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SPIRIT AND SUBSTANCE
RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING ON ABC RADIO
1941-91

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Alison Healey

TERMS AND SPELLING

'Religion Department'

Over the years, the specialist sector of the ABC charged with the production of religious programmes has had various titles: Religion Department, Religious Department, Religious Broadcasts Department, Religious Programmes, Religious Programs. In recent times the word, 'Unit', has been used, rather than 'Department'. For convenience, one title, 'Religion Department', is used throughout most of this study; it is occasionally replaced by 'Religion Unit' in discussion of the period after 1990.

When 'Department' is used without an accompanying descriptive word or phrase, and with a capital 'D', it refers to the 'Religion Department'.

'Head'

The person finally responsible for religious programmes has had different titles over the years, such as Special Talks Officer, Federal Supervisor, Federal Director, Specialist Editor. However, 'Head' has been a term commonly used and, for the sake of simplicity, has been preferred in this text unless the context demands one of the more precise titles. 'Head' is used in reference to the senior officer of other programme departments, also.

'Broadcast'

The word, 'broadcast', is used throughout in its general sense of 'communication far and wide' and is applied to television as well as to radio.¹

'Memorandum (memo)'

'Memorandum' in the main text, and 'memo' in the notes, refers to a communication produced and circulated within the ABC, unless otherwise specified.

'Programme'

There has been a spelling shift in Australia over time from 'programme' to 'program', but the shift has been neither complete nor consistent. For convenience, one form of spelling only will be used throughout, except in a quoted title, and 'programme' has been chosen since it is an acceptable form for the whole period under discussion, whereas 'program' would be quite incongruous in reference to material dated earlier than the 1960s.

¹ The Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983 distinguished between 'broadcasting' and 'television', i.e., 'broadcasting' implied radio only.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives
AASR	Australian Association for the Study of Religions
ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABCB	Australian Broadcasting Control Board
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABT	Australian Broadcasting Tribunal
ACC	Australian Council of Churches
AGM	Assistant General Manager
A/GM	Acting General Manager
AGPS	Australian Government Printing (Publishing) Service
A/Mgr	Acting Manager
ASCM	Australian Student Christian Movement
AVSS	Australian Values Systems Study
BAPH	Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart (pronounced 'baff'), referring to ABC State Branches in Qld, SA, WA and Tas.
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCNZ	Broadcasting Council of New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand
C. Progs	Controller of Programmes
CRA	Christian Research Association
CRAC	Central Religious Advisory Committee (UK)
C. TV	Controller of Television
EST	Eastern Standard Time
FRAC	Federal Religious Advisory Committee
GM	General Manager
Hd Rel.	Head of Religion Department
Hd Talks	Head of Talks Department
MD	Managing Director
Mgr	Manager
PMG	Post-Master General
'PSA'	'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon'
RAM	Radio Action Movement
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
SCM	Student Christian Movement
WACB	World Association for Christian Broadcasting
WACC	World Association for Christian Communication
WCC	World Council of Churches

INTRODUCTION

The ABC¹, from its inception in 1932, has always accepted that its mandate to provide 'adequate and comprehensive' broadcasting to the Australian people demanded a regular schedule of religious broadcasts.² The appointment, in 1941, of a broadcasts assistant who would take special responsibility for religious programmes, and the formation of a specialist department for religious broadcasts in 1949, strengthened the national broadcaster's commitment to religious programming.

Just as the ABC as a whole was charged with the responsibility to provide comprehensive broadcasting, so, each of its programme departments has aimed for a comprehensive range of programmes within its area of specialisation. The ABC's religious broadcasters may not be able to claim that they have ever fully achieved this goal, but at no time could it be said that this was not a genuine aspiration nor that the integrity of their efforts to do so have not been remarkable. In any case, according to the Oxford Dictionary, 'comprehensive' may mean 'comprising much, being of large content and scope', as well as meaning 'fully laying hold of something', and in this less than total sense of the word, both the ABC and its Religion Department can surely claim fidelity to their mandate.

The goal of comprehensive broadcasting has challenged ABC programme producers to stay alert to the total national and global contexts in which they work, to be constantly critical of their performance and to keep exercising their minds, imaginations and skills in service of the Australian people.³ It has been, and will remain, an ideal aspiration. The possibility of their attaining it in practice is subject to many factors outside and inside the ABC. For the staff responsible for religious broadcasts, the most significant factors have been:

- the religious plurality of Australian society;
- the relative power and influence over religious broadcasting of religious and non-religious forces in the society;
- the size of the audience the ABC itself is able to reach;
- the working environment within the ABC: its bureaucracy and philosophies of management, stability and instability, growth and contraction, its secularisation;⁴

¹ This abbreviation originally stood for 'Australian Broadcasting Commission'. Since 1983, it has meant 'Australian Broadcasting Corporation'.

² Cf. ch. 2, 'Charter'.

³ The services of the national broadcaster have been extended beyond the Australian people to countries overseas since 1939, through Radio Australia. However, its primary responsibility has always been to Australian citizens. Religious broadcasting on Radio Australia lies outside the scope of this work.

⁴ Cf. ch. 1, 'Modern individualisation and secularisation'.

- the amount of air-time allocated to religious programmes and their place in the schedules;
- the availability of resources for the production of a variety of attractive programmes: the number and quality of staff, finance and production facilities;
- change over the years in all of these factors.⁵

Thesis

The ABC has been, and is, a unique agent of religious communication in Australia - a secular, publicly-funded institution which has maintained, for nearly sixty years, a continuous commitment to the religious dimensions of life in a modern society. This would not have been so but for the religious specialists in the ABC, who have been responsible for making this commitment effective in action. It has been their collective passion for their work through good times and bad that has ensured its continuance: when society was generally receptive to what they were doing, and when they were declared socially, even humanly, irrelevant; when their peers and higher authorities in the ABC facilitated their programmes, and when they had to fight for resources and opportunities, even for survival, in the organisation that had brought them into being. The ABC, then, has an honorable but certainly not unblemished history of faithful and creative effort:

- to stay attuned to the religious life of Australians, while bringing a world perspective to its programmes;
- to explore the religious and spiritual dimensions of human thought and behaviour;
- to address questions of faith, belief and morality;
- to examine the functioning of religious organisations;
- to make explicit the religious assumptions and meanings underlying world events and issues of public importance;
- generally to offer a comprehensive range of religious broadcasts which inform and educate Australians about religion in the contemporary world and contribute to its vitality.

Scope of study

This study actually spans the years 1932-91, although the period 1932-41 is treated as preparatory to the significant years of ABC religious broadcasting, which began in 1941 with the first appointment of a staff member who would specialise in this area. The decision to encompass, in this study, all these years of ABC involvement in religious broadcasting was made for three reasons.

⁵ The factors listed here would not need much amendment to become applicable to other areas of broadcasting in the ABC, also.

First of all, a long view is necessary, if one is to appraise what has been achieved in relation to changes in the society which the ABC exists to serve. A shorter time than fifty years might have sufficed for this, but there were two other reasons for choosing to take this extensive approach to the subject.

The second reason is that this is the first historical account of ABC religious broadcasting.⁶ It was necessary, therefore, initially to take a broad view of the subject; and its unique features called for a thorough exploration. Every decade has produced its quota of interesting events and developments and, while all of these have not been chronicled here, an attempt has been made to set out the scope of the subject, allowing for further intensive treatment in the future of particular periods, or persons, or themes.

Finally, former and present ABC religious broadcasters have shown strong interest in this work. They will best be served, professionally and personally, by an initial extensive presentation of their history.

Extensive as to time, this account has been confined to radio broadcasting for adults. Forty years of religious programmes on radio for children, 1945-85, have been excluded.⁷ From 1956, the ABC became responsible for national television as well as radio, and so there are decades of religious television programmes which might have been considered also. They have not been included in this account, although among them have been some fine, original productions. The main reason for preferring to limit the work to radio was that religious programmes on television have not had the same steady history; and the high production costs involved have often led to the ABC's using many more imported programmes on television than on radio. In consequence, ABC religious broadcasters have found it more difficult to offer Australian responses to Australian realities on television than on radio. For an exploration of the ABC's comprehensive commitment to religion in Australia, therefore, it was more appropriate to focus on radio broadcasting. It is important to realise, however, that a good deal of Departmental time, energy, money and talent have gone into television since 1956, the story of which remains to be recorded and assessed.

⁶ K. S. Inglis referred to religious broadcasting in his general history, *This is the ABC*, but it was a subject of minor importance in his work. Religious broadcasting is referred to briefly in Alan Thomas' *Broadcast and be Damned: the ABC's First Two Decades* and in Clement Semmler's account of his years with the ABC, *The ABC - Aunt Sally and Sacred Cow*. Cf. Bibliography for details of these works. There have been a number of studies of religious broadcasting on Australian commercial radio and television. Some of these contain references to ABC broadcasts, but the perspective of these studies is quite different from that of the Charter of the ABC, so that they are of little direct relevance to this work. Of them, only Douglas Tasker is mentioned in the Bibliography.

⁷ Some brief reference to these can be found in ch. 10, 'Programmes for young people'.

A further limitation of this account is that it has been written largely from the perspective of the metropolitan areas of Eastern Australia. The inclusion of the ABC's regional network of radio stations, broadcasting from provincial towns to their surrounding districts, would have required more locally focussed research. The work of these stations needs separate attention.

Sources and organisation of material

While the ABC's religious broadcasting is the central focus of this study, it is examined in relation to a number of relevant contexts: of religion and religions world-wide, of contemporary modern culture, of Australian society, of the Australian broadcasting system, of the whole enterprise of the ABC. These various contexts are treated as summarily as possible to support, but not to distract from, the main thrust of the work.

Almost all the material concerning religious broadcasting was researched from primary sources, much of it not examined previously: documents and radio tapes in archives; documents, publicity leaflets and programmes current during the time of research and writing of this work; and personal interviews with former and present members of staff of the ABC's Religion Department and other relevant ABC personnel, a number of whom had never been asked before to recount and reflect on their experiences with the Department.⁸ A range of other written sources were consulted on the subject of religious broadcasting but, in the main, provided the contextual material relevant to this study.⁹

The account has been organised in a way that combines chronological order with themes. Only certain aspects of religious broadcasting have been selected for discussion in any one chapter. Chapters 3, 5, 6 and 8 are focussed also on particular periods in the general history of ABC religious broadcasts; but fifty years of broadcasting are reviewed in chapters 9 and 10, each from a different perspective.

Part I (chs 1-3) begins with some discussion of religion, modern culture and the ABC to provide a context for the rest of the study, and describes how religious broadcasting fared on the ABC before it appointed its first specialist in this field.

Part II (chs 4-5) examines the period, 1941-56, when Kenneth Thorne Henderson set the course for the development of religious broadcasting in the ABC. A consideration of his approach and achievements provides themes that are taken up in Parts III, IV and V.

⁸ Cf. interviews with the majority of former staff members.

⁹ Printed sources are listed in the Bibliography and a list of personal interviews is provided in Appendix 3.

Part III (chs 6-8) is concerned with the Religion Department's responses to social and cultural changes in Australia in the period 1956-77: how it accommodated to religious plurality in society, and the place of secular, and secularist, philosophies in its programmes.

Parts IV and V (chs 9-10) explore two other major themes in relation to the people and work of the Religion Department over the full period of this study, 1941-91: the tensions inherent in the Department's being located within the structures of the ABC, and the relationship of its programmes to the realities of people's lives.

Chapter 11 offers an epilogue and a final appraisal.

One final introductory point concerns the writer's use of such words as 'plurality' and 'pluralism' in the text that follows. They are not understood to have the same meaning. The suffix '-ism' is reserved to indicate an ideological stance on a particular matter. Where 'plurality' describes a factual situation of variety, or diversity, 'pluralism' denotes a tenet, a principle of action, a value to be promoted. A similar distinction is made in the use of such words as 'secularity' and 'secularism', or 'secular' and 'secularist', or 'individuality' and 'individualism'.¹⁰ Other terms used in this work which require similar preliminary explanation are mentioned under 'Terms and Spelling' above.

¹⁰ Cf. ch. 1, 'Modern individualisation and secularisation'.

PART I

CONTEXT AND BEGINNINGS

CHAPTER 1

RELIGION, RELIGIONS AND MODERN CULTURE

Before proceeding to the central task of exploring religious broadcasting on ABC radio, there are two contextual themes which need to be discussed. Firstly, how are we to understand the words 'religion' and 'religious'? The impact of modernity on religion, particularly modern individualisation and secularisation, is the second theme. Millions of words have been written on 'religion' and 'modernity' (or 'modern culture'), as anthropologists, sociologists, philosophers, historians, theologians and psychologists have tried to probe the depth and complexity of their meanings. What will be attempted here is a succinct discussion of those aspects of both topics that are most relevant to the main thrust of this work and to which we can refer in ensuing chapters.

A definition of 'culture'

There is a need, first of all, to establish the ground on which references to culture in the following pages stand. This definition of Brazilian anthropologist, Marcello Azevedo, adheres closely to that of Clifford Geertz.¹

Culture is a system or set of meanings, values, models and patterns, incorporated in, or underlying, the actions and communications of the life of one specific human group or society. This system or set is consciously or unconsciously lived and assumed by the group as the expression of its own human identity and reality. This system or set is learned (it is not a biological inheritance) and passes from generation to generation, whether received directly as it is, or changed by the group itself.²

Although its roots lie much deeper in history, modernity may be dated from the period of radical cultural and social change which occurred in that part of the world we now call Europe, approximately 1650-1750. This dynamic culture has since powerfully spread across the globe.

The two modern processes mentioned of 'individualisation' and 'secularisation' will be discussed more fully later in this chapter but a brief explanation of both terms is appropriate here. 'Individualisation' describes a cultural emphasis on the independence and primacy of the individual in relation to community traditions and norms. 'Secularisation' connotes a shift in values, such that the temporal world and human capacities to comprehend and master it have become so dominant in human

¹ Cf. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Hutchison, London, 1975, p. 89.

² M. Azevedo, 'Inculturation and evangelisation', Paper, unpublished, Washington Theological Union, Washington D.C., Sept. 1987.

consciousness that the very plausibility of religious belief and experience is threatened.³

Religion and religions

Eric J. Sharpe helps us to clear the path ahead by distinguishing between 'working definitions' which facilitate identifying and studying religion and 'tactical definitions' that are used for polemical purposes and which do not concern us here.⁴

Defining religion, or talking about it as an autonomous, or semi-autonomous, reality in human lives is a modern activity born in Western societies. It is one thing to bring modern assumptions, interpretations and terminology to a study of religion in modern culture; quite another thing to apply these to the way of life of people in other than modern cultures. However, when scholars of religion stay aware of the limitations of their concepts and ensure that their students and readers are alerted to the distortions that may come from them, they can help considerably to enlighten modern minds about the religious dimensions of the lives of human beings in other times and cultures.

Basil Moore and Norman Habel, writing on religious education in Australian schools, assert that the study of religion has been strongly influenced not only by the assumptions of modernity but also by Christianity as the 'dominant paradigm'.

When we think of 'religion' the first association for most of us in the western world is institutionalized Christianity.... the model for defining a religion, or religion *as such*, is normally the type we know as Christianity.... we need to be aware of the given role that Christianity plays in providing us with 'spectacles' through which we see and identify other religions.⁵

The phrase used by Moore and Habel above, 'a religion, or religion *as such*', introduces a distinction that underlies many variant definitions and descriptions of religion.

A religion, as Sharpe has pointed out, is an 'intellectual construction', a classification according to observable data - beliefs, teachings, institutions, practices

³ For a penetrating critical analysis, see M. Azevedo, *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity*, Gregorian University, Rome, 1982.

⁴ E. Sharpe, *Understanding Religion*, Duckworth Paperduck, London, 1988, pp. 33-4. Sharpe quotes, as examples of 'tactical definitions', Karl Marx's famous statement that religion was 'the opium of the people' and Salomon Reinach's description of religion as 'a sum of scruples which prevent the free exercise of our faculties'.

⁵ B. Moore and N. Habel, *When Religion Goes to School: Typology of Religion for the Classroom*, South Australian College of Advanced Education, Adelaide, 1982, pp. 3-4. Moore and Habel acknowledge that Judaism, also, to some extent shapes the lens of the 'spectacles', cf. p.17. Cf. also W. Cantwell Smith's statement that 'religion' is a Western concept deriving from two sources: Christianity, especially Protestant, when referring to others' faiths, and secular culture that denies transcendence, in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Mentor, New York, 1964, p. 126.

and behaviour - in relation to particular cultural or social groupings.⁶ Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and so on, are terms each of which supposedly fairly identifies a body of beliefs and practices that unite adherents and distinguish them from others, forming what Winston King calls 'a separative fellowship'.⁷ Depending on how modern Western thought fits with the culture it attempts to describe, the labels will be more or less appropriate. They can, indeed, convey quite false impressions insofar as they cloak the extent of real diversity, flexibility and formlessness within the categorisations. If this is true even for 'Christianity' which, of those mentioned, has had the closest historical association with modernity, how much more so for such classifications as 'Hinduism' or 'Shintoism' or 'animism'.⁸

The phrase, 'religion *as such*', suggests a set of concepts that fit all existing recognised religions and can be used as criteria for identifying new ones. The expression might also be interpreted to refer to a state, or quality, of religiousness to be found in persons and societies which need not be formally identified with a religion. Religion has been spoken of in these different ways from such a variety of perspectives that the accumulated effect is highly complex.⁹

There are those who have tried to clarify the essence of religion - what it is - and those who have preferred a functional approach - what it does. Between these two poles lie Ninian Smart's six dimensions of religion,¹⁰ Moore and Habel's eight characteristic components¹¹ and Eric Sharpe's four modes in which religion functions.¹² Some have viewed religion as essentially a social phenomenon; others as an essentially private experience of the individual.¹³ From the viewpoint of

⁶ Sharpe, *Understanding*, p. 46.

⁷ W. L. King, 'Religion', *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 12, Macmillan, New York, 1987, p. 283.

⁸ The inappropriateness of these and other terms is summarily discussed in Sharpe, *Understanding*, p. 46, and is more fully presented in Cantwell Smith, chs 2-3.

⁹ See E.J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: a History*, 2nd ed., Open Court, La Salle Illinois, 1986, for an authoritative treatment of the subject.

¹⁰ Doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential and social, cf. N. Smart, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Collins Fount Paperbacks, London, 1977, pp. 15-25.

¹¹ Beliefs, experience, texts, stories, ritual, social structure, ethics and symbols, cf. Moore and Habel, p. 71.

