

The Christian Research Association has been providing research and information for seven years and in the last three years has established *A Yearbook for Australian Churches* as the essential reference work for religion in Australia.

While the Yearbook is compiled by the researchers (Peter Bentley, 'Tricia Blombery and Philip Hughes), they are indebted to the many people who contribute, including other researchers and church and religious leaders. The invitation to provide a short reflection of the aim and content of the Yearbook is welcomed, because it allows some opportunity to spread our net wider and perhaps find out other details which should be recorded.

The 1993 edition contains directorial and statistical details for the major Christian denominations and religious groups (over 50 entries, including Islam,

Judaism and Hinduism), as well as a directory of major non-denominational/ecumenical groups. Each year there is a special section. In 1991 this was on statistics and religion in Australia. In 1992 the focus was on multiculturalism and the churches and the 1993 edition examines religious education in schools, concentrating on the smaller systems and groups which have not received wide coverage in the past (there are ar-

ticles on Christian Community Schooling, Lutheran, Seventh-day Adventist).

In 1991 non-government schools represented 25.2% of the total number of schools in Australia. Catholic schools represented 17.1% of all schools and Anglican schools 1.2%. In actual numbers this was 2510 schools. An approximate percentage breakdown of this non-government group provides an even more interesting picture:

## BUMS ON SEATS

### *number crunching in the church*

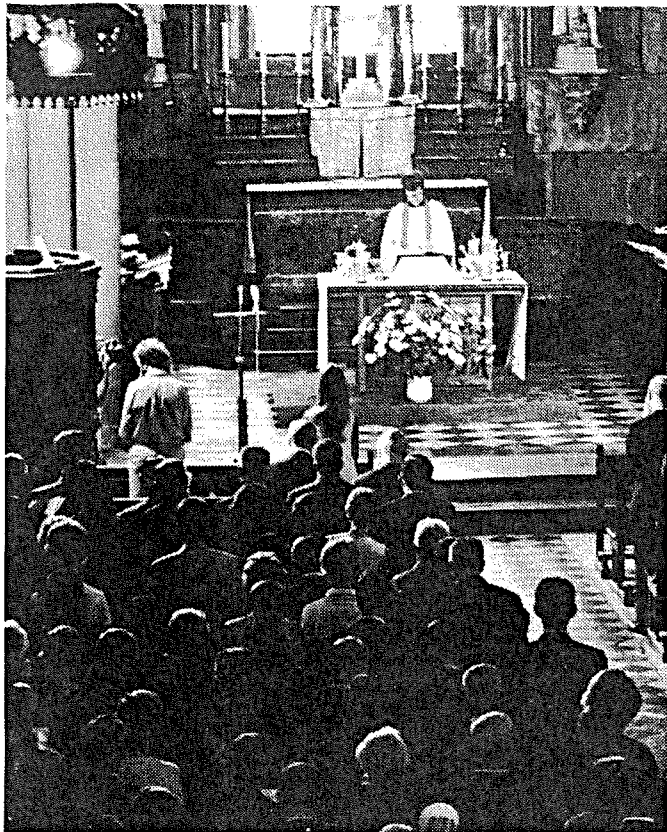


67.9%	Catholic
4.8%	Anglican
3.0%	Christian Community Schooling
2.5%	Christian Parent Controlled Schools
2.9%	Lutheran
2.9%	Seventh-day Adventist
0.5%	Presbyterian
1.9%	Uniting Church
13.6%	other

(Source: ABS Schools 1991 and Yearbook 1993)

Some of the questions raised in this survey are: What does it mean to offer an alternative to government education? What is the effect of denominational schooling on measures of religiosity?

In one of the articles, 'Offering an Alternative: Schooling and Faith Development', CRA researcher 'Tricia Blombery notes that these questions still need more consideration. In this preliminary examination, 'Tricia concludes that levels of attendance at church services are slightly enhanced by attendance at denominational schools (based on National Social Science Survey data). 'Tricia raises a number of questions for all denominational schools to consider,



including: Do they need to consider and carefully articulate what it means to offer an alternative to the secular philosophy of government education? Do they offer in their schools, both implicitly and explicitly, a coherent set of beliefs and values? If providing education is part of the Church's ministry, to what extent is effective ministry compromised by accepting government funding and with it the government's agenda and priorities?

In the statistical area, Dr Alan Black of UNE examined preliminary religion results from the 1991 census (note: only Tasmania and ACT), concluding that "the denominations which recorded an increase in their percentage of the population between 1986 and 1991 were those which either (a) were pre-coded on the 1991 census form, or (b) had increased their market share between 1981 and 1986." (Pre-coding allowed members of the seven largest churches to tick the relevant box))

The Anglican Church, still the largest religious group in Tasmania, rose slightly from 35.46% (1986) to 36.77%, while the Catholic Church also rose slightly from 18.44% to 19.76%. In the A.C.T the situation is reversed with the Catholic Church the larger group. Again the Catholic Church rose slightly from 30.08% to 31.08%, while the Anglican

Church recorded a slight decrease from 22% to 21.77%. The full results for the census will be available about mid-year.

