominations at each census (Phillips, 1987: 419).

Following this advice, figures for four of the major denominations have been included in the following table for the purposes of easy comparison, though it should be noted that the figures provide only a guided outline of church commitment. The census years chosen, 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1921 are some of the few which correspond with available statistics from the denominations represented.

As it has been previously mentioned, it needs to be noted that church membership figures usually did not include people under a certain age, while census figures included all ages.

1. Anglican

	Census	% Population	Church Members	% of Members - Census
1891	1 209 445	38.7	63 114	5.2
1901	1 497 576	39.68	100 002	6.7
1911	1 709 830	38.4	141 992	8.3
1921	2 371 853	43.66	185 374	7.8

Notes:
1891 - figures do not include Western Australia
1911 and 1921 - figures do not include the Northern Territory.

2. Baptist

	Census	%	Church Members	% of Members - Census
1891	58 650	2.27	11 154	19
1901	72 756	2.35	14 391	19.8
1911	97 059	2.18	23 199	23.9
1921	101 136	1.98	23 716	23.5

Notes:
1891 - figures do not include W.A., Queensland and Tasmania
1901 - figures do not include Queensland and Tasmania
1911 - figures do not include Northern Territory
1921 - figures do not include W.A. and Northern Territory

3. Churches of Christ

	Census	% Population	Church Members	% of Members - Census
1891	14 744	.47	8408	57
1901	24 192	.64	12 274	50.7
1911	38 747	.87	20 003	51.6
1921	54 569	1.0	25 098	46.0

Notes: 1891 - figures do not include Western Australia
1911 and 1921 - figures do not include Northern Territory

4. Presbyterian

	Census	% Population	Church Members	% of Members - Census
1891	340 167	11.42	36 428	10.7
1901	426 105	11.29	47 626	11.2
1911	558 192	12.54	63 661	11.4
1921	636 708	11.72	77 273	12.1

Notes: 1891 - figures do not include Tasmania and Western Australia
1911 and 1921 - figures do not include Northern Territory.
Source: W. Phillips, 'Religion', *Australians: Historical Statistics*.

Table 2. Denominational Growth 1891 - 1921.

The table illustrates what has already been established. Anglicans have a small number of members compared to affiliation as indicated in census returns. In these figures the people are most likely to be regular attenders, or regular enough to have attached a label of communicant. This pattern corresponds with other records of lower rates of church attendance than that found in other denominations.

Anglicans have looser criteria for membership than the Baptists and the smallest group, the Churches of Christ, which have a tighter focus on what it means to have actual membership in the church. Both these groups have higher comparative attendance rates, indicating that membership entails a more obvious commitment. These churches promoted a membership philosophy which included regular (weekly) attendance at church.

For the Presbyterians it is worth noting Uidam's findings that the New South Wales Presbyterians reported that of the 132 617 Presbyterians recorded in their state (for the 1901 Census), they could account for 55 089 of them (41.54%). The difference between the New South Wales figure of 55 089 and the overall church figure of 47 626 is because of the inclusion of non-communicant adult attenders and the non-communicant children of communicant members. Of the 426 105 Presbyterians in the 1901 census, 35% were under 15 years of age (Uidam, 1982: 47).

If we include these children in the overall membership for the Presbyterian Church, then the comparison rate for 1901 instead of 11.8%, would be closer to 45%, a figure which compares much more favourably with the claim by the New South Wales Presbyterian Church that they could account for 41% of the Presbyterians in their state. A similar comment could be made about the Baptist and Church of Christ figures. None of these denominations would include children as members. This example provides a good example of the difference between census figures which include all ages and church figures which often only include communicant members.

The War to end all Wars

It is also worth examining the impact of the First World War on attitude to religion in Australia.

In a section in Sydney Anglicans on 'The War in the Parishes', the impact of the absence of large numbers of active men is noted. 'By 1916, the departure of laymen for the war badly affected smaller parishes. Choirs struggled for want of tenors and basses and some parish councils - for which only men were eligible

- were obliged to disband for want of male parishioners to fill them.' Church offerings declined and women were often caught up with war appeals and voluntary work for the war effort, rather than church activities like lay visitation (Judd and Cable, 1987: 178-79).