¹² Existential (faith), intellectual (beliefs), institutional (organisations) and ethical (conduct), cf. Sharpe, *Understanding*, p. 95.

¹³ For Emil Durkheim religion was a social projection, see *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, tr. J.W. Swain, Allen and Unwin, London, 1971. For Rudolph Otto it was an individual numinous experience of the 'wholly other', cf. *The Idea of the Holy*, 2nd ed., tr. J.W. Harvey, Oxford University Press, 1958, ch. 4.

anthropology, the cultural matrix has been of central concern;¹⁴ psychologists, on the other hand, have approached the subject from the perspective of individual consciousness and unconsciousness.¹⁵ An emphasis on the rational and intellectual content of religion - belief and beliefs - has been opposed by a stress on personal experience, feeling, emotion, the non-rational components of religiousness.¹⁶ Some have probed the relation of religion to 'the sacred';¹⁷ others its relation to 'the secular'.¹⁸ Claims that authentic religion is marked by the acknowledgement of some transcendent or supernatural reality have been countered by an insistence that religion is to be sought in an immanent, spiritual power within human persons and the world they inhabit.¹⁹ And all of these approaches have been available to both 'insiders' and 'outsiders', that is, to people with and without religious faith, who bring to the subject the different interpretations of participant and observer.²⁰

¹⁴ Melford E. Spiro has defined religion as 'an institution of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated superhuman beings,' cf. 'Religion: problems of definition and explanation', *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. E. Banton, Tavistock, London, 1965, pp. 85-126, quoted in Sharpe, *Understanding*, p. 44. For Clifford Geertz religion was a cultural system giving meaning to human existence, cf. *The Interpretation of Cultures*.

¹⁵ Carl Jung understood religion as a psychic reality, claiming that 'the human psyche from time immemorial has been shot through with religious feelings and ideas', cf. *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Routledge, Kegan and Paul, London, 1933, p. 140. Freud spoke of religion in terms of collective fantasies produced by unconscious forces, cf. P. Homans, 'Sigmund Freud', *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, vol. 5, pp. 436-7.

¹⁶ Contrast, for example, Tylor's approach in terms of belief and thought and Schleiermacher's insistence on religion's basis in intuition and a feeling of absolute dependence. See E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, vol.2, J. Murray, London, 1871; and F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, tr. J. Oman, Kegan Paul, London, 1893.

¹⁷ Mircea Eliade concluded that the essence of religious experience was sacredness which may be encountered in an experience of God, but also in symbols and rituals in the natural world, see *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*, tr. W. R. Trask, Harcourt Brace, New York, 1959.

¹⁸ 'The secular', understood to mean the world in its temporal aspect, is discussed later in this chapter. Existentialist philosophers are among those who have promoted the shift of focus to the secular over the last 50 years. Martin Buber, for one, located genuine religious life in what he called the 'interhuman', see *Between Man and Man*, tr. R. G. Smith, Macmillan, New York, 1965. Christian debates throughout this century on the implications of the Gospel phrase, 'the kingdom of God', have exemplified many differently nuanced perceptions of the sacred and the secular in relation to religious life. See also Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, SCM Press, London, 1965, and the writings of Don Cupitt in the 1980s.

¹⁹ The nature of transcendent reality has been variously described from a personal, loving, creating and sustaining God to an abstraction like 'the Beyond'. Asian religious traditions exemplify, in different ways, the emphasis on immanence. Schleiermacher, Otto, Eliade, Buber all placed a stress on immanence, while not denying transcendent reality. J.A. Robinson argued for an immanent God, not a Being distinct from the world, in his best-seller, *Honest to God*, SCM Paperback, London, 1963.

²⁰ 'A religious tradition has no meaning unless it enables those within it to see something that those without do not see.' W. Cantwell Smith, p. 118.

We are dealing with a topic, complex and many-sided. It comprises the deliverance of the understanding as it harmonises our deepest intuitions. It comprises emotional responses to formulations of thought and to modes of behaviour. It comprises the direction of purposes and the modifications of behaviour. It cuts into every aspect of human existence. So far as concerns religious problems, simple solutions are bogus solutions...We must not postulate simplicity.²¹

Considering how complex and all-embracing the subject, it is hard to conceive of a description of religion that could escape the criticism that it was reductive. Efforts have been made many times to find a way of speaking about religion that is widely applicable to the diversity of what are considered to be religious phenomena in the cultures of the world. Nowhere would the demand for such an effort be stronger than from an encyclopaedia of religion. This is W.L. King's summing up in his article there:

Almost every known culture involves the religious in the...sense of a depth dimension in cultural experiences at all levels - a push, whether ill-defined or conscious, toward some sort of ultimacy and transcendence that will provide norms and power for the rest of life. When more or less distinct patterns of behaviour are built around this depth dimension in a culture, this structure constitutes religion in its historically recognisable form...Religion is the organisation of life around the depth dimensions of experience - varied in form, completeness and clarity in accordance with the environing culture.²²

One of the ambiguous outcomes of such striving for an inclusive summation of what religion is and does, is that a wide range of philosophies and ideologies can get to be included. Marxism, Nazism, scientism, nationalism, humanism: each offers people a vision for their lives and for the progress of history and is convinced of its ultimate irresistibility; each has its myths, rituals, language and doctrines; their followers, called to faith and adherence to particular ethical codes, may experience communion, inspiration, exultation. These are often described as secular religions, or 'surrogate religions'.²³ Other modern movements concerned with the self and the full realisation of human potential function, for their individual participants, as another kind of alternative to religion.²⁴ Sociologists also speak of 'civil religion', to describe what they perceive to be dimensions of religion in the life and structures of the nation state.²⁵

²¹ A.N.Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, Cambridge University Press, 1933, p. 165, quoted in Sharpe, *Understanding*, p. 36.

²² King, p. 286.

²³ Cf. Robert Towler, *The Need for Certainty: a Sociological Study of Conventional Religion*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1984, p. 4.

²⁴ Cf. Rachael Kohn, 'Radical subjectivity in "self religions" and the problem of authority', *Religion in Australia: Sociological Perspectives*, ed. Alan W. Black, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991, pp. 133-50.

²⁵ These dimensions include the devotion and commitment of citizens, beliefs and practices, rituals, myths and ethics all oriented to the ideals of the state. 'On Civil Religion' was the title Rousseau gave to the last chapter of his *Social Contract* (1762). For a contemporary

Some legal descriptions of religion

In 1983, the Australian High Court had to consider by what criteria an organisation would be judged by the state to be a religion. It is interesting to compare its findings with decisions of the United States Supreme Court as to what constituted religious belief.

In a decision on a case, *Torcaso v. Watkins* (1961), the American Supreme Court listed examples of beliefs recognised by the court as, without qualification, religious beliefs, thus: 'Buddhism, Taoism, Ethical Culture, Secular Humanism and others'.²⁶ To describe a modern secular system of thought and way of life as an analogue of religion is to offer some enlightenment on how modern culture has spawned functional alternatives to religious faith to inspire human lives and motivate human endeavour. The expression, 'surrogate religions', carries this connotation of analogy: to be surrogate is, as the Oxford Dictionary describes it, to be a substitute, to take the place of something else. However, to assert, as this judgment did, that secular humanism, for example, is a religion 'without qualification' is a blurring of concepts related to religion indicative of advanced secularisation of society.

Taking only a subjective functional approach to religion and religiousness leads to further obfuscation. Four years later, in a conscientious objection case, *United States v. Seeger* (1965), the Supreme Court ruled that the only criterion which the draft board should have considered was 'whether the beliefs professed by a registrant are sincerely held and whether they are, in his own scheme of things, religious'.²⁷ In 1970, the same Court heard another case where a conscientious objector had struck out the word 'religious' in his application and claimed exemption from military service on historical and sociological grounds. The majority of the Court, nevertheless, found him to be religious and explained the phrase in the Seeger case, 'in his own scheme of things', as intended 'to indicate that the central consideration in determining whether the registrant's beliefs are religious is whether these beliefs play the role of a religion and function as a religion in the registrant's life'²⁸ - a statement that leads in circles. This decision identified religion completely

discussion of 'civil religion' in relation to USA, cf. Robert N. Bellah, *Beyond Belief: Essays on Religion in a Post-Traditionalist World*, University of California Paperback, 1991, pp. 168-89.

²⁶ Quoted in. W. Sadurski, 'On legal definitions of "religion"', *Australian Law Journal*, vol. 63, no. 12, Dec. 1989, p. 835.

²⁷ Sadurski, p. 835.

²⁸ *Welsh v. United States* (1970), cf. Sadurski, p.836. The intention of Sadurski's article was to argue for the wisdom in law of these decisions of the USA Supreme Court. Here they are being used simply to exemplify how the words 'religion' and 'religious' serve hardly any useful purpose in a modern secular society if they are interpreted only in a subjective functional way.

with ethics or morality, arriving at the end of the road Kant had set out upon two hundred years earlier, a route taken generally by modern societies over that time; and it expressed the mind of the court that these were entirely matters for individual option, or invention.

By way of contrast, ten years later in the United Kingdom, religion was defined legally in terms of 'faith in a god and worship of that god...recognition on the part of man of some higher unseen power as having control of his destiny, and as being entitled to obedience, reverence and worship'.²⁹

The Australian High Court, in 1983, took a position somewhere between the United States and the United Kingdom. It was called on to hear an appeal application from the organisation, Scientology, whose claim for recognition as a religion and church in Australia had been rejected by the Victorian Supreme Court. Two of the five judges advanced two criteria for the recognition by the state of a new religious body in Australian society. The first was belief in a supernatural thing, order, or principle and the second, acceptance of canons of conduct which gave expression to that belief. Two other judges proposed five 'indicia', including the above two items and adding three others: ideas related to human nature within the universe and in relation to the supernatural; identifiable groups of adherents; and a claim by the adherents that their beliefs and practices were religious. They held that a combination of all or most of these would be necessary to gain acknowledgement as a religion. The remaining fifth judge suggested three criteria, not to be taken as definitive, of which any one would be a sufficient identification of religion, so long as adherents claimed it as such. These were: belief in a supernatural being or beings; a way to find meaning and purpose in life; beliefs or practices that revived or resembled earlier cults. In other words, he gave equal weight to belief in a supernatural order of being, secular philosophy and historical precedents. The five judges were unanimous in upholding Scientology's claim, although they came to the same conclusion by very different routes.³⁰

Together, these court judgments in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, with their many disparate notions of what it means to be religious, reflect the fragmentation of religion that has occurred in these modern societies.

It is intellectuals and academics in modern societies who are more likely to correlate religions and entirely secular views of the world than are the general citizenry. In the 1970s, there was widespread public discussion in Australia about how the ABC understood 'religion'; this involved ABC staff, leaders and members of

²⁹ J. Dillon, *Re South Place Ethical Soc.: Barralet v. A-G*(1980), quoted in *Australian Law Reports* (1983) 49 ALR 76.

³⁰ Cf. *Australian Law Reports* 49 ALR 66.

Christian and Jewish religious communities and self-proclaimed agnostics and secularists. Humanists and rationalists were making a determined effort during those years to gain airtime from the Religion Department to expound their world views. A very loose definition of religion floated by the ABC at that time, which made no reference to any reality beyond human consciousness, gained no support from those whom the ABC consulted about it - atheists, as well as Christians, Jews and Moslems.³¹

The differences between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom in this matter of identifying religion should be noted, if only as a caution against too ready an application to Australia of theories and interpretations based on data from these other countries. Australian society has maintained the public separation of secular society from religion more clearly than either the United Kingdom or the United States, having no established church and less 'civil religion'.

'Sacred' and 'spiritual'

The word 'sacred' has been used in the titles of ABC religious programmes over several decades: 'Sacred Music' and 'Sacred Readings'. How does 'religious' relate to 'sacred'? For some, 'sacred' and 'holy' are almost synonymous, because that which is sacred is a symbol, or sacrament, of another order of reality where wholeness, or perfection, or utter well-being abide. Another view, akin to that of Durkheim, is that a society, or group, holds sacred that which is intimately linked to the well-being of the group and is deeply respected by the group.³² In any case, to be sacred is to be set apart, whether physically, ritually or psychologically, from the ordinary and the usual; and to be revered. Space, time, objects, actions, experiences, texts, persons and communities may be sacred. Mircea Eliade perceived sacredness as the essence of religious experience, but in an entirely secular milieu the sacred may become instead analogously religious. Richard Ely put it this way:

...the obverse of nearly all processes of secularisation is a parallel sequence of sacralisations. Secularisation in Australian history has been nothing but the displacement of certain sacred objects, beliefs and customs with others.³³

Bruce Wilson, taking a similar view, saw four major sacralisations in contemporary Australia, which he described under the headings of progressivity, individuality, sex and family.³⁴

³¹ Cf. ch. 8.

³² Cf. A. Black (ed.), *Religion in Australia: Sociological Perspectives*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1991, p. 13 (referring to Richard Ely).

³³ R. Ely, 'Secularisation and the sacred in Australian history', *Historical Studies* 19(77):553-66, p.564, quoted in Black (ed.), p.13.

³⁴ B. Wilson, *Can God Survive in Australia?*, Albatross, Sydney, 1983, pp.89-102.

In 1988, the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand (BCNZ) made a policy shift and decided to speak less of religious broadcasting and more of 'spiritual' programmes.³⁵ This raises the question of the relationship of 'religious' to 'spiritual'.

The 'spiritual' realm connotes what is non-material, non-tangible or non-conscious. There is a spiritual dimension in all religion, but religion is not solely spiritual. It is also material and involves persons in concrete actions in cultural and social contexts. Spiritual experience may, or may not, be a religious experience. It may be aesthetic, insightful, imaginative, emotional, ecstatic; it may lead a person to religious awareness but it need not; the context in which the experience occurs is significant.³⁶

It is necessary to make clear the stance taken in this study on what is distinctive about a religious way of viewing and relating to the world. The assumptions underlying this writer's use of the words, 'religious' and 'religion', are: that a religious view holds to an essential reference point beyond the temporal world and relates human beings and the totality of their environment to another order of reality that human consciousness cannot, and will not ever, encompass; and that relationship to this other order of reality is necessary for the attainment of the fullness of truth, goodness and freedom.

Modern individualisation and secularisation

Secularisation is often presented as the modern enemy of religion. A brief analysis of modernity and its most dominant symbols will show that this can be misleading: that secularisation is one process among a number which interlock and interact within modern culture and that it is the collective impact of these that has diminished the status and authority in modern societies of a religious interpretation of life. To say this is not to deny the fundamental significance in modernity of secularisation; but at least equally fundamental is individualisation. This is why they are particularly mentioned in the heading of this section. Both individualisation and secularisation have been substantially present in the discussion of religion above, explicitly or implicitly. Now they need some further elaboration.

The common ending of both these words, '-isation', indicates that they are both processes, moving and fluctuating and unstable, not permanent, static structures. However, when the word ending changes to '-ism', what was a process in movement has become an ideology, a system of doctrines and conforming patterns of behaviour.

³⁵ BCNZ, Policy Papers (for internal circulation), Jan. 1989. Programmes treating religion in quite conventional ways continued to be made.

³⁶ W.L. King believed spiritual experience to be religious if it occurred 'in a religious context of thought, discipline and value', p.286.

The ideologies of secularism, individualism, materialism, scientism, for example, are all obstructions to religion.

Five main symbols of modern culture are: individualisation, constant striving for order and continuity, secularisation, inductive science, and a linear view of history.³⁷ It is in the nature of symbols that they contain more than one meaning and, together, these five symbols represent a dynamic complexity of assumptions, values and attitudes that make dissonance and turbulence inevitable in any modern society. A brief analysis of these symbols will suffice for our present purposes.

Modern culture asserts the autonomy of the individual. Underlying assumptions are that all are equal in their human freedom; that individuals may choose and decide for themselves; that individual consciousness has value in its own right and individual privacy a claim to protection. This produces a society in which there is plurality in all realms, complexity, fragmentation, competition, conflict. As well, freedom for individuals to make their own choices - more, the demand that they do so - increases personal responsibility in the society and places the more fragile under stress. Each individual must find her, or his, own coherence in the confusion of possibilities, either alone or in groups with compatible others, who may then make collective options and shape their lives, or some segment of their lives, according to a common vision. Individualism, a modern ideology based in self-centredness, is an insistence on individual freedom at the cost of denying the rights of others; it is indifferent, or antagonistic, to community.

Order and continuity are not a stable inheritance in such a plural culture, but have to be achieved, generation by generation, in continual tension among sectional interests, pressure groups, ideologies, missionary efforts of one group or another to win allies to its cause. Some form of representative government is the means chosen by most modern societies to achieve a successful political balancing of competing factors and forces, but another response to modern plurality has been to suppress it under an authoritarian regime which imposes its own ideology of order upon the whole society.

The word 'secular' is derived from the Latin 'saeculum', meaning the world in its temporal aspect. 'Secularisation', then, is basically the process by which human beings give increasing importance to the temporal world.³⁸ Their perceptions of its reality and autonomy relative to the non-temporal realm of the divine, or the sacred, or

³⁷ The account of modernity offered here is based in reading from a variety of sources in the fields of cultural anthropology, history and theology. See Bibliography for principal references.

³⁸ R. Pannikar, *Worship and Secular Man*, Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1973, p. 10.

the transcendent, or the ultimately real, change; and so religious consciousness is modified. Associated with the concept of secularisation is, also, the growing perception that the world operates according to laws and processes that are intelligible to the human mind; thus, more emphasis is placed on human rationality and responsibility and so on human management.³⁹ Modern secularisation, profoundly connected as it is with the other traits of modernity mentioned here, has displaced religious perceptions of reality and undermined their authority and influence both in society and in individual consciousness. With this fundamental understanding of secularisation in terms of culture and consciousness, it is easier to comprehend the range of 'definitions' of it that have proliferated in books and articles written from the varying perspectives of historians, social scientists, philosophers and theologians. Because of its pervasive effects, all of these have been concerned with secularisation and each has defined its meaning according to his, or her, particular focus of study. A high valuation of the temporal world and of human consciousness need not eliminate religious faith. However, when the non-temporal is denied any value, or existence, secularisation has become secularism, a non-religious or anti-religious ideology.