Regular features of the Yearbook are reflections from church leaders. Details and reflections about religious groups provide much-needed information for the general public about some groups which have otherwise remained almost faceless. Over the three years fourteen churches have been included in this section. This year the groups represented are: Assemblies of God, Reformed Churches, Russian Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist and the Uniting Church.

These articles present the official outlook of the churches and have proved to be very useful for the religious press and those interested in learning about some of the major areas of concern for the different churches in Australia. Sometimes comments provoke controversy or stimulating debate such as (now) Bishop Kevin Manning's 'Reflections on the Issues and Significant Developments in the Catholic Church' in the 1991 Yearbook. This year several church leaders provide some interesting spiritual food for thought, with a common theme for several churches being the challenge provided by a secular society and the decreasing homogeneity of their membership.

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*A common theme is the challenge of secular society and the decreasing homogeneity of membership.*

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Historian for The Reformed Churches of Australia, Rev. Fred L Vanderbom, comments that "During the 1980s, the membership came for the first time to include many aging people, and the younger generation increasingly integrated with Australian society, quite often at the cost of their Christian faith and RCA membership." He reports that the "1991 national Synod was characterised for the first time by close votes on several of the major difficult and divisive issues facing Christian churches



at present", including marriage breakdown and remarriage in the light of the gospel; the role of the Holy Spirit and the place of women in Christian ministry.

Very Rev. Michael Protopopov, the Administrator of the Russian Orthodox Church (Outside of Russia), reports on the "noticeable renewal of vocations" and states that "Holy Transfiguration Monastery near Bombala, NSW, has become a place of pilgrimage for many young Russians ..."

#### • *Redefining Russian values*

IN relation to Russia Protopopov states that the church has a threefold obligation: "1) To return to the Mother Church its proper understanding of itself as the repository of God's truth, as opposed to the concept of itself as either a suppressed organisation or a tool of government policy; 2) To provide Christian support to the needy through the collection, transportation and distribution in Russia of food, clothing ...; 3) ... to assist in the renewal of the nation ... We are interested in Russia redefining its national values in terms of not only economics and politics, but also spirituality, morality, Christian ethics, national heritage, history and justice."

For the Seventh-day Adventists, Dr Bryan Ball, the President of the South Pacific Division, stresses the need to see Seventh-day Adventists "as a worldwide movement", though Australia has special responsibility for the South Pacific area. Over the last five years the Church has gained over three million new members. He also echoes the comments of other leaders, writing: "Like many other denominations, we face pressures for change and relevance in worship and doctrine, and we are experiencing the tensions that rapid changes bring between conservatives and progressives. An evaluation of Seventh-day Adventist attitudes and lifestyles in the nineties reveals a much wider spectrum and less homogeneity than in the past. This is creating a greater challenge to administrators and pastors in maintaining unity and tolerance."

Rev. Dr D'Arcy Wood, the President of the Uniting Church, also reports strug-

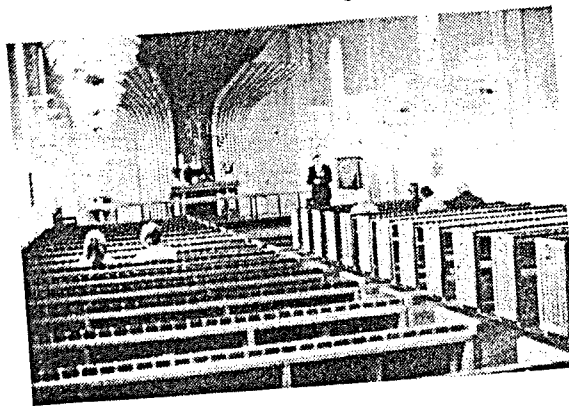
gles, but notes that "the issues it wrestled with in 1992 were even more reminiscent of Reformed and Evangelical churches overseas..." This is particularly true concerning issues of ethics and sexuality. The 1991 Assembly established a Task Group to examine this area. Also the Assembly is in the process of establishing guidelines for use by parishes and presbyteries in cases of sexual harassment by ordained persons.

Dr Wood notes: "Two issues have recurred in the national Uniting Church agenda again and again: baptism and ministry." The latest issue regarding baptism is whether ministers and elders' councils should be permitted to refuse all infant candidates. Finally Dr Wood poses a question—why the church is not as prominent in the media as other churches. Is the "name too new and un-

specific? Or is that, as a regular critic of political and social policies, the Uniting Church is an irritant, best pushed aside?"

Another feature of the Yearbook is a bibliography of books published during 1992 in the area of religion in Australia. We welcome details of self-published works, so if you can help please send details to the address below. To round the Yearbook off we include a combined Lectionary and ecumenical calendar of events for Australian churches and religious groups. This provides a useful guide to what is happening in the church scene in Australia for the following year.

The work of the CRA is supported by several denominations and by individuals (through a subscription series). If you would like any further information please contact: The CRA, Locked Bag 23, Kew Vic. 3101. ■



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