Many clergy assumed that the war would promote spiritual revival and disappointment arose when this did not occur (McKernan, 1980: 26-27,175-77; Judd and Cable, 1987: 180-82). Certainly there were more church services, memorial services, special services and prayer meetings, but there was also bitter division among the churches and individuals over issues like conscription (McKernan, 1980: 110; O'Farrell, 1977: 324-27). It would have been difficult to win converts by telling young Australians that the way to honour God was to go to a situation in which they would probably make closer contact with God than they presently wished.

Clergy were involved in the communication of the 'death telegram', which perhaps provided a contact with religion which most people would not have welcomed. Judd and Cable comment: 'Church attendance increased dramatically during the war: in a climate of enduring uncertainty, there was room for unbelief but not for indifference' (Judd and Cable, 1987: 179).

The impact of the deaths of 60 000 young Australians 150 000 wounded, out of 330 000 active servicemen - 7% of the population (Judd and Cable, 1987: 176) - is difficult to determine, but it is unlikely that it provided a good foundation for post-war church life. What is quite obvious from an examination of churches built before the First World War is that many of those who had been killed, or their families, had an association with their local church. The honour boards usually listed those who had been killed and for World War I stand out far more than those for later wars, even allowing for the difference in numbers.

Judd and Cable relate the experience of St Mary's Anglican Church, Balmain, which lists the 83 men who had served from the church, including the rector's five sons, three of whom did not return (Judd and Cable, 1987: 175).

Engel believes that 'the war and the post-war years saw a significant hardening of attitude against religion' (Engel, 1984: 213). Engel also quotes Maynard Davies as saying that male survivors were generally less interested in church life than their fathers. Though they may had attended the chaplain's services, noting the church attendance rates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is reasonable to assume that most had not regularly attended services held in church buildings in the pre-war years. It could even be argued that the wartime association of religious practice with the chaplain would

end as the war did, with relief. Was there any need or encouragement for the regular non-attenders to attend church back in Australia? It is unlikely there was, religious practice in the trenches must have been very different from the pew.

It may be that the war had other effects as well. The impact of the influenza epidemic was especially felt in church life. Because of the risk of infection, such public gatherings could not be held in church buildings and for several months in 1919, only open air services were permitted and under such restrictions that it is quite possible that 1919 recorded the lowest church attendance rates for any period in Australian church history (Judd and Cable, 1987: 186).

Also, Hugh Jackson relates that Sunday observance and church attendance were again threatened by the changed environment which came after World War I. Men in particular were used to travel, adventure and change. Mobility was increased due to the availability of the motor car for country trips and long weekends (Jackson, 1987: 114).

Between the Wars

The next two decades witnessed major changes in Australia, particularly in technology and consumerism. Intellectual circles grew, notably within the Catholic Church and within universities. Socially and morally there were changes, especially during the depression.

Catholic leaders were worried by the decline in the Catholic proportion of the population (from 22.6% in 1901 - 17.5% in 1935), but it is has not been established that this decline was reflected in any significant way in attendance at mass. Judging by the statistics which illustrate Catholic attendance after the war, it can be reasonably concluded that up until World War II there was a similar attendance pattern compared with the nineteenth century, namely that probably at the most 50% of Catholics attended mass on a weekly basis.

O'Farrell reports the findings of a priest who visited an area in outer Northern Sydney in 1919. According to the priest, only 14% of the Catholic households maintained a good practice of the Catholic faith. Of the religious practice of 513 persons, about 50% were thought to have a reasonable practice, while 30% of the Catholics did not even practice their faith at all (O'Farrell, 1977: 369).

Hugh Jackson comments on figures supplied by a priest who had examined attendance at mass in two parishes in Sydney in 1933 over a period of three weeks and compared them with actual numbers on the roll. In the first

parish (1633 on the roll) an average of about 44% of Catholics attended mass and in the second parish (6323 on the roll) an average of 36% attended (Jackson, 1987: 122).

O'Farrell states that in 1933, just over 50% of the Catholic population attended mass 'in any way regularly'. He notes that this was a serious issue in the light of a Catholic's obligations to attend mass under pain of serious sin (O'Farrell, 1977: 372).