Inductive science has had an immense impact in the modern world. The inductive approach to knowledge involves observation, study and interpretation of particular experiences and facts, from which come generalisations, which may be amended, or discarded, in the light of further experience, or other facts. This is very different from the deductive approach, which holds firm to established principles and explores reality from there. An unhappy consequence of the inductive approach has been that knowledge in modern societies has become very fragmented. The inductive sciences and resulting technologies have all set their own particular goals, developed their own jargon, even their own ethics, as separate specialisations. One particular area of knowledge can acquire considerable power and dominance over other areas; economics seems to command today's world. Where it is claimed that science and technology alone can solve the world's problems and provide answers to questions of meaning and purpose, where scientists admit no other authority over their work, there is scientism, one of the most powerful of modern ideologies.

Finally, a linear view of history underpins modernity. History is perceived as a human enterprise progressing into the future. The function of this view of history in relation to secularisation is to drive modern human beings on to continuing self-reliant effort.

³⁹ Secularisation is 'giving rational explanations to natural phenomena, as well as predominance to the immanent over the transcendent'. Cf. Azevedo, *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity*, p. 46.

Secularisation and modern sciences also reinforce each other. The more human beings achieve in scientific knowledge and associated technologies, the more they feel justified in trusting in their own rationality and powers of management and manipulation; and, in turn, the more confidently and assertively they pursue scientific and technological goals and values. Modern industrialisation, urbanisation and commercialisation have fed upon, and have fed, these processes. With the historical vision of certain progress into the future, the combined effects of all these on religious ways of life and consciousness have been many and powerful. Where scientific values dominate, people are less inclined to acknowledge as real what cannot be demonstrated empirically; propositions and tenets, even values, may be held provisionally; scepticism is characteristic. Technological development, wedded to industry, commerce and the growth of cities, has acquired such energy and such an ethos of self-justification that nature and persons, and the discourses of wisdom and contemplation, have been devalued in its relentless progress.⁴⁰

Modernity and religion

Modern fragmentation is evident within culture and society and the human person. The emphasis on individual choice has not only greatly increased the number of religions in the society but also private forms and expressions of religious faith. Peter Berger perceived an 'heretical imperative' in modern culture as a result of the individual's freedom to choose his or her religion.⁴¹ Thomas Luckmann's view of religion in modern societies was similar. He spoke of the modern 'autonomous consumer' of religion who selects 'certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds them into a somewhat precarious private system of "ultimate" significance'.⁴² Ethics have also been fragmented. Scientific, economic, social and political forces have all exerted influence on the ethical norms of society and of individual persons within it, displacing religion as moral guide. Increasingly religion has become an area of specialisation like other institutions and enterprises in the

⁴⁰ Mircea Eliade saw in the momentum of modern technology 'the millenary dream of the alchemist' searching for the secrets of transformation, cf. *The Forge and the Crucible*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1971, p. 172.

⁴¹ 'In premodern situations there is a world of religious certainty, occasionally ruptured by heretical deviations. By contrast, the modern situation is a world of religious uncertainty, occasionally staved off by more or less precarious constructions of religious affirmation. Indeed, one could put this change even more sharply: For premodern man, heresy is a possibility - usually a rather remote one; for modern man, heresy typically becomes a necessity. Or again, modernity creates a new situation in which picking and choosing becomes an imperative.' Cf. P. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York, 1979, p. 25.

⁴² T. Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*, Collier-Macmillan, London, 1967, p. 102. Don Cupitt called the people Luckmann described here as 'anthologists', cf. *Life Lines*, SCM Press, London, 1986, p. 13.

society, no longer in a position to provide an overarching or all-encompassing 'framework of meaning'.⁴³ The plurality of modern societies has necessitated that liberal democratic governments be religiously neutral, arranging a separation between church and state that allocates to each its own sphere of power and responsibility. As all these processes have occurred, religion has become less visible in the society, removed from public structures and activities and more and more assumed to belong in the private, optional world of individuals. People have grown accustomed to living with this assumption, those with a religious perspective on the world taking care not to allow it entry into the public arena, whether at work or play. Thus, it has become normal for many people to lead divided lives; and even more separation of religion from public life has occurred than has been required by liberal democratic law.

Modernity has entered into the very content of religion and religiousness, as well as impinging on it from without. We have mentioned already the impact of individualisation in the creation of private forms and expressions of religious faith, which Berger and Luckmann have described so lucidly. Robert Towler made a related but different study and identified five types of religiousness to be found in Anglicans in the United Kingdom, people whom he described as adherents to 'very conventional religion in the latter part of the twentieth century'. His work showed that, although the people represented in his study might well have been 'at the same church service together, singing the same hymns, saying Amen to the same prayers and listening to the same sermon', their ways of being religious were markedly distinctive from one other and, in some cases, sharply in opposition.⁴⁴ In other words, church communities that appeared to be united in faith were in fact gatherings of disparate, conflicting beliefs and affirmations.

There are other aspects of modernity within religion that call for our attention. We will treat them summarily with a few examples drawn from within Christianity, since this is the most connected with modern culture and the most relevant for this study.

The first aspect is the use of the knowledge, techniques and methodologies of modern intellectual disciplines in the interpretation of sacred texts, in theology and in religious spirituality. The appeal to, and affirmation of, human reason as a partner in faith has been characteristic of Christianity. Thomas Aquinas is a mighty example from the Middle Ages of an intellect at work on a synthesis of Christian teaching and Greek philosophy. But, unlike the philosophy of Aristotle, a number of modern

⁴³ Hans Mol, *Meaning and Place: an Introduction to the Social Scientific Study of Religion*, Pilgrim Press, New York, 1983, p.46.

⁴⁴ Towler, p. 1. The data for his study came from the 1960s.

sciences and systems of thought have developed in entirely secular environments so that the utilisation of these is qualitatively different from anything that occurred before modern times.⁴⁵

The importance of the temporal world in the context of faith has become a very contentious issue as modern secularisation has become more and more pervasive. We might illustrate this with three examples: the 'kingdom of God' controversy in the first half of this century which absorbed participants in the World Council of Churches Second Assembly in Evanston in 1954; the debates in the Roman Catholic church surrounding liberation theologians; and the 'secular theology' of Don Cupitt.

The theme of the Evanston Assembly was 'Christ, the Hope of the World', to which an understanding of the Biblical concept, 'kingdom of God', was central. Was the reign of God over all to be realised in this world, and were Christian men and women called to act to bring it about - as a number of liberal theologians maintained? Or was it entirely a gift of God promised as the end of history, which European theologians like Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann had insisted? Visser't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches at the time, claimed that the Assembly found ways of holding these polarities in creative tension.⁴⁶ Not, however, without sharp theological contestation and certainly not definitively. The application, or not, of a modern view of history to this theme of scripture was clearly an underlying issue of this debate; also, the significance of culture in faith or, to say much the same thing in another way, the role of experience in theology.⁴⁷

In a different place and time, very similar issues emerged when Latin American liberation theology captured the attention of the world in the 1970s. From the point of view of those concerned for social justice, a secularised view of reality which affirmed human power and responsibility in history was essential. On what other basis could humankind be held accountable for active injustice and moral inertia and be called to conversion? Grounded in the experience of the oppressed poor and seeking to speak

⁴⁵ Some examples of the interaction of modern science and religion are: the transformation of Biblical studies by linguistics, archaeology and anthropology; the partnership of physical sciences and theology in the work of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry; the current enthusiasm for Jungian psychology in the field of religious spirituality; the influence of sociology, economics and cultural anthropology in mission and that of contemporary philosophies on the language of faith

⁴⁶ Cf. W.A. Visser't Hooft, *Memoirs*, SCM Press, London, 1973.

⁴⁷ Karl Barth held that culture was not significant in faith. However, this theological debate on the meaning of 'the kingdom of God' clearly had cultural, social and political components. The convictions of the Europeans, particularly the Germans, had been shaped by their dark experiences of nationalism, social destruction and cultural hauteur, while American theologians reflected the basic optimism of their culture and the self-confidence of their society at that time. Cf. Visser't Hooft's *Memoirs*, also E.J. Sharpe, *The Kingdom, the Power and the Glory*, unpublished, 1984.

of God from this cultural perspective, liberation theologians utilised secular analyses of economic and political structures - analyses which owed much to Marx - in order to call Christians to personal and social justice. The focus was strongly, although not exclusively, this-worldly. Their opponents rejected their use of Marxist analysis, their emphasis on God's presence in culture and their encouragement of particular contextual interpretations of the Gospel.

Don Cupitt has articulated his faith to a wide reading and listening public in several books and in talks and interviews on radio and television, particularly through the 1980s. He has also been condemned as heretical. While not at all denying God or the incarnate Christ, his theology has nonetheless been so substantially secularised that he advocates, with Albert Schweitzer, an 'abandonment of the eschatological future' for the sake of a 'real acceptance of the world'. The destiny of Christianity is to become 'wholly this-worldly'; a Christian life is a transient life.⁴⁸

One might go on pointing to signs of modernisation in religious life: church leaders, thinkers, and members at large have absorbed perspectives and values from the world around them, consciously and unconsciously. The organisational and governmental structures of many churches have conformed themselves to modern models of bureaucratic management and assumed secular priorities of material security and temporal power. At the same time, advocates of liberal democracy, or of the primacy of individual consciousness, or of indiscriminate equality in the church, have challenged authoritative leadership and teaching. Every dimension of religious life (to use Smart's terminology) has been probed by modernisation.⁴⁹

In a plural society, there will be no uniformity in how particular people, or groups of people, internalise values and assumptions present in the surrounding milieu and give expression to them. We have spoken of a number of ways in which modernity has shaped the religious faith, beliefs and activities of people. We have also noted that others, for whom religion has no credibility or relevance, have constructed their lives on entirely secular bases. A third kind of religious response to modern attitudes and currents of thought is to consciously reject and withdraw from them. There are many different expressions of this, of which we will mention only a few: fundamentalist readings of the sacred texts which take no account of history or culture; submissive, reverential obedience to authoritarian, doctrinaire leaders;⁵⁰

⁴⁸ D. Cupitt, *Life Lines*, pp. 200-1.

⁴⁹ Cf. fn. 10 above.

⁵⁰ For example, the followers of Ron L. Hubbard in Scientology and of Rev. Sun Myung Moon in the Unification Church and of leaders of other new religious movements. See Kohn, 'Radical subjectivity'.

adamant adherence to what are perceived to be inviolable traditions;⁵¹ an emphasis on non-rational religious experience;⁵² turning to religious traditions of exotic cultures and indigenous peoples for different cosmologies and different relationships with nature, time and the inner self.⁵³

Religion and modernity in Australia

In the years following white settlement, Aboriginal culture was eliminated utterly from some parts of Australia and elsewhere, ruptured by alien symbols and concepts, weakened and thrust to the margins of the new society. From the point of view of the European population, up to the 1960s, a Christian perception of what 'religion' and 'being religious' meant was sufficient for Australia's needs. This is to say that Aboriginal culture, pervaded by sacred realities expressed in myth, ritual, codes of conduct and the authoritative leadership of elders, was either ignored or deeply misunderstood by almost everyone.⁵⁴ Since Aboriginal people gained the rights of full citizenship in 1967, their participation in the society has become gradually stronger and white Australians have begun to gain a little more insight into their way of life and their perceptions of the universe. The renewed energy in Aboriginal communities and groups has challenged other Australians to expand their religious awareness beyond the narrow sets of assumptions and attitudes that have characterised it in the past.

With the steady flow of immigrants into Australia since the Second World War, what were formerly thought of as exotic Christian churches (varieties of Orthodox, Coptic, Armenian, etc.) and foreign religions (such as Moslem, Buddhist, Baha'i and Hindu faiths) have taken root here. Modern mobility and communications technology have facilitated the rapid internationalisation of Australian life over the same period, opening the society to an incessant flow of ideas and influences and new movements. The plural world, along with the impact of this plurality in and on religion, has taken up residence in Australia and has demanded from Australians more open, more receptive, more educated and more discerning responses.

⁵¹ Such as the 'traditionalists' in the Roman Catholic church who have rejected decisions of the Second Vatican Council, 1963-5.

⁵² This may take many forms, from Jungian analysis of dreams to the emphasis by Pentecostal and Charismatic communities on the gift of tongues, the engagement of the emotions and wonders of healing to occult practices.

⁵³ Particularly since the 1960s, new movements with their roots in Asian religious life have developed in Western modern societies. Even though their origins may lie in centuries-old traditions, people in modern cultures have 'discovered' them as something new and creative. Others have become Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems according to the traditional forms of these religions. The attraction to Australian Aboriginal, North American Indian and Inuit cultures, to name only a few, lies particularly in their spiritual bonds with the land and its creatures.

⁵⁴ See T. Swain, *Interpreting Aboriginal Religion: an Historical Account*, Australian Association for the Study of Religions, Adelaide, 1985.

And now to the ABC.....

It is in these global and national contexts of religion and culture, that the Religion Department of the ABC, as a servant of the society, has had to discern how best to apply its very limited resources to the task of fostering communication among Australians around the multiple themes touched on in this chapter. In succeeding chapters, we shall note significant times of stability and change in religious perceptions in Australia and give an account of how the ABC responded in its religious programmes.

CHAPTER 2

THE ABC: CHARTER AND INSTITUTION

The ABC was brought into existence by an Act of the Commonwealth Parliament, in 1932.¹ This chapter aims to set out clearly those aspects of the purposes, structures and functioning of the ABC which are relevant to our subject.

Beginning a national broadcasting service

A number of licensed radio stations had already been established in all States by 1923 and, by 1924, had been classified by the Postmaster-General (PMG) as A-class and B-class stations.² The A-class stations, licensed for five years, were to receive funding from listeners' fees.³ B-class stations could apply to the PMG for approval to fund their operations from advertising.

As broadcasting developed, public concern increased about the use and control of the airwaves. By 1929, the Commonwealth Government had decided to take over the A-class stations as their licences expired in order to set up a national broadcasting service and had awarded a three-year contract to a consortium, the Australian Broadcasting Company, to provide programmes for this service. With the expiry of this contract, the responsibility for national broadcasting was passed to a statutory body, the Australian Broadcasting Commission, although the provision and operation of all technical equipment remained under the authority of the PMG.⁴ The Commission began with twelve radio stations and its first programme went to air on 1 July, 1932.

Charter

The Commission's Charter read as follows:

The Commission shall provide and shall broadcast from the national broadcasting stations adequate and comprehensive programmes and shall take in the interests

¹ *Australian Broadcasting Commission Act 1932* (Cwlth)

² A short history of the origins and development of the ABC up to 1963 can be found in Committee of Review of ABC, *The ABC in Review: National Broadcasting in the 1980s* ('Dix Report'), vol. 2, AGPS, Canberra, 1981, ch. 4.

³ Radio listeners were charged a licence fee for their receivers. Listeners' licences were abolished in 1974. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 4.38.

⁴ Act 1932, ss. 45-9.

of the community all such measures as, in the opinion of the Commission, are conducive to the full development of suitable broadcasting programmes.⁵

The Act further required the Commission to encourage and develop local talent and to establish and utilise in its programmes choirs, bands and orchestras of high quality.⁶

When the ABC became responsible also for public television in 1956, its original Charter was extended to television but otherwise remained unchanged for fifty-one years.

The Dix Committee of Review (1979-81), judging the ABC to have lost some of its energy for innovation and responsiveness to change during the preceding decade,⁷ recommended many changes, among them a re-wording of the Charter. The Committee wanted the ABC to be required by statute to provide 'informative, entertaining and innovative' programmes and to serve both Australian society as a whole and its 'component community groups'.⁸ It had been sharply critical of the ABC's failure to serve adequately Australia's Aboriginal people and its ethnic communities formed as a result of Australia's programme of planned immigration.⁹ These key ideas of the Dix Committee appeared in the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*, which re-worded and elaborated the initial Charter in this way:

The functions of the Corporation are -

(a) to provide within Australia innovative and comprehensive broadcasting and television services of a high standard as part of the Australian broadcasting and television system consisting of national, commercial and public sectors and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, to provide -

(i) broadcasting programmes and television programmes that contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community; and

(ii) broadcasting programmes and television programmes of an educational nature;

(b) to transmit to countries outside Australia broadcasting programmes and television programmes of news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment that will -

⁵ Act 1932, s. 16.

⁶ Act 1932, ss. 23-4.

⁷ 'Dix Report', vol. 1, pt 1, ss. 1-4.

⁸ 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 3.36.

⁹ 'Dix Report', vol. 1, pt 1, ss. 22-3.

(i) encourage awareness of Australia and an international understanding of Australian attitudes on world affairs;

(ii) enable Australian citizens living or travelling outside Australia to obtain information about Australian affairs and Australian attitudes on world affairs; and

(c) to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other arts in Australia.¹⁰

What did the 1983 Charter add to that of 1932? Certainly a good many more words. It retained the word 'comprehensive' and it made it clear that the adequacy of the ABC's performance would be judged on criteria of innovativeness and high standards. It acknowledged in an oblique way the much expanded, more diverse and competitive, broadcasting environment in which the ABC already had to function in the 1980s and with which it would increasingly have to contend in the future, but dealt not at all with the substantial debate about how much the ABC should think of complementing, rather than competing with, the programmes of others. The directive to innovate might be interpreted as a response of the legislators to this debate, that is, a call to the ABC to pioneer and take risks where commercial operators would not. However, in the light of the remarkable innovations of the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in its short life of only six years, it might equally be understood as a challenge to the ABC to follow the lead of this competitor.¹¹ While the 1932 Act did not require explicitly that the ABC strengthen national identity and inform and educate, it is clear from its Annual Reports that these were goals the Commission very early set itself.¹² The 1983 Act effectively added nothing here. It did introduce one new phrase - 'to reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community' - and this was a necessary reminder to the ABC that, culturally speaking, it had been 'narrowcasting' rather than broadcasting in the preceding twenty years and more. For the rest, Radio Australia was given statutory status, even though it had already been at work since 1939, and this section of the Act concluded with a general statement of commitment to promoting the arts in Australia, avoiding the current debate on whether the ABC should continue to sponsor and manage orchestras and concerts. These had become a

¹⁰ *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983* (Cwlth), s. 6.

¹¹ SBS was set up by the Australian Govt in 1977 as a second, publicly funded broadcaster to provide a service which the ABC was not providing, namely, programmes which took account of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society. Cf. *Broadcasting and Television Amendment Act 1977* (Cwlth), pt IIIA.

¹² Cf. its use of such phrases as 'responsibility in public education' (*Annual Report 1932-3*, p. 17); 'adult education in an entertaining form' (*Annual Report 1937-8*, p. 30); 'to be a useful centre of our national unity as a people' (*Annual Report 1945-6*, p. 3); 'to the building of an informed and critical democracy' (*Annual Report 1948-9*, p. 4).

major area of activity, having greatly expanded since the Commission's early efforts to respond to the 1932 Act.

The 1983 Act required the ABC to set its sights on entertainment, information, cultural diversity and national unity. In practice, entertainment objectives and information objectives in broadcasting frequently conflict.¹³ Judgments vary, also, on the extent to which cultural diversity is consistent with, or inimical to, a strong spirit of national unity. This is evident in the ongoing debate about multicultural policies in Australia. In blandly listing these objectives as its statutory requirements, the Act hardly achieved any greater clarity than if it had omitted them. The conclusion one must draw is that the 1983 Charter improved very little on its 1932 predecessor.

Commissioners and Directors

The Commission in 1932 comprised five part-time Commissioners appointed by the Governor General.¹⁴ They were empowered to appoint a General Manager and any other staff they thought necessary.¹⁵ The Commission was accountable to the appropriate Federal Minister, who, in turn, was obliged to table the Commission's Annual Reports before both Houses of Parliament. Over the years, the number of Commissioners grew. Legislation in 1948 required that there be seven Commissioners, adding a representative each from Treasury and the PMG.¹⁶ In 1956, the provision for these two representatives was dropped, but the number of Commissioners remained the same and each State was then able to be represented.¹⁷ Later legislation permitted nine to eleven Commissioners.¹⁸

Most recently with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983, when the Commission became a Corporation and the Commissioners became Directors of a Board, the number was reduced to a minimum of seven and a maximum of nine. As well, the chief executive ceased to be a General Manager and became a Managing

¹³ This has been a particularly severe problem for ABC television, having to try and cater for all interests with only one channel.

¹⁴ Act 1932, s. 6.

¹⁵ Act 1932, s. 15.

¹⁶ *Australian Broadcasting Act 1948* (Cwlth), s. 8.

¹⁷ *Broadcasting and Television Act 1956* (Cwlth), s. 14(1).

¹⁸ Cf. *Broadcasting and Television Act 1967* (Cwlth), s. 3(a) and *Broadcasting and Television (Amendment) Act (No.2) 1976* (Cwlth), s. 31.

Director with a seat on the Board ex officio, significantly increasing his power at Board level.¹⁹

From 1948 to 1975, it was also specifically required that one at least of the Commissioners be a woman.²⁰ At least two women were required to be appointed from 1976²¹ and there were actually four women Commissioners in the years 1979-80. Any explicit reference to women was omitted from the 1983 legislation,²² and the number of women Directors has ranged between two and four since then.²³

From 1973, the ABC Staff Association began to press for staff representation on the Commission and, in 1975, without changing the legislation, the Labor Minister for the Media, Moss Cass, acted within his administrative powers to appoint one staff-elected Commissioner. At the end of one term of three years this arrangement was terminated by the Commission but was re-instated when new corporate structures were set up by legislation in 1983.²⁴

Finance

For sixteen years, the ABC was funded from listeners' licence fees; an ABC Fund was set up in 1932 to receive half the revenue obtained from these fees. The Commission could invest money from this Fund in Government securities and accumulate the interest and, until 1942, it was also permitted to issue debentures with Treasury approval.²⁵

A major change to these financial arrangements came in 1948. The Fund was abolished and the ABC was henceforth funded by direct allocations from Governments in their annual Budgets.²⁶

¹⁹ Act 1983, s. 12.

²⁰ Act 1948, s. 8 (2A).

²¹ Act 1976, s. 31(2).

²² Act 1983, s. 12.

²³ Cf. *ABC Annual Reports* for the years, 1983-91.

²⁴ Marius Webb was a member of the Commission Oct. 1975-Oct. 1978. Tom Molomby was the first staff-elected Board member in 1983. For a full account, cf. T. Molomby, *Is There a Moderate on the Roof?: ABC Years*, Heinemann, Melbourne 1991, pp. 63-74, 95-114, 160-4.

²⁵ Cf. Act 1932, pts IV, V and 'Dix Report', vol. 2, 4.28, 4.34.

²⁶ Act 1948, s. 27.

From its inception the Commission has been prohibited from broadcasting advertising.²⁷ Since the mid-1970s, as the gap has widened between what the ABC believes it needs from Government and the amount of money Governments are able, or willing, to give it, the options of advertising and sponsorship as extra sources of revenue have been seriously discussed.²⁸ The ABC has more and more entered into co-production and co-financing arrangements with other organisations and has heavily advertised its own money-making activities and business enterprises, such as its publications and tape sales and the ABC Shops. This way of increasing its financial resources has enabled it to avoid direct commercial advertising and explicit sponsorship from other institutions. Surveys of public opinion have shown sustained, strong opposition to commercial advertising on the ABC, although one survey in 1980 reported a growing number of people willing to countenance unobtrusive and controlled sponsorship of programmes as a way of supplementing the ABC's finances.²⁹ However, the Friends of the ABC,³⁰ three thousand of whom rallied at the Sydney Town Hall in February 1988 outraged by inadequate Government funding of the ABC, declared both corporate sponsorship and advertising 'completely unacceptable'.³¹ The issue here is the ABC's freedom from any commercial pressures which might compromise its integrity. It is a matter of considerable argument which of the two - the blatant disruption of broadcasting by interspersed advertisements or the less obtrusive, but still influential, corporate underwriting of a particular programme - would be the greater threat. The Friends of the ABC believed they were right to reject both equally. In any case, so far, legislation continues to prohibit the intrusion into ABC programmes of both paid commercial advertisements and explicit sponsorship.

²⁷ Act 1932, s. 21.

²⁸ Similar discussions about funding have taken place in relation to the British Broadcasting Corporation in the United Kingdom. See C. McCabe and O. Stewart (eds), *The BBC and Public Service Broadcasting*, Manchester University Press, 1986.

²⁹ 94.9% of submissions received by the Dix Committee on these matters rejected advertising and 76.5% rejected sponsorship. However, a wider public survey conducted for the Dix Committee showed that 50% of respondents (and 45% of regular ABC viewers) supported the ABC's seeking additional funds through programme sponsorship. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 2, ss.19.76-80 and vol. 3, s. 5.2.

³⁰ 'Friends of the ABC' is an association formed in 1976 in response to the Government's severe reduction of funds to the ABC. It held its first public meeting on 20 April 1976 to protest against destructive financial cutbacks and advertising on the ABC. E. Blain, *Life With Aunty: Forty Years with the ABC*, Methuen, Sydney, 1977, pp. 7-8.

³¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25.2.88, p. 3.

The 1983 Act, which set up the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, expressly denied it the freedom to borrow money.³² This stance was reversed in 1988.³³ Whatever the reasons for these Government decisions, they serve to illustrate how Government control of its funds and financial policy can affect the ABC's striving for success in a fast-moving, intensely competitive, broadcasting system.

The innovative thinking of Senator Gareth Evans, as Minister for Transport and Communications, 1987-8,³⁴ offered another, though quite different, illustration of the same point. He and his Department decided to take a fresh approach to the problems of funding national broadcasting, to be applied to both the ABC and SBS. What Evans recommended in the discussion papers which he released for public comment³⁵ would have seriously damaged religious broadcasting and will, therefore, be examined in detail in a later chapter.³⁶ It is sufficient to note here that Evans was genuinely sympathetic to the ABC, but his proposals were rejected strongly by many of its staff. They were unacceptable because, while they entailed a guarantee of improved Government funding for a selection of the existing range of activities and objectives of the ABC, they offered less security to the remainder and admitted the possibility of advertising and sponsorship. In the event, Evans acknowledged the flaws in his scheme and did not proceed with it. This initiative of the Minister, however, further demonstrated the potential for political management of the ABC consequent on its dependence on Government for finance. It must be acknowledged that this episode also showed the effectiveness of the democratic process when lawmakers open their thinking to public discussion and heed fair criticism.

Authority of Government and Parliament

Constituted by an Act of the Federal Parliament, the ABC has always been accountable to that Parliament through the appropriate Minister of the day. As has already been mentioned, a Report is sent every year to the Minister, who must then table it in both Houses of Parliament.

³² Act 1983, s. 25(2).

³³ *Broadcasting Legislation (Amendment) Act 1988* (Cwlth), s. 25B, 70A.

³⁴ Evans held this portfolio for a little over a year, from 24.7.87 to 2.9.88. Cf. information from Dept of Transport and Communications, Canberra.

³⁵ Dept of Transport and Communications, *Review of National Broadcasting Policy - Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, Discussion Papers, Canberra, Feb. 1988.

³⁶ Cf. ch. 9, 'The Federal Government and the ABC'.

In 1942, a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting was set up, a joint committee of both Houses of Parliament to consider and report to Parliament on 'every matter affecting broadcasting in Australia or the Territories' put before it by either of the Houses or the Minister.³⁷ The aim of this legislation was to 'strengthen Parliament's and the Minister's ability to maintain control over developments in broadcasting'.³⁸ This Committee met until its functions were given to the Australian Broadcasting Control Board (ABCB), brought into existence in 1948³⁹ and then replaced by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT) in 1976.⁴⁰ The ABCB took over much of the PMG's administration and co-ordination of technical services for broadcasting as well as oversight of all programmes provided by both national and commercial broadcasters. Subject to the Minister's approval, the Board, therefore, controlled planning for transmitters and the allocation of frequencies for national broadcasting, but it seems never to have wielded authority over ABC programmes and its right to do so was formally withdrawn in 1956.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the programme policies which the ABCB developed in its jurisdiction over commercial stations and which it enunciated in its Annual Reports were referred to by ABC Departments in the shaping of their own policies.⁴² With the abolition of the Board, responsibility for its technical functions in relation to national broadcasting reverted to the Minister.⁴³

The 1932 Act gave the Minister power to prohibit the Commission from broadcasting any matter.⁴⁴ The need to protect the ABC from misuse of this power was evident by 1942. In a completely redrafted Act, the Minister was given the power both to direct that a particular matter be broadcast if it were judged to be in the national

³⁷ *Australian Broadcasting Act 1942* (Cwlth), s. 85(1).

³⁸ The whole of Australia's broadcasting system was in this Committee's purview, not just the ABC. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 4.34.

³⁹ Act 1948, s. 6.

⁴⁰ Act 1976, ss. 7-8. The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* (Cwlth) replaced the ABT with a new body with revised powers, the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), but this lies outside the scope of this study.

⁴¹ Act 1956, s. 6K.

⁴² In the files of the ABC Religion Dept there are references to ABCB policies on the use of languages other than English by broadcasters, cf. AA (NSW):SP411/1, file 8. Policy influence flowed the other way, too. The ABCB, setting standards for the broadcasting of divine worship each week by commercial stations, suggested a formula for allocating time among the various religious communities borrowed from the ABC Religion Dept, cf. *ABCB Annual Report 1950*, s. 146(c).

⁴³ 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 4.43.

⁴⁴ Act 1932, s. 51(1).

interest to do so⁴⁵ and to prohibit a particular broadcast,⁴⁶ but the Commission was required to publish in its Annual Reports the directives it received from the Minister in order to discourage too eager use of such powers.⁴⁷ In 1967, the legislation made further demands, obliging the Minister to provide a written report of any directive to both Houses of Parliament within seven days.⁴⁸ These Ministerial powers, along with the constraints on their use, have remained in the legislation ever since.

Apart from the above provisions for Ministers' interventions, the 1942 Act gave the Commission editorial control over political matter⁴⁹ and this was extended in 1948 to include 'controversial matter' also.⁵⁰

From the beginning, there have been debates about the proper independence of the ABC from political interference: how to ensure that a publicly-funded national broadcaster is duly accountable to its Parliament and Government and yet sufficiently independent of both to serve the people of Australia with integrity. Over the years there have been many corrections made to imbalances as they were perceived on one side or the other. While the ABC informed the Dix Committee in 1980 that it did not believe its 'independence was prejudiced by the process of annual Parliamentary appropriations',⁵¹ the proposals of the Minister in 1988 showed that this view was far too sanguine, but also that undesirable political intrusion may be prevented when there is public access to information.

ABC structures and lines of authority

It is not necessary for our purposes here to describe the structures and organisation of the ABC in detail as they have evolved over nearly sixty years. From simple beginnings the ABC has become extraordinarily complex: no longer the twelve radio transmitters of 1932 but, in 1991, four hundred and seventy two, as well as four hundred and ninety for television;⁵² from two hundred and sixty five employees in

45 Act 1942, s. 23.

46 Act 1942, s. 41.

47 Act 1942, s. 42.

48 *Broadcasting and Television Act 1967* (Cwlth), ss. 78A, 105A.

49 Act 1942, s. 89(1).

50 Act 1948, s. 6K(2)(b)(iii).

51 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 19.3.

52 ABC, *Annual Report 1990-1*, p. 75.

radio in 1933⁵³ to over seven thousand in radio and television in 1975.⁵⁴ National public radio has become a 'network of networks'⁵⁵ using technology, some of which the ABC has itself created, that offers vastly improved scope, speed and efficiency.⁵⁶

With the radical and rapid changes in communications technology, the engineering and technical sector of the ABC has grown in size and complexity over the decades and has had a very significant role to fulfil: that of ensuring that the ABC is in the forefront of the application of this technology to broadcasting. It is sufficient to acknowledge here the important place of this sector in the organisation and go on to attend more closely to those structures and lines of authority directly concerned with programming.

First, however, a brief explanation is necessary of terms which the ABC applied to its stations and networks over the years.

By October 1938, the ABC had two stations in every capital city, which gave it the capacity to offer an 'alternative programme' on the second station.⁵⁷ The terms, 'national programme' or 'national relay', were applied to one set of six stations which 'broadcast to the Commonwealth'. Each of the other six stations carried a 'State programme' for its own State; when these stations were linked so that a programme could be heard in a number of States, it was referred to as the 'alternative relay'. In addition to these services from metropolitan stations, regional stations were developed to serve places where reception from the city transmitters was unsatisfactory. These stations took a selection of both national and State programmes and also produced their own local material.⁵⁸ In 1947, the Commission decided to develop a stronger contrast between the 'national' and the 'State' programmes: the first would offer 'more serious and service sessions' and the second 'lighter material'.⁵⁹ These two sets of stations were often spoken of, from then on, as the 'serious network' and the 'light

⁵³ *History and Development of the ABC 1932-86*, leaflet, ABC, n.d.

⁵⁴ 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 22.44.

⁵⁵ ABC, *Annual Report 1989-90*, p. 14.

⁵⁶ In 1991, ABC networks comprised Radio National (145 transmitters), Metropolitan Radio (9), Regional Radio (181), FM-Stereo (48), JJJ (9). As well, Parliament was broadcast over 8 transmitters; the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) involved the use of 66 transmitters; there were 6 domestic shortwave transmitters. Cf. ABC *Annual Report 1990-1*, p. 75. Note that this range and complexity of services does not include Radio Australia.

⁵⁷ ABC, *Annual Report 1938-9*, p. 3.

⁵⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1939-40*, p. 12.

⁵⁹ ABC, *Annual Report, 1947-8*, p. 4.

network'.⁶⁰ In 1963, the three existing networks were identified by numbers: 'Radio 1' ('light'), 'Radio 2' ('serious') and 'Radio 3' (regional).⁶¹ The last change, which introduced the current terminology, took place in 1985, as the Corporation set out to differentiate these three networks further 'in programmatic and demographic terms'. 'Radio 1' became 'Metropolitan Radio', 'Radio 2' is now 'Radio National' and 'Radio 3' has been re-named 'Regional Radio'.⁶²

For much of its existence, the ABC has been structured on the basis of national, state and regional management, programme departments and station networks. Charles Moses as General Manager, 1935-64, had a great formative impact on the ABC and the structures and processes which were developed under his direction remained basically undisturbed until the 1980s.

The first Federal programme department, Talks, was established in 1934⁶³ and many others followed, the Religion Department among the last in 1949.⁶⁴ Makers of programmes worked in specialist departments, such as Talks, Religion, Rural, Music, Sport and so on, each with its own Federal Director, or Supervisor, accountable through various levels of administrative and financial control to the General Manager who, in turn, reported to monthly meetings of the Commission. When television was added to the ABC's responsibilities in 1956, the specialist programme departments were expected to work to both media. Geoffrey Whitehead, the first Managing Director of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which replaced the Commission in 1983, was charged with restructuring the national broadcasting service and began, in 1984, to split the programme departments along media lines, that is, entirely separate television production from radio production. These structural changes to programme departments as they affected the Religion Department will be discussed further in Chapter Nine.

State management, accountable to national management, was developed in every State except NSW.⁶⁵ Staff of specialist departments based outside NSW have,

⁶⁰ The ABC's official terminology was 'Metropolitan National', 'Metropolitan Light' and 'Regional', cf. *ABC Annual Report 1957-8*, p. 49.

⁶¹ ABC, *Annual Report 1963-4*, Appendix 5, p. 29.

⁶² ABC, *Annual Report, 1985-6*, p. 4.

⁶³ *History and Development of the ABC 1932-86*.

⁶⁴ AA (NSW): SP 341/1/0, box 28, 8.5/II.

⁶⁵ The location of national Head Office in Sydney affected the full development of State structures in NSW.

therefore, always worked to two authorities - their specialist department and their State Manager. When the two media, radio and television, were structurally separated, media management became another authority in the lives of programmers, along with network management. As stations proliferated and the various ABC networks demanded more and more focussed attention and planning, structures of network management, also accountable to national management, were put in place to ensure that the purpose and style of each network was distinctive and coherent.

It is evident that, with these criss-crossing lines of responsibility and authority, ABC programmes emerge not only out of the creativity of producers and their attentiveness to needs and wishes of their listening public but out of complex negotiations among many potentially and really conflicting perceptions of what should, or should not, be done at any particular time.

The centralised hierarchical management structure, which prevailed until Whitehead's re-organisation, spawned multitudes of memoranda and drafts of letters and reports. For example, if a listener wished to comment about an aspect of religious broadcasting, he or she might write to the person directly concerned with a particular programme, or to the Head of the Religion Department, to a Station Manager, a State Manager, the General Manager, a member of the Commission, the Chairman of the Commission, the citizen's local Member of Parliament, the Minister responsible for broadcasting, or even the Prime Minister. At whatever point the letter was received, it would make its way, step by step, to the Head of the Religion Department, accompanied by covering letter or memo. Coming from higher authorities it would pass through the office of the Federal Controller of Programmes on the way. Communications addressed directly to the Head might be answered directly by the Head; even so, a higher authority might be informed about the matter. For other letters received at a point higher up the line of authority, the Head would often be asked to draft a reply and send it on its way, again step by step, back to that point. Any authority en route might comment on it. The reply would then be despatched, usually unaltered, sometimes a little amended. Since 1984, however, a less centralised system of management has put an end to this often tedious, but also at times entertaining, procedure.