It is more likely that Catholic leaders were worried by the perhaps unpredictable and diverse commitment of certain groups of Catholics, especially the intellectuals and radicalised workers. A more important question was how could the Church maintain the loyalty of those people who had the power to influence large number of other Catholics?

World War II

There is less statistical material available for the 1930s and 1940s. Economic circumstances and then the war changed the pattern of the regular Commonwealth census. The first for this period was held in 1933 and the second, fourteen years later, in 1947. On the whole, most writers agree that there was no significant change in the overall positions of the churches in terms of membership or affiliation during the depression and ear years.

It is worth noting the following summary of the war period by Michael Hogan:

> On the home front during the Second World War the main churches tended to stagnate. Many of the most energetic of the clergy were serving as chaplains in the armed forces. There was no call for expansion of resources, as there had been during almost every previous era. Since the beginning of the Depression the Australian birthrate had not been replacing the population, and there was no physical expansion of the cities which might have needed more churches or schools. This was just as well, for, in a war-time economy of rationing and restricted resource, the churches had a low priority. Yet the churches did fairly well; there was money in the economy as there had not been in the 1930s (Hogan, 1987: 229).

Hogan notes two important factors:

1. Economic crisis.

The Depression not only affected church incomes, but also placed greater strain on charitable works and social welfare resources. The Churches of Christ

report that membership declined in the depression, while their social welfare services expanded (Gillman, 1988: 162).

2. Defence crisis.

Like the Depression, the war years were focussed on survival, rather than development. For example, between 1938 and 1947, Baptists made little progress and membership in three states declined (Petras, 1988: 46). Unlike the First World War, between 1939 and 1945, the churches were more united over matters like conscription, and the Irish question did not appear as significant. The defence threat was perceived as significantly greater, particularly after the Japanese attacks on Darwin and Sydney in 1942.

In a way, the churches were support agencies for the war effort. They were one of the fabric threads which connected and contributed to the well-being of the whole society. On a practical level, the economic crisis and defence crisis were given greater priority in Australia than denominational concerns about church membership and attendance.

It should be noted that the churches had not begun to feel the effects of post-war immigration by the time of the 1947 census.

Historical Patterns

Overall, it appears that the available evidence supports the view that for the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the average church attendance (at least once each month) usually stayed in the range of the 25% - 30%. Of course some denominations had significantly higher attendance rates than others. Usually these were the smaller denominations, who usually had a high prescription on membership commitment, the key being regular attendance. There were also certain periods of high involvement in church life, like the Wesleyan Methodists in the Victorian gold rush period. But these were isolated and temporary examples of enthusiasm rather than a general picture of the nineteenth or early twentieth century.

In conclusion, it is worth noting Jackson's reflective comments on church attendance in New Zealand. 'Judged against the Methodists, in the 1860s and 1870s, Catholics were mediocre church attenders; by the 1930s the Catholics were better attenders than the adherents of all the principle Protestant denominations and the gap was steadily widening' (Jackson, 1987: 124).

Chapter 3
Since World War II

Since the 60s, there has been an increase in nominalism, particularly in some of the mainline denominations. Nominalism is found evenly spread across all age groups, and does not vary significantly with marital status, gender, or work-force participation. The degree of nominalism varies most with denominational affiliation. While most denominations have seen increased nominalism, some, such as the Baptists, have seen increased levels of involvement. The development of the Pentecostal churches also defies the general trends of decline in church involvement.

General Trends

Following the end of World War II, there was a boom time in many aspects of Australian life. Everything was expanding, including the churches. A survey in 1947 found that 35% of Australians claimed they had attended a church service in the last fortnight (Goot, 1987: 438). Many churches were being built and were experiencing growth. The peak in attendance seems to have been reached around the time of the 1959 Billy Graham Crusades. At that time, around one third of Australians indicated in polls that they had attended church last week, and 45% or more said they attended at least once a month.

By the mid seventies, the picture was quite different. Only 20% indicated they had been to church in the last week, and less than 30% were attending once a month or more. While there was little drop between 1974 and 1984, there has been another decrease in the latter half of the eighties. In 1989, 11% indicated that they attended weekly or more often, and 24% were attending once a month or more. In thirty years, the percentage of Australians attending church more than once a month has almost halved.

This decline in church attendance can be partly explained in terms of people leaving the Christian faith altogether. There has been an increase in those