Finally, some mention should be made of the external committees appointed by the Commission to advise it on programmes. Citizens who were thought to have particular qualifications for the task were invited to serve a term in an advisory committee. Advisory committees were set up in the States and Territories and there

were regional committees, as well as some specialist advisory committees.⁶⁶ The Federal Religious Advisory Committee (FRAC) met from 1953 to 1976.⁶⁷ When the Commission became a Corporation in 1983, the State, Territory and Regional Advisory Committees were disbanded and replaced, in 1984, by National, State and Territory Councils.⁶⁸ Most of the existing specialist committees ceased to function soon after.⁶⁹ The ABC sought and welcomed the criticism and recommendations of these committees, but was under no obligation to act upon them.

Philosophy and purposes

Over the years, as Australian society has become more complex, the broadcasting system in Australia has also expanded and diversified: with a larger and more varied range of broadcast providers;⁷⁰ with a greater number of radio stations and television channels more intensely competitive; through the exploitation of all the resources of communications technology. The environment in which the ABC has functioned since 1932 has changed enormously, yet its statements of philosophy and purpose have stayed remarkably consistent over sixty years. Four strong themes recur.

The first is concerned with notions of independence, impartiality, neutrality and balance and can be seen in such phrases from the Annual Reports as: 'neutral forum for the expression of conflicting opinions...standing outside the political, social and religious differences of the community it represents';⁷¹ 'just balance';⁷² and 'the ABC will...maintain its integrity and independence'.⁷³

The second most repeated theme is the aspiration to be an agent and focus of national unity and identity. During the Second World War and in the critical period of post-war reconstruction, this theme found expression in such terms as: 'sustaining

⁶⁶ School Broadcasts, Kindergarten, Music, Orchestral and Religious Advisory Committees, and a Standing Committee on Spoken English, have had a very long history; a Science Advisory Committee was set up in the early 1970s, cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1971-2*, Appendix 15.

⁶⁷ Cf. chs 5 and 8.

⁶⁸ Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1982-3*, p.77, and *1983-4*, p. 75.

⁶⁹ ABC, *Annual Report 1985-6*, Appendix 11, p. 83. The Standing Committee on Spoken English still meets.

⁷⁰ To the ABC and commercial broadcasters were added Public Broadcasting Services, legislated for in the 1976 Act (pt IV), and SBS (cf. fn. 11 above).

⁷¹ ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 5.

⁷² ABC, *Annual Report 1948-9*, p. 4.

⁷³ ABC, 'Statement of purpose 1984' in *Annual Report 1985-6*, inner front cover.

morale in the country'⁷⁴ and 'being a service to the needs of a people in process of rebuilding the civil life of the nation'.⁷⁵ To this end, the ABC aimed at 'aiding the growth of an informed, independent and virile democracy'⁷⁶ by allowing 'vigorous debate'⁷⁷ over its airwaves in the hope for 'a truly critical democracy.'⁷⁸ The 1983 Charter set 'a sense of national purpose and identity' as a primary objective of the ABC.⁷⁹ The unremitting efforts of the ABC to broadcast to the whole of Australia, even to the most remote and tiny settlements in the continent, are a further expression of its commitment to unite all Australians by means of a national communications network.

The other two focal themes in the statements of vision and goals are related to this one of national unity and identity.

The 1932 Act required the ABC to discover and foster Australian talent and to be relevant to Australia and Australians. In 1974, the Commission wrote of its desire to be 'distinctively Australian' while not excluding overseas programmes altogether.⁸⁰ In recent years, the Reports of the Corporation have included graphs showing the proportion of programmes from Australian sources in the year's output and have commented with pride on the ABC's achievements in this regard.⁸¹ This effort to develop Australian content in programmes is aimed, of course, at encouraging, and providing an arena for, the creativity of Australians. It serves two other purposes also - one internal, the other external. Internally, it is directed to the goal of promoting national self-esteem, a national spirit and sense of achievement. Externally, as the Commission wrote in 1952, it brings 'this country's voice into the general world exchange of thought and culture',⁸² or, as the Corporation would have it, 'project[s] Australia to the world'.⁸³

⁷⁴ ABC, *Annual Report 1939-40*, p. 3.

⁷⁵ ABC, *Annual Report 1945-6*, p. 3.

⁷⁶ ABC, *Annual Report 1951-2*, p. 4.

⁷⁷ ABC, *Annual Report 1948-9*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1946-7*, p. 7.

⁷⁹ ABC, 'Statement of purpose'.

⁸⁰ ABC, *Annual Report 1973-4*, p. 6.

⁸¹ Cf. Annual Reports from 1989.

⁸² ABC, *Annual Report 1951-2*, p. 4.

⁸³ ABC, 'Statement of purpose'.

Finally, the ABC understood its role to be that of educating and elevating Australian society. We have already caught glimpses of this in its aspiration to help create a great democracy 'in which all classes...might share equally'.⁸⁴ But there have been many other explicit references to its educative function: 'the enlargement of interest rather than the mere presentation of information';⁸⁵ 'to raise standards of both performance and appreciation';⁸⁶ 'creating a more enlightened community';⁸⁷ 'the first priority is to increase and develop...general knowledge and appreciation of the intellectual, ethical and artistic';⁸⁸ 'the ABC...is both an originator and transmitter of cultural and material values'.⁸⁹

These ideals together have made for ambiguities, even contradictions, in practice. For example, by pursuing national unity from a monocultural perspective, the ABC for most of its history has not provided an adequate service in relation to Australian Aborigines or citizens from other than English-speaking cultures. It has only been since 1981 that Aboriginal Australians have found any place for themselves in the structures of the ABC.⁹⁰ As late as 1986, when the Government proposed to amalgamate SBS and the ABC, the clamorous opposition of Australia's ethnic communities was an emphatic vote of no confidence in the ABC's capacity for cultural flexibility.⁹¹ Again, the ABC's objectivity is dependent on the research and judgments of staff who cannot reasonably claim to be 'outside the political, social and

⁸⁴ ABC, *Annual Report 1946-7*, p. 7.

⁸⁵ ABC, *Annual Report 1932-3*, p. 17.

⁸⁶ ABC, *Annual Report 1936-7*, p. 9.

⁸⁷ ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1954-5*, p. 5.

⁸⁹ ABC, *Annual Report 1984-5*, p. 5.

⁹⁰ Aboriginal and Islander broadcasts have been carried by the ABC since 1981. In 1983, Neville Bonner became the first Aboriginal Director, a post he held for eight years. From 1984, the ABC actively supported independent Aboriginal and Islander production houses in Central Australia, North Queensland the Torres Strait Islands. In the same year, because of concern that satellite television might erode Aboriginal traditions, the Corporation sought advice from a consultant from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation with long experience in programmes for remote Inuit and Indian peoples and since 1988, an Aboriginal Employment Development Policy in radio, supported by the Department of Education and Training, has been implemented aiming at 2% Aboriginal staff by 1991. Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1983-4*, pp.10-11, and *1988-9*, pp.23-4..

⁹¹ The amalgamation was announced in the Federal Treasurer's Budget speech, August 1986, to take effect from 1.1.87. It was successfully prevented. Instead, SBS and the ABC began to explore some forms of practical co-operation. Cf. ABC, *Annual Report, 1986-7*, p. 8.

religious differences of the community'.⁹² However honestly they gather data, however conscientiously they follow guidelines for balance in programming, their subjective experiences and choices leave their imprint on programmes. Another source of ambiguity lies in the two aspirations of being a unifying agent in society and of broadcasting vigorous, critical debate - aspirations which are not always and everywhere considered compatible. Decisions that favour one may be criticised for having compromised the other.

Commercial broadcasters

The ABC was brought into existence within a broadcasting system that included commercial broadcasters. We need only be concerned here with their approach to religious broadcasting in order to be able to compare it with that of the ABC.

The 1948 Act explicitly required the ABCB to 'ensure that divine worship or other matter of a religious nature is broadcast for adequate periods and at appropriate times and that no matter which is not of a religious nature is broadcast by a station during any period during which divine worship or other matter of a religious nature is broadcast by that station'.⁹³

The Board was not sure what the second half of this legislation meant, but assumed it referred to advertisements. In its second Annual Report, it set out its proposed standards for implementing the above requirement:

Each station would give a minimum of one hour, free of charge, every Sunday at an appropriate time approved by the Board, to religious broadcasting, preferably 'Divine Worship' in a location where corporate worship normally took place. Where there was no suitable location or local clergy available to provide regular broadcasts, taking a relay from elsewhere would be an acceptable alternative. Station licensees should consult with the various denominations in their localities to arrange rosters and times. Religious organisations wanting additional broadcasts could be asked to pay for these.⁹⁴

Within a year this standard had been revised and it was frequently amended over the years to become more flexible. In 1951, stations which could not conveniently broadcast Divine Worship were permitted to broadcast other religious

⁹² Cf. fn. 71 above.

⁹³ Act 1948, s. 6K(2)(b)(ii).

⁹⁴ ABCB, *Annual Report 1950*, ss. 146, 148.

matter in periods of time that would total one hour a week.⁹⁵ The stations generally complied well and the Board reported in 1954 that they were, in fact, broadcasting an average of two and three-quarter hours per week of religious matter free of charge.⁹⁶ The wording of the 1956 legislation gave the Board considerably more freedom in dealing with religious broadcasting but it announced that it did not envisage any change to existing instructions.⁹⁷ In 1957, the Board reported that there had been three hundred and three hours per week of religious broadcasts free of charge on the commercial stations that year and an additional one hundred and forty six hours paid for by various religious bodies. Paid religious broadcasting peaked in 1963 at three hundred and twenty eight hours per week, many sponsored by what the Board called 'movements outside main streams of religious belief'.⁹⁸

By 1965, a number of problems had emerged: churches complained about the attitude of stations to religious programmes and were concerned about their own inadequacies in providing material acceptable to contemporary radio. Syndicated material was replacing available locally produced programmes; there was insufficient religious content in the ten-second scatter announcements which stations were preferring to use; some stations were changing arrangements and time-slots without consultation with the relevant religious bodies.⁹⁹ However, one positive development, in the churches' view, was the introduction by some stations of religious counselling for listeners. In 1990, the Tribunal reported that it would set up an inquiry into sustained complaints of religious bodies about the poor time-slots allocated to religious broadcasts and the lack of broadcast worship services.¹⁰⁰ Its decision on these matters was announced in July 1991: that the ABT did not believe it had the power to direct licensees either to broadcast a particular type of religious programme or to schedule religious programmes at particular times.¹⁰¹

In contrast to the ABC, commercial radio stations and television channels were required expressly by statute to reserve some minimum time each week for religion.

⁹⁵ ABCB, *Annual Report 1951*, s. 106.

⁹⁶ ABCB, *Annual Report 1954*, s. 105.

⁹⁷ ABCB, *Annual Report 1956*, s. 62. (The standard for religious programming on commercial television was set at 1% of transmission time or a minimum of 30 minutes per week.)

⁹⁸ ABCB, *Annual Report 1964*, s. 71.

⁹⁹ ABCB, *Annual Reports 1965*, s. 91; *1966*, s. 95; *1969*, s. 22.

¹⁰⁰ ABT, *Annual Report 1989-90*, p. 77.

¹⁰¹ ABT, *Annual Report 1991-92*, p. 78.

The foundations for ABC religious broadcasting lay implicit in the words in its 1932 Charter, 'adequate and comprehensive programmes'.

The ABT defined 'religious matter' as 'all programmes originated by recognised religious bodies'.¹⁰² Herein lies a second contrast to the ABC. The commercial stations have substantially relied on religious organisations to provide the material for broadcasting - whether a completely packaged media product ready to go to air or a broadcaster with a programme for whom the station provided production facilities. Churches and other religious groups have developed, as far as their resources would allow, media sectors in their organisations to co-operate with the commercial stations in these ways.¹⁰³ The ABC, on the other hand, has itself assumed responsibility for its religious programmes, creating them out of its own resources and taking the initiative in bringing religion to its listeners. While collaborating with others, it has insisted on editorial authority over its programmes to ensure their compatibility with its Charter obligations and philosophy.

There are, therefore, philosophical imperatives and constraints within the ABC by which religious broadcasting is both demanded and shaped. For most commercial stations, on the other hand, the imperative has come from an authority outside themselves. As a result, they, and the religious bodies with whom they co-operate, have had some severe problems of incoherence and inconsistency.

The BBC

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) was the model for the setting up of the ABC and has continued over the years to be the single most important source of programmes and ideas. From the outset, there were some significant differences in their situations, however, which K.S. Inglis has drawn attention to.¹⁰⁴ For one thing, the BBC was founded by Charter deriving authority from the King-in-Council, not the Parliament; and its funds came from listeners' licence fees. In these circumstances, it was less susceptible to the political power of the Government of the day, so long as new legislation to change this was not enacted.¹⁰⁵ By Australian

¹⁰² *Review of National Broadcasting Policy*, Discussion Paper 1, p. 39.

¹⁰³ For example, the Christian Broadcasting Association and the media centres and units in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches.

¹⁰⁴ K. S. Inglis, *This is the ABC: the Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-83*, Melbourne University Press, 1983, p. 19.

¹⁰⁵ The BBC's Charter has been subject to more frequent review than that of the ABC: six Charters have been granted to the Corporation in the period 1927-81 and the 7th is due at

standards, the BBC had access to immense financial resources. It also had a monopoly of the airwaves.¹⁰⁶ It is fair to say that it has enjoyed the status of 'establishment' in Britain, much as has the Church of England. The ABC has had to make its way in a markedly different demographic, social, political and commercial environment.

The ABC's strong ties to the BBC have both impelled it forward and constrained it. On the one hand, it has gained greatly from access to British programmes through the BBC's transcription services, from the opportunities for experience in Britain which many of its staff have enjoyed and from the stimulus of British ideas about broadcasting and about the role of a national broadcaster in a democratic society. These benefits have been passed on to the Australian people. On the other hand, its reliance on the BBC model was a factor in holding the ABC back from the cultural diversification which its Australian context demanded.

This chapter has provided basic information about the institutional development of the ABC as necessary background against which we can better view and comprehend its religious broadcasting. We now move to the period 1932-41, the first decade of national broadcasting in Australia. Religious programmes had their place in the schedules but there was no one on staff with special knowledge or competence to direct them.

the end of 1996. Each Charter is preceded by a period of public inquiry or by discussion of a government White Paper. The UK Govt produced a White Paper in the latter half of the 1980s, 'Broadcasting in the nineties', in which it has proposed major legislative changes. For a short constitutional history of the BBC, see *Guide to the BBC 1992*, BBC, London 1992, and for an official BBC view of its future, see *Extending Choice: the BBC's Role in the New Broadcasting Age*, BBC, 1992.

¹⁰⁶ Competition from commercial radio was introduced into the UK only in 1971, although commercial television began in 1954. Cf. Committee on Future of Broadcasting, Report ('Annan Report'), Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, March 1977, ss. 2.9, 2.19.

CHAPTER 3 RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING 1932-41

Australia in the 1930s

The first Annual Report of the ABC published in mid-1933, set out to paint a word picture of the country it was to serve as its national broadcaster. The Commission spoke of Australia in terms of 'vast areas', 'populous, progressive cities' and 'sparsely peopled rural areas'. Australians were people with 'British heritage and relations', affected by overseas events 'about which they knew little'.¹

The 1933 census declared the Australian population to be 6,629,839,² of whom nearly 64% were living in urban areas.³ The census did not include the Aboriginal population. Nor were these in the Commission's mind as it visualised the context of its obligations. Australian society at this time generally proceeded as if Aboriginal Australians did not exist. It has been estimated that people of Aboriginal descent in Australia in 1933 numbered some 73,800.⁴ The rest of the population contained some ethnic diversity, although precisely how much is impossible to determine. The birthplaces of the population are known but these are only a crude pointer to cultural origins and identity, especially at a time of widespread colonial rule and control of trade throughout the world. The census showed that there were people resident in Australia who had been born in at least ninety countries from all the continents. 86% had been born in Australia and 11% in the United Kingdom and Ireland.⁵ Bearing in mind the immigration laws at this time,⁶ one might reasonably assume that those of the remaining 3% who were listed as born in Asia and Africa were white immigrants from British or other European colonies.

In the same census, 86.4% of the population declared themselves Christian and some proportion of the 12.8% who did not answer the question on religious

¹ ABC, *Annual Report 1932-3*, p. 5.

² Wray Vamplew (ed.), *Australians: Historical Statistics*, Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, Sydney, 1987, p. 9.

³ *Historical Statistics*, p. 40.

⁴ *Historical Statistics*, p. 4. Section 127 of the Commonwealth Constitution required that the Aboriginal people be excluded from population counts. This was repealed only in 1967 when Aboriginal Australians gained full citizenship rights. Counts and estimates of the Aboriginal population have been attempted at every census since Federation, but those who lived 'beyond settled areas' could be estimated only on the basis of information provided by authorities responsible for Aboriginal welfare. Cf. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 1991, p. 1.

⁵ *Historical Statistics*, pp. 8-9.

⁶ Cf. *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Cwlth) and *Immigration (Amendment) Act 1925* (Cwlth).

affiliation would have been Christian, too.⁷ Those who claimed adherence to other religions, such as Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist, totalled 0.5%; 0.2% held no religion at all; 0.1% were uncertain. Most of the Christians had their church roots in the English-speaking world of the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Catholics, with their strong links to Ireland and Rome, made up a large minority - over 22% of the Christian total. Orthodox Christians were fewer than 1% of this total. Lutherans, with their roots in Germany and Scandinavia, accounted for a little over 1% of the total number of Christians but, as they had settled particularly in Queensland and South Australia, their numbers relative to other Christians in these two States were considerably higher. They accounted for over 5% of Christians in South Australia, more than the Presbyterians there.⁸

The census figures, then, suggest a substantially homogeneous society but they hide more than they reveal, for Australia was markedly sectarian. Relations were forged or obstructed by group loyalties and antagonisms that were rather clear. There was capital and there was labour, for example; there were Protestants and Catholics, whites and blacks.⁹

The religious life of Australia at this time was derivative. It depended on overseas sources - Europe, the United Kingdom and Ireland - but was isolated from them, so that Australians were not much concerned with religious issues that stirred in those parts because they were little aware of them.¹⁰ Australian religious communities placed a higher priority on the practical than on the intellectual and reflective. This was the emphasis in local clergy training generally in the Christian churches. There

⁷ Since 1861, this question on religion had been optional because of protests, particularly from small Protestant denominations, at the State's intruding into religion in any way. It was clearly stated on the census paper for the first time in 1933 that there was no legal obligation to answer the question and the number choosing not to reply increased dramatically as a result. After that, the proportion of people answering the question stayed fairly constant. Cf. *Historical Statistics*, p. 418.

⁸ *Historical Statistics*, pp. 421-7.

⁹ Cf. E. J. Sharpe, 'Religious issues of the inter-war years in Australian society', Address to Jewish-Christian Study Centre, Sydney, 16.8.84, p. 14. Sharpe noted that it was at this time that A.P. Elkin was writing his famous book, *The Australian Aborigines, How to Understand Them* (first published by Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1938), aimed at removing some of the destructive ignorance of white Australians.

¹⁰ Sharpe noted some of the issues of intense concern overseas for Western Christianity: the character and role of the church in the world, populist nationalism, the authority of the Bible in relation to culture, lay involvement and leadership, cf. p. 9. Visser't Hooft, in his *Memoirs*, sets out these issues clearly from the perspective of world Christian ecumenism. There were a few exceptional persons in the mainstream churches in Australia at this time who did take initiatives on one or other of these issues and prepared the way for some vigorous ecumenical thought and action in later years. See F. Engel, *Times of Change 1918-78*, Christians in Australia, vol.2, The Joint Board of Christian Education, Melbourne, 1993; P. O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: an Australian History*, 3rd edn, NSW University Press, Sydney, 1992.

was no theology in Australian universities.¹¹ As well, the amount of religious education the majority of Australians had through the public school system was negligible.

This being so, those who consider intellectual energy an important ingredient in faith would want to call into question the depth and quality of the religious affiliation that most asserted on their census papers in 1933. Still, the census figures stand and mean something. At the very least, they suggest the kind of general cultural and religious context within which groups, institutions and individuals, whatever their differences and suspicions of one other, pursued their ends.

So it was that the ABC at this time perceived religious broadcasting as Christian broadcasting¹² and a duty under its Charter to provide 'adequate and comprehensive programmes' for the Australian people.

K.S. Inglis tells an interesting story about new Commission appointments that were due towards the end of 1939, during the Chairmanship of W.J. Cleary.¹³ Cleary urged the Government to appoint two Catholics, one from Western Australia and one from South Australia, 'as some guarantee that their interests would not be submerged or inadequately represented' on a body 'dealing...with cultural and religious questions'. As it happened, they were not appointed, but this is not what interests us here. The story reveals a good deal about the Commission's understanding of its role in relation to religion at that time. The Commission perceived itself to be a body which dealt with 'religious questions'; it understood 'religion' in terms of denominational Christianity; and it acknowledged the need to locate itself judiciously in the context of the politics of rivalry and defensiveness that existed among the mainstream Christian churches of the day.

Religious programmes before 1932

In providing religious programmes, the ABC was, in fact, continuing what radio stations had already been doing before the ABC came into existence. Worship services of Sunday congregations were broadcast in the 1920s and, incidentally, have been 'the longest running regular commitment in the whole history of Australian

¹¹ Sharpe, 'Religious issues', pp. 4-5. Cf. also I. Breward, *Australia - 'The Most Godless Place Under Heaven'?*, Beacon Hill Books, Melbourne, 1988, p. 88: 'Australian Christianity [has] a rather practical character, often uninterested in the spiritual and intellectual depth of some of our forgotten forebears...Migrant churches commonly are nostalgic, conservative, deferential to the leaders of their parent bodies and not often inclined to value the qualities of originality and creativity in their leadership'.

¹² The exceptions to this were programmes acknowledging three festivals of the Jews each year.

¹³ Inglis, p. 99. Cleary was the second Chairman.

radio'.¹⁴ 'Sacred Music' also had its beginnings in pre-ABC days in the 1920s and was continued by the ABC.¹⁵ In April 1928, radio station 5CL, Adelaide, was broadcasting religious matter in one form or another for five hours out of the available eight hours' transmission time each Sunday, as well as seven minutes of Scripture readings every evening, Monday to Saturday.¹⁶

ABC religious programmes

From July 1932, when the first broadcasts went to air under its auspices, church services, morning and evening, were a regular feature of the ABC's Sunday programming.¹⁷ In 1936, 'Daily Devotional' was introduced on weekday mornings at 10 a.m.(EST).¹⁸ This was a fifteen-minute programme consisting of a Christian devotional talk that was 'strictly undenominational'.¹⁹ A year later, four to five minutes on a Sunday night before the end of the day's transmission were given over to a meditative programme of prayerful music called 'Epilogue'.²⁰ 'Evensong' from St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, on Thursday afternoons was a suggestion of T.W. Bearup to the General Manager, Charles Moses, in 1939.²¹ These three programmes had very long lives: 'Daily Devotional' thirty-four years, 'Epilogue' approximately forty-eight and 'Evensong' thirty.²² Other very early programmes in the history of the ABC were 'Pleasant Sunday Afternoon' (popularly known as 'PSA') and 'Questions and Answers', both projects of Rev. Irving Benson of Wesley Church, Melbourne, broadcast for several years in Victoria and among the earliest radio programmes in Australia.²³ In 'Questions and Answers', Benson responded to letters from listeners as a 'friendly philosopher, guide in sorrow and doubt, informant regarding puzzling points in Sunday School lessons'.²⁴ 'PSA' consisted of an

¹⁴ Loftus Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties', p. 200, held at ABC, Adelaide, SA. Hyde, who was State Supervisor of Talks in South Australia (Dec. 1954-Feb. 1974), made a compilation of his Department's files in three volumes, adding his own brief explanatory notes and comments. The other two volumes are 'Files of the Forties' and 'Files of the Fifties'. All are held at ABC, Adelaide.

¹⁵ Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties', p. 201.

¹⁶ Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties', p. 202.

¹⁷ ABC, *Annual Report 1934-5*, p. 9.

¹⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1935-6*, p. 27.

¹⁹ K. Barry, Federal Controller of Programmes (C. Progs), memo to Manager Queensland (Mgr Qld), 24.9.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.6.

²⁰ ABC, *Annual Report 1936-7*, p. 36.

²¹ T.W. Bearup, Assistant General Manager (AGM), memo to General Manager (GM), 7.1.39, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.

²² There is more detailed discussion of these programmes in chs 5 and 10.

²³ 'PSA's arranged by Rev. Samuel Forsyth at the Maughan Methodist Church were also broadcast in South Australia by the ABC in the 1940s. Cf. Hyde, 'Files of the Forties'.

²⁴ I. Benson, Report to ABC, 13.10.36, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

address on a topic of current public interest by someone well known in political, church, military or academic circles, music from an orchestra and singers, and comment and announcements from the host churchman.²⁵

The Commission's Annual Reports refer to a number of other initiatives in this decade:

- a monthly session with the singular title of 'A Sermon For Those Who May Not Like Sermons' (1935-36);
- 'Morning Reverie' on weekdays, 'Family Hymn Book' on Sunday evenings, 'Radio Sunday School' and 'In Quires and Places Where They Sing', also weekly on Sundays (1938-39);
- a weekly programme entitled 'Choral Praise' (1939-40).

There were also occasional broadcasts of special events, perhaps the most notable being the Requiem Mass for Prime Minister Joseph Lyons at St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney, in 1939.

According to the 1933 census, the adherents to religions other than Christian totalled 0.5% of the Australian population. Most of these were Jews and only these were acknowledged in religious programmes at this time.²⁶ From the start, the ABC broadcast programmes to celebrate the Jewish festivals of the Day of Atonement, Passover and New Year.²⁷

What proportion of broadcast time did religious programmes occupy on the ABC at this time? This kind of information was provided for the first time in the Commission's third *Annual Report 1934-5*. However, as there was no consistent method of analysis over the years, accurate year to year comparisons cannot be made. It seems, though, that religious programmes occupied around 4.5% of total broadcast hours during the years 1934-9 and somewhat over 3% in the following year.²⁸ 'A very meagre service', Dr Irving Benson called it, for what was 'a very big factor in the life of the nation'.²⁹ He may not have been referring only to the percentage of airtime given to religious programmes. The range of programmes was quite confined, too:

²⁵ The PSA movement had its origins in the United Kingdom in the late 19th Century, where it aimed to provide for both the religious and social needs of working class Christians in industrial areas. Cf. C. Silvester Horne, 'Institutional church', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. VII, ed. J. Hastings, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1914, pp. 362-4.

²⁶ While Jews made up only 45% of the 'other religions' in Queensland, they accounted for 81% in N.S.W. and 89% in Victoria. See *Historical Statistics*, pp. 421-3.

²⁷ AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/3/3.

²⁸ Calculated from information in Annual Reports over this period.

²⁹ Benson, Report, 13.10.36.

sacred music and hymns, worship and prayer services and devotional talks, in other words, programmes of Christian devotion, and almost all scheduled only on Sundays.

It is important to remember, however, that all of these programmes were being put to air before there was any staff in the ABC with specialist skills for religious broadcasting. The first person to specialise in this field was Kenneth Thorne Henderson, who was employed in 1941. Responsibility for religious broadcasts was located in the programme area of Talks. When B.H. Molesworth became the first Head of the newly formed specialist department of Talks in 1935, the job description included this responsibility³⁰ and so it remained until 1949.³¹

In these early years, the ABC was little more than a communication channel for clergy of the major Christian churches. The ABC claimed editorial independence but the practice did not always match the rhetoric, particularly in programme areas where staff members lacked either the competence or the confidence to assert their authority. Religion was decidedly one of these areas - dominated by the hierarchy and clergy of the main churches, vexed by denominational differences and, in any case, a complex phenomenon in human life with power to stir deep and intense responses.

Still, there is evidence that the ABC strove to exercise control over its own religious programmes, even if inconsistently in these early years. The large file in the archives of letters and memos about Rev. Irving Benson's two programmes in Melbourne gives lively witness to this. As mentioned earlier, 'PSA' and 'Questions and Answers' pre-dated the ABC and were then taken up by the Commission. By 1936, there were signs of ABC management's becoming uncomfortable with the programmes.

When the General Manager asked for sample scripts of 'PSA' talks, he was told by the Victorian Manager that scripts were not submitted.³² Benson thought it an embarrassment to ask his unpaid guest speakers to submit scripts in advance.³³ The Federal Controller of Programmes, Keith Barry, complained that Benson handled his own correspondence with guest participants in the programme, whereas the ABC normally dealt with this.³⁴ There were complaints about Benson's appealing for funds during programmes;³⁵ sometimes, about his choice of politicians as guest

³⁰ Inglis, pp. 56-7.

³¹ Cf. ch.5.

³² B.W.Kirke (Mgr Vic.), memo to C.Moses (GM), 3.10.36, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

³³ Benson, Report 13.10.36.

³⁴ Barry, memo to GM, 2.1.40, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

³⁵ B.Kirke, memo to GM, 31.8.37, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

speakers;³⁶ about the quality of speakers and music;³⁷ and about the ABC's allowing one churchman from one denomination to have so much broadcast time.³⁸ The battles for authority over the programmes make diverting reading. Dr Benson defended his 'PSA' and 'Questions and Answers' passionately and persistently: they were of very high standard, sensitively balanced, popularly demanded. 'We are rendering you [a service] through the "PSA",' he wrote to Charles Moses.³⁹ The ABC, by comparison, was tentative, now advancing now retreating, but slowly - it took the best part of ten years - untying itself from a commitment to broadcast what another organisation produced independently. Ultimately, this was the issue, which Benson did not seem to comprehend or was unwilling to grant: not the balance or standard or audience appeal of the programmes so much as where control of them lay.

The ABC realised that it needed specialist staff of its own with sufficient theological education to be able to negotiate with church representatives as their equal. The Commission found such a person in Kenneth Thorne Henderson, who joined the Talks Department in 1941. He had the capacities and vision for religious broadcasting that fitted well with the Commission's policies and goals. What Henderson set in place endured over decades. The next part of this study will examine his work in some detail in order to comprehend his achievement and to provide a basis for comparison when discussing later events and developments.

³⁶ In the view of ABC managers, his choices at times lacked balance, e.g. guest speakers from the same side of politics on consecutive Sundays. Cf. C.Moses, memo to Mgr Vic., 16.11.38; T.W. Bearup (A/GM), memo to A/Mgr Vic., 27.8.1; AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

³⁷ Barry, memo to GM, 16.8.40, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

³⁸ Exchange of memos among Barry, Kirke and Moses, 24.11.37, 26.11.37 and 1.12.37, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65. Irving Benson might be on air three times in one day: in the 'PSA', in 'Questions and Answers' and as leading minister and preacher at 'Divine Service' when it was broadcast from Wesley Church, Melbourne, as it regularly was. In spite of Benson's objections, the ABC management decided that twice a day would be the maximum allowed in future, but they continued to feel uneasy.

³⁹ I. Benson, letter to GM, 29.12.37, AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

PART II

'THE HENDERSON YEARS': 1941-56

CHAPTER 4

AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY (1): 1940s-1950s

Dividing time into decades is a convention of obvious artificiality. Most of what occurs within one decade has its sources in an earlier time and its influences on the period that follows. However, it is a common practice of our day to speak of 'the thirties' and 'the fifties', and so on, and to characterise each according to movements and forces that particularly prevailed at that time and, in a world of rapid change, distinguished those years from others that preceded and followed them. This chapter, and Chapter Seven, will follow this convention and will broadly survey those features of Australian society that are relevant to the subject and period of our study.

Population and religion: some statistics

The census of 1947 recorded a population of a little over seven and a half million, of whom nearly 10% were born overseas.¹ It has been estimated that Aboriginal Australians at this time numbered at least 87,000.² By 1954, the total population had grown to nearly nine million - an 18.6% increase. The foreign-born component, however, had increased by 72.8%.³ This pattern of growth continued, so that, by 1961, Australia's population was counted at ten and a half million - a 39% increase since 1947 - and those born overseas constituted 17% of the total at one and three-quarter million.⁴ The Aboriginal population was estimated to have increased by 22% over this period to at least 100,000.⁵

The United Kingdom and Ireland accounted for 73% of the overseas-born population in 1947, but by 1961 this proportion was reduced to 43% and there were more immigrants from continental Europe than from these traditional sources of Australian settlers. Immigrants from Europe came from approximately thirty countries but the largest numbers, in descending order, were from Italy, Germany, The Netherlands, Greece, Poland, Yugoslavia, Malta and Hungary. The 1961 statistics showed also a dramatic increase over the fourteen years since 1947 in immigrants from Lebanon, Palestine-Israel and Turkey, who more than trebled their numbers. In total, the number of immigrants from China, India, Indonesia and Malaysia increased to the same extent,⁶ but it must be assumed that these were principally of British and

¹ *Historical Statistics*, p. 9.

² *Historical Statistics*, p. 4.

³ *Historical Statistics*, p. 9.

⁴ *Historical Statistics*, p. 9.

⁵ *Historical Statistics*, p. 4.

⁶ *Historical Statistics*, pp. 8-9.

European origins. The immigration laws, although they were being progressively modified,⁷ still discriminated against Asian and black immigrants.

The census figures in general over the period 1947-61 present a picture of stability in the declared religious affiliations of the Australian people. In 1947, 88% described themselves as Christian; in 1954, 89.4%; in 1961, 88.3%.⁸ Around 10% of the population in each census gave no reply to the question about religion.⁹ Those who claimed no religious belief constituted around 0.3%. The percentage espousing other than Christian religions increased 30% in the period but still remained very small at just over 0.6% in 1961.¹⁰

The apparent stability of Christianity in Australian society indicated by these census figures needs the correction of some detailed comment. Within the Christian population, diversifying trends became evident as post-war immigration proceeded and shifts occurred in the relative numbers of adherents of the major Christian churches long established in the country. For example, Australia became home to a wider range of Orthodox churches and the number of people describing themselves as Orthodox in 1961 was more than five times the number in 1947, although still less than 2% of all Christians. As well, predictably, the number of Catholics and Lutherans increased over the period, while there was a decline among Anglicans, Methodists and Presbyterians.¹¹

War-time

Australia was greatly changed by its involvement in the Second World War and it is pertinent to our subject to consider the impact of the war in a few aspects. Most of all, Australians were forced to reflect on what they had formerly taken for granted and were brought to new perceptions of themselves in relation to other peoples - but the new perceptions were neither uniform nor consistent.

⁷ The arbitrary dictation test was dropped in 1958 and, by 1966, it had been decided that applications for entry into Australia would be considered primarily on the basis of qualifications and suitability rather than race. Cf. J. Rickard, *Australia - a Cultural History*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1988, pp. 235-6. Rickard provides in this work a chronology of events in Australian history, which has been helpful in constructing this chapter and ch. 7.

⁸ *Historical Statistics*, pp. 418-27.

⁹ Some proportion of this 10% would have been people with religious faith, cf. ch. 3, fn. 7.

¹⁰ *Historical Statistics*, pp.418-27.

¹¹ Lutherans almost doubled (increasing by 91.5%); Catholics showed a 24% increase; Anglicans experienced a decline of 11.2%, Methodists of 11.3% and Presbyterians of 5.5%. Cf. *Historical Statistics*, pp. 421-7. In 1952, the Federal Catholic Immigration Office announced that it was already supporting 70 migrant chaplains to care for the needs of 'new Catholics' of 12 different nationalities. Cf. A Pitorello, 'Multiculturalism and the Catholic Church' Paper unpublished, 1989, p.15.

The war brought Australians into contact with people of other cultures. The men and women who went on duty overseas had varied experiences of this kind but the Americans' presence in Australia was also a powerful cultural challenge to those who remained at home. The war against Japan in the Pacific region brought Australians to the sharp realisation that Asia, exotic and populous, was very near and that the United Kingdom, which many Australians had called 'home', was remote. The bombing of Darwin demonstrated how fearfully frail and vulnerable Australia was. A powerful, available ally was needed immediately and, as soon as the war was over, it was seen to be essential and urgent that Australia look to its own rapid growth and development.

The horrors of which human beings were capable were fully exposed by the war, but so also their courage and generosity and idealism. Insight was inevitably impaired, however, by ignorance and prejudice, worsened by the tactics of war-time propaganda. War-time is 'stereotype time' - for all sides. At home, Australians and their allies were portrayed as noble, courageous and resourceful and the enemy as evil, or stupid. Another kind of stereotyping came from 'Tokyo Rose', the Japanese war-time propagandist, who set out to undermine morale among Australian men fighting in the Pacific with her depictions of the men's wives and girl friends at home being seduced by the smart, affluent, smooth-talking American soldiers who were strutting the men's home territory in their absence. Both the Australian Government, and private citizens of their own initiative, moved against people in Australia of Italian and German descent, no matter how long their families had been settled in the country nor what service they had given, and were giving.¹² By way of contrast, while this stereotyping of different nationalities was being reinforced, conventional images of 'male' and 'female' in Australian society were being called into question, as women took over what had formerly been men's roles and work.

Most Australian families were ruptured by the war, as relatives enlisted for service and left home and Australians were continually suffering sorrow and loss as family members and friends were killed or injured. It was a society in severe stress; it was a time when people needed courage and hope; and so, a time when they and their political leaders welcomed what religious institutions could offer them in their search for comfort, meaning and communal spirit.¹³

¹² Cf. W. D. Borrie, *Italians and Germans in Australia: a Study of Assimilation*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1954, pp. 116-17, 123. The Lutheran Archives in Adelaide contain many first-hand accounts of the war-time experiences of German Lutherans in Australia. Their treatment as enemy aliens was particularly distressing to families with relatives fighting in Australia's armed forces at the time. There was a period during the war when the broadcasts of 'Divine Service' from Lutheran churches were banned. Cf. ch. 5, fn. 52.

¹³ The ABC was asked by the Australian Government, in 1941, to institute a daily programme called 'A Minute of Prayer' with the aim of helping to sustain the spirit of the

Post-war Australia

The Second World War brought home to Australians their vulnerability to others greater and more powerful. Very soon after the war's end, the Australian Government began to implement twin policies of quick population growth and industrial development. Families and family life were promoted, along with a determined programme of immigration from increasingly diverse sources. Human resources for industrial development were thus increased rapidly as well as the domestic market for goods and services. Consumption of material goods was encouraged.

The urbanisation of Australia also proceeded apace during these years. Australia's cities and towns absorbed the whole of Australia's population increase and further drained the rural areas in this period. Suburbs spread wider around the city centres. In 1961, the urban population amounted to 81.9% of the total; it had been 68.7% in 1947.¹⁴

E.H.Burgmann's pondering of the lessons of the war led him to write in 1944:

Europe has accumulated vast wealth over and over again. With that wealth mankind could have been greatly served. In every case the wealth has been wasted in slaughter and destruction. Europe shows us a dead-end in civilization, a way we must not travel unless we wish to die. There may be many lovely gardens on the way up a blind alley, just as there are, no doubt, many precious things in European civilization, but that does not alter the fact that Europe has shown us the way we must not go...There is nothing for it but to work out our own salvation.¹⁵

While the world's industries and economies needed to be re-directed towards peaceful pursuits, spiritual and moral regeneration was seen by many to be essential 'if peacetime was to be more than a re-run of the past'.¹⁶ Human lives everywhere wrecked, scarred, embittered by the war were crying out for restoration and healing. At the very least, human relationships, radically changed by the war, sought a new communion. Kenneth Henderson, a friend and colleague of Bishop Burgmann and by this time five years with the ABC, saw the world of 1946 as presenting a 'fundamental challenge of moral disruption and spiritual decline'. The compelling work was to 'revive [people's] faith in God and each other, to restore their confidence in goodwill as a principle that will work in a big way, and to discover the life of the spirit that makes life worth living'.¹⁷

people, cf. ch. 10, fn 11. In the same year, Kenneth Henderson was employed by the ABC especially to produce programmes conducive to spiritual morale and post-war reconstruction, cf. ch. 5.

¹⁴ *Historical Statistics*, p. 40.

¹⁵ E.H.Burgmann, *The Education of an Australian*, St Mark's Theological Centre, Canberra, 1991, pp. 101-2.

¹⁶ Breward, p. 60.

¹⁷ K. T. Henderson, *Broadcasting as a religious opportunity*, ABC, Sydney, 1947, p.3.

Australia, having escaped the ruin that war-torn lands had suffered, became a haven and opportunity for large numbers of displaced people from other countries seeking a permanent home and a future of productive work. As the census data at the beginning of this chapter shows, Australia developed a very successful immigration programme, attracting not only people made homeless by strife but many others, too, hopeful for a new life of prosperity and peace. Australia after the war, then, was radically changed by this influx of people of many cultures and by the industrial and economic expansion that simultaneously occurred. Yet, in the midst of increasingly confident and divergent growth, the social mood of the time was conservative.¹⁸

Immigrants were expected to conform themselves as quickly as possible to 'the Australian way of life'. This might mean any number of things: speaking English, or acquiring the work practices and leisure pursuits of their fellow employees, or abandoning loyalties connected with political conflicts overseas, or praying and worshipping in the mainstream style of Australian churches. A monocultural Australia into which immigrants and Aboriginal people would be assimilated was the assumption and the goal of the society throughout this period - and the churches largely conformed with this.¹⁹ John O'Grady's enormously popular novel of 1957, *They're a Weird Mob*, written under the pseudonym of Nino Culotta, was created from this perspective.

As the victors of the war set about consolidating their power over peoples and territories, Australia energetically pursued its alliance with the United States of America which had recently provided such welcome protection. However, ties with the United Kingdom were re-affirmed. In the 1950s Australia allowed Britain to use Australian territory to test nuclear weapons, albeit territory that was distant from the areas of white population. Having, in 1951, negotiated the ANZUS security pact with New Zealand and the United States, from which the United Kingdom had been excluded, Australia participated in the setting up of a complementary organisation, SEATO (South-East Asian Treaty Organisation), in 1954, in which both the United Kingdom and France, still with colonial interests in the Pacific, joined with countries in South East Asia and the ANZUS group in an anti-communist alliance in the region. 1954, too, was the year of the first tour of Australia by a reigning English monarch.

¹⁸ Rickard, p. 225.

¹⁹ A. W. Black, 'Ethnic diversity, multiculturalism and the churches', *Yearbook for Australian Churches 1992*, Christian Research Association, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 165-6. Even the Roman Catholic church which received more immigrant adherents from a diversity of cultures than the other churches, largely acted on this assumption. A few ethnic congregations were formed in the 1950s, e.g. Polish Catholics who gathered at St Vincent's, Ashfield, in Sydney. Black makes the point that Australia developed corresponding social policies with regard to immigrants and Aboriginal Australians. The policy of assimilation in this period shifted to one of 'integration' in the 1970s.

The young Queen Elizabeth and her husband were given a great reception by Australians, confirming the vigour of their sentiment for their connections with the United Kingdom. It was in the 1950s, too, that young Australians in large numbers began to take off on working trips to the United Kingdom, Ireland and Europe to explore the lands of their physical and cultural origins.

After the war, Western democracies, with a powerful United States at the forefront, became locked in mutual enmity with the communist block of nations, dominated by the USSR and China. The same antagonism between communist and anti-communist was evident in political conflicts within democratic societies. Anti-communism was a strong formative influence on Australia's foreign and domestic policies up to, and during, the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Refugees from communism among immigrants to Australia in this period reinforced this stance.²⁰ A vigorous movement against communism within Australia was led by B.A. Santamaria, a Roman Catholic layman who combined fervent fidelity to conventional Catholicism with innovative practical politics. The fact that Santamaria's Movement came amazingly close to political power in Australia led historian Patrick O'Farrell to wonder about the 'allegedly secular nature of Australian society, at least at that time'.²¹ Even though the Movement was thwarted, the Democratic Labor Party, which was formed out of its defeat within the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 1954, helped to keep the ALP out of national government until 1972. O'Farrell asserted that the success of the Movement was prevented principally by division in Catholic ranks. Ian Breward noted as a limitation on its success the Protestant 'difficulty of moving beyond confessionality and traditional social and political alignments...to accept Santamaria's invitation to cooperate in transforming Australian perceptions'.²² Both of these interpretations are compatible with this view: that, even though it had, indeed, found space in Australian society to achieve some of its objectives, the Movement ultimately suffered a cultural defeat. The separation of the realms of Church and State, of private religious faith and public life, typical of modern societies, had been assumed as necessary for social order and progress since the Eighteenth Century, by most Christians as well as everyone else. Santamaria's Movement disturbed these assumptions of modern culture and represented for some a threat to modern plurality. The issues divided Australian society across, and within, political parties, industrial unions, professional organisations, churches and families. The responses of many were ambiguous. As

²⁰ There were substantial numbers of immigrants from Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, the USSR and China. It is important to note, however, that Australians rejected the proposal to ban the Communist Party put to them in a referendum in 1951.

²¹ P. O'Farrell, 'The cultural ambivalence of Australian religion', *Australian Cultural History*, eds S.L. Goldberg and F.B. Smith, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.7.

²² Breward, p.56.

the Movement challenged certain cultural and social norms, it was also spear-heading effective political action against communist domination of the trade unions and industry. For or against the Movement, what precisely was one supporting or opposing? The ambiguity was embedded in the culture and remains so. O'Farrell concluded his paper with the observation that 'the relationship between the secular and the religious elements and tendencies in Australian culture and society continues to be uncertain, complex, ambivalent'.²³ To speak only of the relationship of 'religious' to 'secular', as O'Farrell has done here, is misleading. The impact of individualisation in modern Australia is at least as relevant to O'Farrell's subject as is secularisation.²⁴

Beward's judgment that Christians still had difficulty 'moving beyond confessionism' leads us to the question: What of Christian ecumenism in Australia in this period? Although traditional denominationalism remained very strong, many Australians judged it to be of slight significance in their life experience. In Beward's words, 'the common experience of suffering in all ranks of the forces [during the war] had...underlined that denominational barriers had little social utility when life and death were involved'.²⁵ This comment needs to be applied also to those who had confronted primary human questions of life and love in other places than the battlefield.

In the face of the war, Christian churches in the Western world felt themselves called 'to an agony of profound Christian reconstruction'.²⁶ Ecumenical advances in the 1920s and 1930s and common efforts for peace during the years of conflict provided the ground for a burgeoning of ecumenical thought and action after 1945.²⁷ In 1947, the second World Conference of Christian Youth in Oslo moved its participants deeply to work together for world renewal and reconciliation.²⁸ In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formally inaugurated in Amsterdam and held its Second Assembly in Evanston, Illinois, in 1954, in the midst of what Lawrence McIntosh called 'halcyon days of theology'.²⁹ Protestant theologians like Barth, Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and the Niebuhrs were widely influential and Congar, Chenu, de Lubac, Karl Rahner, Teilhard de Chardin and others were giving

²³ O'Farrell, 'The cultural ambivalence', p.13.

²⁴ Cf. discussion on modernity in ch. 1.

²⁵ Beward, p.60.

²⁶ Henderson, p.5.

²⁷ See details in such works as: R. Rouse and S Neill (eds), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1968*; G. H. Tavard, *Two Centuries of Ecumenism: The Search for Unity*, Mentor-Omega, New York, 1962; as well as Visser 't Hooft's *Memoirs* and Engel's *Time for Change*.

²⁸ The third conference was in Travancore, India, in 1952. Engel, pp. 200, 205.

²⁹ L. McIntosh (ABC Religion Dept, 1956-60), personal interview, 19.6.89.

strength to movements for change in the Roman Catholic church, which the next decade would confirm. Halcyon, and contentious, days. The Evanston Assembly saw theologians and delegates engaged in a common quest and yet in deep disagreement on questions of great consequence for Christians' spiritual life and for their involvement in political, economic and social action.³⁰ Four years before Evanston, the Assumption of Mary had been proclaimed as a dogma of the Roman Catholic church. For other Christians, eager for unity, it was an assertion that emphasised their separation rather than their communion. The Christian world was stirring with these two strong currents: communities were approaching each other across boundaries which had been set with great passion and held for centuries; at the same time, what separated them were seen to be real and important differences that needed to be clearly enunciated.³¹

International activity urged ecumenism forward in Australia. WCC (Australian Division)³² and Regional Committees of WCC in most States were already established and active by 1946.³³ The Australian Student Christian Movement (SCM), fed from British and American sources committed to Christian social action, became particularly energetic in the 1950s and 1960s.³⁴ On the other hand, the Inter-Varsity Fellowship of Evangelical Unions (EUs) grew as well, emphasising 'spiritual unity based on broad agreement on Protestant evangelical doctrine'. The SCM was strongest in Melbourne, the EU in Sydney; both offered their talented, well-educated participants strong formative experiences.³⁵ Two other joint initiatives of the 1950s in Australia which have endured ever since were the Blake Prize for Religious Art and the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, in both of which members of the Roman Catholic church took leading roles.³⁶

³⁰ Cf. ch.1, 'Modernity and religion'. Visser't Hooft recalled in his *Memoirs* that he acted largely as a trouble-shooter at Evanston in 17 serious crises, p. 246.

³¹ Conflicting views of these kinds made for crises within churches as well as between them. See, for example, the strife among conservative and liberal evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics in the Anglican church in Australia described in S. Judd and K. Cable, *Sydney Anglicans: A History of the Diocese*, Anglican Information Office, Sydney, 1987.

³² This title was changed in 1948, when the WCC was formally inaugurated, to the 'Australian Council for the World Council of Churches' and changed again in 1960 to the 'Australian Council of Churches (ACC)', cf. Engel p. 222.

³³ Engel, pp.81, 91.

³⁴ Engel, pp. 40, 47, 154.

³⁵ Engel, p. 141.

³⁶ Jewish lawyer and artist, Richard Morley, and Jesuit priest, Michael Scott, devised and developed the competition for the Blake Prize. French priest, Père Couturier, started the Week of Prayer in 1933 and it was inaugurated in Melbourne and Adelaide in 1954, in Sydney in 1960. Cf. Engel, pp. 217, 265.

This, in brief, was the society that Kenneth Henderson set out to serve as a religious broadcaster in the ABC from 1941 to 1956, during most of the war years and the first decade of post-war development. It was a conservative society which, as soon as the war was over, launched itself into a vigorous programme of modern industrialisation and population growth. It was a society bent on strengthening itself within and without: reconstructing personal and social life, seeking wealth and material well-being through technological development and the production and consumption of goods, entering into alliances with the major anti-communist countries and promoting social unity by a policy of assimilation of minorities. Religious faith was broadly respected as a foundation for personal morality and a source of spiritual comfort and hope. A minority appreciated its intellectual force and concerned themselves with its potentiality for renewing cultures and social structures.

CHAPTER 5 CONSENSUS AND THE CENSUS

Introduction

In 1941, after two years of World War, the ABC invited Kenneth Thorne Henderson to join their Talks Department in Melbourne. He was to be Editor of Special Talks with an early assignment to develop programmes for Listeners' Groups around themes of spiritual morale and postwar reconstruction.¹ Victoria had led the way in the formation of these groups - small gatherings of radio listeners provided with discussion material following up broadcast programmes.² At the age of fifty, as he was then, he brought to the ABC a considerable breadth and depth of experience and knowledge.

After two years, his field of work was specified more particularly as religious broadcasting and, when the General Manager, Charles Moses, set up a specialist department for religious broadcasts in 1949,³ he became its first Federal Supervisor and remained Head of this Department until his retirement in 1956. This was the year of his sixty-fifth birthday, but was also the year television was introduced into Australia and he found it an opportune time to hand over to a younger man.

The recruitment of Henderson marked the beginning of the ABC's building up of a specialist resource in the field of religion. Competent staff like him could assume full responsibility for religious programmes. As well, they could, as the need arose, advise the Commission, its management, and its other programme departments, on matters that required religious knowledge and sensitivity or communicative relationships with religious authorities and organisations.

Henderson was the lone specialist in religious broadcasts until 1949, during which time he depended entirely on the co-operation of the staff of the Talks Department. When he became Federal Supervisor of a Religion Department based in Sydney, he gained two assistants - Alan Robson, MSc, and Mona Birrell, both ardent Methodists with a personal commitment to religious communication. Robson was particularly skilled in radio technology and worked hard to achieve and maintain high technical standards of production.⁴ Birrell was the Department's secretary.⁵ It was

¹ For a detailed account of Henderson's life, see R. Trumble, *Kenneth Thorne Henderson: Broadcaster of the Word*, Spectrum, Melbourne, 1988.

² ABC, *Annual Report 1938-9*, p. 30.

³ Cf. ch. 2, fn. 59.

⁴ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 2.2.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁵ Birrell worked with the next two Heads of Dept. Under John Munro, Henderson's successor, at a time when it was rare for anyone other than a clergyman to participate in

only in 1953, however, that Henderson acquired a colleague in Melbourne who was his peer in theology and philosophy. John Munro, also an ordained Anglican priest, who was to become Henderson's successor as Federal Supervisor, took responsibility for religious broadcasts in Victoria. In the year of Henderson's retirement, while Munro was overseas studying television for a few months, two younger men, Richard Connolly and Lawrence McIntosh, were appointed Specialist Trainees to religious broadcasting in Sydney and Melbourne respectively.⁶ After twenty-four years, the ABC had acquired four religious programme makers.

Kenneth Henderson strove with great energy and enthusiasm to give the ABC an effective religious voice. He created a substantial body of programmes and built strong co-operative relationships all over Australia. He enunciated a vision for religious broadcasting and formulated policies for it. It was he who set the course for the future, bringing to the task a clarity of intention and a spirit of service to Australian society that has lived on in the Department in the years since.

Henderson's goals for religious broadcasting and the policies and perspectives of the Commission were in close accord. It was not only that he and Richard Boyer, the Chairman, were good friends and had a similar religious outlook,⁷ nor simply that he was a loyal employee. To appreciate the philosophical compatibility of Henderson and the ABC and to comprehend his achievements, it is necessary first to reflect on the personal qualities and resources he brought to his employment with the Commission before examining his work as a broadcaster in detail.

The man, Henderson

Henderson came to the ABC an Anglican priest, married with four children, a philosopher, a teacher and a journalist.

With a Master of Arts in Philosophy from Melbourne University and a Diploma of Education, Henderson taught English and History at Melbourne Grammar School in 1914-15 and, ordained deacon in 1915, he became also assistant school chaplain there. In 1916, very soon after he was ordained priest, he offered himself to

religious broadcasting, she became a broadcast officer and the first woman to produce programmes in the Department. Cf. J. Munro, personal interview, 21.7.89.

⁶ File, Staff Establishment - Religious Section, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁷ Boyer frequently expressed such thoughts as these: '[this is] very much part of our own ambition for the national radio service, namely, its purposive use for the appreciation of the spiritual values of Christianity'. Cf. R. Boyer, letter to Sunday Christian Observance Council, Melbourne, 15.2.49, AA (NSW):SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

the army and served for two years as a chaplain with the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in France until he had to be invalided out in 1918.⁸

From 1923 to 1925, he spent 'two glorious years at Oxford' where he gained a B.Litt. for his thesis on the German philosopher and theologian, Ernst Troeltsch, whose thoughts on the social and political dimensions of Christianity had attracted him. As well, he absorbed all he could from the places he visited and the people he met. He was particularly exhilarated by what he described as 'a great release of Christianity' that he came upon in Oxford. He spoke of 'the great modernists' who had been 'very good to [him] personally' - B. H. Streeter, A. E. J. Rawlinson, C. H. Dodd, C. C. J. Webb, H. D. A. Major and Friedrich von Hugel - and kept up his friendships with some of these and with thinkers in other countries in personal correspondence over many years.⁹

Although always a faithful member of his church, Henderson was never offered any preferment in the Anglican church.¹⁰ His understanding of what constituted a living faith did not fit well with the preoccupations of most of his fellow clergy in Australia. How could it? He had been challenged in France to grapple with the most primary human questions of life and love and meaning in the face of cruel suffering and death. At university in Melbourne and Oxford he had absorbed liberal influences which, combined with his convictions about the essentially social message of the Christian Gospel, set him apart from the majority in his church.

As Henderson told it, he arrived back in Melbourne in 1925 on a day when an Anglican Church Congress was in progress, at which there was some discussion of modernism. His notes read: 'Five minutes of outspokenness. No job available'.¹¹ Walter Murdoch, who had taught Henderson English at Melbourne University was a leader-writer for the *Argus* in 1925. Henderson spent the next three years as a free-lance journalist on the *Argus* and in 1928 moved to Perth to become a leader writer for the *West Australian*, tackling all manner of topical political, moral and spiritual issues in Australian life. There he stayed until he joined the ABC in 1941.

As it turned out, religious broadcasting with the ABC offered him the scope he needed to be 'an ally of the churches'¹² and, at the same time, to extend the range of religious communication in Australia - more diverse content presented more

⁸ This experience as chaplain in the First World War was one of the things he had in common with Richard Boyer. For a biography of Boyer, see G. C. Bolton, *Dick Boyer: an Australian Humanist*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1967.

⁹ K. Henderson, personal notes, held in family records.

¹⁰ J. Munro, personal interview, 21.7.89.

¹¹ Henderson, personal notes.

¹² FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 6-7.8.53, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

attractively to a wider audience. On its side, the Commission acquired a man particularly suited to bearing its obligation towards religion in Australia. Practically speaking, it gained a capable journalist interested in the public communication of ideas and a man with a wide range of contacts in the Christian world.¹³ Further, Henderson was, in intellect and experience, more than a match for most of the churchmen in Australia and so could speak and act in the name of the Commission with authority as well as understanding.

It was Henderson's commitment to the social dimensions of Christian faith and his modernism that were particularly suited to the vision and purposes of the ABC.¹⁴ As a modernist, he was convinced of the need to apply human reason to faith and life. He welcomed modern Biblical criticism and intellectual inquiry for their enlightening and liberating effect within Christianity and he anticipated a hopeful convergence of science and religion.¹⁵ At the core of his spirituality was an abiding consciousness of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in the world who, he believed 'sanctifies the spirit of experiment and constructive effort'.¹⁶ He was, therefore, spiritually and theologically committed to modern society and its betterment, to a faith that admitted criticism of tradition and to serving the world with adventurous energy. Henderson hoped and laboured for a society in which faith was integrated in the daily lives of the people. He found obstructions to this in some of the assumptions of modern society and of religious conservatism. His task, then, was not only to communicate this ideal adequately in his programmes but also to strive to change secularist and religious attitudes that would frustrate progress towards it.

Just as the ABC looked to Britain for guidance in broadcasting, so also did Henderson, as might be expected of a member of the Anglican church and a scholar in the English tradition. The structures he set up, such as the FRAC, and the programmes he introduced to Australian audiences had their antecedents in Britain, but being true to the Australian context in which he worked had been one of his preoccupations for many years.¹⁷ As we now turn to examine his achievements, we will be particularly attentive to the extent to which his approach to religious broadcasting can be judged to have been comprehensive in the Australia of his time.

¹³ These contacts came not only from his years in Oxford but also from his involvement with the WCC and the SCM. Henderson attended the Faith and Order Conference in Lund, Sweden, in 1952 and was a delegate to the Second Assembly in Evanston in 1954.

¹⁴ Cf. ch. 2, 'Philosophy and purposes'.

¹⁵ K. Henderson, 'Christianity and secularism', *The Morpeth Review* 16, June 1931, pp. 25-6.

¹⁶ K. Henderson, *Christian Tradition and Australian Outlook*, ASCM, Melbourne, 1923, p. 4.

¹⁷ Cf. Henderson, *Christian Tradition*.

How broad were the perspectives of the programmes, the scope of their content? What relevance had they to different walks and ways of life of Australians? Did they appeal to diverse interests and tastes? Who listened?

Christian broadcasting

Henderson's programmes were substantially Christian in content and entirely so in intent. He asserted that the culture was founded in Christianity, the vast majority of people espoused it, and the community needed it if spiritual values were to be maintained. From the start, he oriented his broadcasting to the vast majority of people in Australia who were not church-goers, but were nonetheless concerned with fundamental values and spiritual life. These people should be offered whatever Christianity could bring to enrich their search. Many times over the years, Henderson spoke and wrote of the 'two audiences' to whom religious broadcasting needed to be attentive: the committed church participant whom he numbered at '10%-15%'¹⁸ and the multitude of 'wayfarers' best served by 'a message of companionship addressed directly [to them] that bears immediately and obviously on daily life'.¹⁹

Apart from occasional programmes concerned with one or other of the great world religions, Henderson gave full play to the reasonableness of Christian faith as expressed in the 'mainstream' traditions in Australian society. Most of his programmes emphasised what was common in these traditions; they were weighted in favour of a united Christian voice. Three times every year celebrations of major Jewish festivals were broadcast and there are references in the extant files to two series of talks, in 1952 and in 1954, on the religious beliefs of Hindus, Buddhists, Moslems and Jews.²⁰ There were Jewish communities and leaders well established in Australia who could always provide speakers. Those who spoke about Hindu, Buddhist and Moslem faiths were either Christian missionaries with a background of long experience and study of these traditions or, as occurred in 1954, adherents of these faiths who were living in Australia at the time. The Colombo Plan, launched in 1950, brought thousands of Asian students to Australia.²¹

¹⁸ K. Henderson, memo to AGM, 25.6.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.5, pt 1.

¹⁹ Henderson, *Broadcasting*, pp. 10-11.

²⁰ There had been other programmes on the same subjects in previous years but they had been BBC transcriptions. These two series of Australian-made programmes were referred to in a report of the Dept on its programming of non-Christian religions. It can reasonably be assumed that if there had been other series of the same kind in other years, they would have been mentioned. Cf. K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 20.5.54, AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3; and memo, 11.11.54, AA(NSW): SP587/1, file 8, pt 2.

²¹ The Colombo Plan was an aid programme of the Australian Govt directed to countries of south and south-east Asia, offering their students opportunities to study in Australia. 'The influx of Asian students has helped in the search for articulate speakers on World

In August, 1953, we find Henderson telling the first meeting of the FRAC about 'constant complaints that agnostics were not broadcast' and in 1954 he wrote that there were some sixteen 'sects' also wanting air-time in the religious programmes.²² He saw no good grounds for allocating time to these small groups, or people with anti-religious opinions, who asked for an opportunity to broadcast. After all, their numbers in the society were very small. Placing a high priority on reason in faith, he discounted those whose tenets or claims he judged to be ill-founded in reason and he claimed that the Talks Department frequently arranged broadcasts of forums, where non- and anti-religious opinions could be expressed.²³

In February 1954, the General Manager canvassed the opinions of the ABC's State Advisory Committees on three questions concerning religious broadcasts, one of which asked 'whether sufficient scope was being given to non-orthodox views or to open discussion as between religious and non-religious beliefs'. The Western Australian Committee was uncertain, but all the other States replied in the affirmative.²⁴

In 1947, the ABC published one thousand copies of a booklet which Henderson wrote especially for broadcasting clergy, entitled *Broadcasting as a Religious Opportunity*. Putting programmes to air in Henderson's day meant seeking broadcasters from the churches. These were almost all clergymen, since adult theological and religious education was available only in institutes preparing men for ordination. A few were gifted radio communicators. Most needed training, advising, directing and editing. Henderson wanted them to appreciate the scope that broadcasting offered them. 'The air is Christianity's great mission field', he wrote.²⁵ He instructed them carefully on the differences between addressing a congregation from a pulpit and conversing with a listener by radio, which makes greater demands of sincerity of person and sensitivity of voice: 'It is by intimacy that you must do your evangelising'.²⁶

Religions', wrote Henderson in a memo to the GM, 20.7.54, AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

- ²² Some of those Henderson had in mind were Seventh Day Adventists, British Israelites, Christadelphians, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Plymouth Brethren, Theosophists, followers of Father Divine. Cf. Henderson, memo, 11.11.54.
- ²³ Henderson, memo, 11.11.54. Programmes of this kind had been produced by Talks over a number of years. There was a series of seven 45-minute forums on consecutive Sunday afternoons in 1946, cf. A. Robson, Acting Hd Rel., memo to C. Progs, 3.7.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.5.
- ²⁴ Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'.
- ²⁵ Henderson, *Broadcasting*, p. 12.
- ²⁶ Henderson, *Broadcasting*, p. 7.

It is a remarkable indication of the strong correspondence there was at this time between the Commission's philosophy and Henderson's vision that he could write in this way and have it published and distributed by the ABC. There is no sign in the files of letters from this period that any objection was made to this.

The churches disappointed Henderson with what he saw frequently to be a lack-lustre performance in their communication of, and witness to, the Gospel. However, this spurred him on to make every effort to complement their activities in his broadcasts and to guide and encourage them to show more 'nerve and imagination'.²⁷

According to the census

Having a mandate to provide a comprehensive broadcasting service to the people of Australia, the ABC has always been sensitive to public appraisal of its success or failure in this, since its future ultimately lies secure only in the strong support of the people. Concerned to maintain an acceptable balance between the churches, the ABC had decided in the 1930s to plan its broadcasting of Sunday church services, on the basis of the census figures.²⁸ Henderson concurred with this approach and developed a national policy. Using statistics from the most recent census to justify programme schedules was a contribution he made to ABC religious broadcasting which lasted into the 1980s. They were employed with mathematical precision for many years to determine whose 'Divine Service' would be broadcast. They also guided the choosing of speakers for a number of other programmes. This enabled the ABC, sensitive to attacks on its impartiality, to claim objectivity in the midst of rival claims for air-time, not without some satisfaction in its evident logic and reasonableness.

Here the mathematical precision is first illustrated and then explained.

Allocation of Church Services - National, based on 1933 Census:

DENOMINATION	% ADHERENTS	?/52 SERVICE	NAT/L RELAY
Church of England	46.583	25.503	25
Roman Catholic	21.091	11.546	12
Presbyterian	12.956	7.093	7
Methodist	12.424	6.801	7
Baptist	1.925	1.053	1
Congregational	1.185	0	
Church of Christ	1.142	0	
Lutheran	1.105	0	
Salvation Army	.570	0	
7th Day Adventist	.255	0	
Greek Catholic	.215	0	
Brethren	.184	0	

²⁷ Henderson, *Broadcasting*, pp. 5-6.

²⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1935-6*, p. 27.

Christian Science	.162	0
Christadelphian	.088	0
Mormon	.048	0
Unitarian	.027	0
Apostolic Catholic	.019	0
Quaker	.015	0
Australian Church	.006	0
<u>TOTAL</u>		

52

Allocation of Church Services in NSW:

CHURCH	STATE	NATIONAL	TOTAL
Church of England	58	25	83
Roman Catholic	24	12	36
Presbyterian	12	7	19
Methodist	8	7	15
Baptist	1	1	2
Congregational	1	0	1
<u>TOTALS</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>156</u>

Allocation of Church Services in Victoria, November 1941:

CHURCH	% MEMBERS	?/156	NATIONAL	STATE	TOTAL
Church of England	41.451	65.929	25	41	66
Roman Catholic	20.887	33.222	12	21	33
Presbyterian	18.315	29.131	7	22	29
Methodist	12.781	20.329	7	14	21
Baptist	2.080	3.309	1	2	3
Church of Christ	1.739	2.767	0	3	3
Congregational	.825	1.313	0	1	1
<u>TOTALS</u>			<u>52</u>	<u>104</u>	<u>156</u>

fn. 29

By 1940, in the metropolitan areas with two stations, three church services were being broadcast every Sunday, two on the State network and one on the national network. They went direct to air from a location where people were gathered normally for worship and prayer. Both State statistics and national statistics were taken into account in calculating how to allocate the total one hundred and fifty-six services to the various denominations.³⁰ Precise determinations, like those above, were made on the following bases:

- (i) All imprecise categories in the census were ignored, such as 'other Christians' or 'Protestants undefined', so that the relevant total for calculating proportions was the total of those who specified their adherence to a particular denomination.
- (ii) To get a State allocation of a broadcast service during the year, a denomination needed to number at least 1/156 of the total. A denomination needed 1/52 of the total to be eligible for an allocation on national relay.

²⁹ Cf. AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

³⁰ This allowed for the uneven spread of the denominations through the Commonwealth. For example, Lutherans were more numerous in South Australia and Queensland than elsewhere.

(iii) A church not taking up its allocation could nominate another denomination in its place; or the ABC would re-allocate, on a pro rata basis, any broadcasts not accepted by the designated church.

(iv) Adjustments to the allocations could be made by negotiation among the churches themselves, if they wished.³¹

At the same time as these arrangements were laid down, the ABC also proposed that the 'governing bodies of the Churches...nominate the actual churches from which the broadcasts [would] be done', with the proviso that the ABC had right of veto if the choice was unsuitable or inconvenient to broadcast from.³²

Two years' experience of this brought Henderson to a new mathematical formula.

It was always intended that 'Divine Service' would reflect honestly the church at its worship giving the listener a sense of participation in a real community at prayer. But presentations of quality and attractiveness were central to the whole enterprise. Henderson found that churchmen in authority would too often nominate themselves and their churches while there were more competent broadcasters among their more junior clergy in other parishes. As well, there were gifted speakers in denominations too small to qualify for regular allocations.

Out of a flow of memoranda in the archives emerged a gentle but vivid story of a very awkward situation in St John's Cathedral, Brisbane, in 1942, which presented the ABC with a number of problems typically associated with direct broadcasting of church-based events. In this case, it was the organist that worried the ABC staff, concerned as they were about audience appeal. Reports began to reach management from various officers:

The choirmaster and organist, Mr Sampson, sits in the organ loft some 15'-20' above the choir. He is deaf to a degree and has no possible hope of hearing adequately the quality of the singing. [He] has decided views on broadcasting and while he holds his present post, very little, I think, can be done to improve the choral side of the service.

The members of the choir are definitely not able to see Mr Sampson.

I think Mr Sampson is over-anxious to make sure the organ is heard and...the whole performance on occasions gives the impression of an organ recital with choral accompaniment.³³

Ewart Chapple, the Queensland State Manager, explained to the Acting General Manager that George Sampson was eighty-four years old and church officials felt compassion for him because there was no possibility of arranging a pension for him. He went on:

³¹ T.W. Bearup, A/GM, memo to C. Progs, 17.11.41, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.4.

³² Bearup, memo, 17.11.41.

³³ Cf. AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

All this, however, does not help in our broadcasts [and] during a quarter it is possible that we take up to seven services from this location,...these being allocated, of course, by Archbishop Wand.³⁴

The quality of programmes broadcast direct from churches was too often at the mercy of: hierarchical authority structures; little regard in the churches for the opportunities for broad, effective communication which radio afforded them; technical incompetence; and voluntary or inadequately paid staff who could not then so readily be called to account.³⁵

To counteract, at least somewhat, the impact of these problems on the year's productions of 'Divine Service', Henderson announced, in 1943, a new arrangement, resorting to census data once more to justify it. Having previously ignored in earlier calculations the 15% or so of the population who had expressed their religious affiliation in an imprecise way, he now took them into account to explain the new policy:

According to present arrangements, broadcasting churches account for about 85% of the religious population. 15% discretion on church broadcasting is to be claimed by the ABC. The ABC is taking into its own hands allocation of 15% of all religious broadcasts, i.e. eight national services at 9.30 a.m. and fifteen State services (11 a.m. and 7 p.m.). To begin January 1944. The Federal allocation will occur on the fifth Sunday of the month. State allocations should, if possible, occur on the same Sunday of each month. The remainder to be allocated on important occasions.³⁶

This gave the ABC freedom to broadcast special celebrations on important occasions which might not be denominationally aligned; and to give air-time to the best broadcasters, irrespective of their denomination or their location and status within their own church.

It is a comment on the rivalry and jealousy among and within some churches, that Henderson thought it necessary to find a way of invoking the census in support of his quite proper professional desire to have more control over what he was responsible for and to improve the quality and appeal of ABC programmes. As the years went by, inter-church tensions and antagonisms diminished³⁷ but census-based scheduling of 'Divine Service' endured for decades. In the case of other religious programmes which sought to give expression to what the churches held in common, the census

³⁴ E. Chapple, memo to A/GM, 16.2.43, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

³⁵ The long-running programme, 'Community Hymn Singing', was an endless struggle with the same problems.

³⁶ K. Henderson, memo, 25.10.43, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4; and memo, 19.11.43, Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'.

³⁷ When Henderson received a letter in early 1953 from a Methodist Circuit protesting that the ABC was favouring Roman Catholicism, he commented in a memo that the letter 'came as a disagreeable surprise as we have been free of this kind of thing for a number of years'. Cf. memo to C. Progs, 21.1.53, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

data were less relevant. Even so, they were frequently referred to in appraising overall balance of programming.³⁸

Surprisingly, the archives reveal that the ABC even went so far in 1952 as to decide to apply the same census-based calculations to news. A. N. Finlay, the Assistant Controller of Programmes, informed the News Editors in Chief in all States that, while the news value of any item was their first consideration, the General Manager had agreed that when news items referred to churches, precedence should be given according to their relative proportion of the population. In other words, news items about the Church of England should account for 40% of national news about churches in any one year, Roman Catholics 22%, Methodists 11%, and so on.³⁹ It is hard to imagine the Editors in Chief earnestly implementing such a directive. Nevertheless, the instruction was given, indicating how nervous the ABC could be of complaints from the major Christian churches about its impartiality.

Christian ecumenical relations

As early as 1942, Henderson organised meetings with Anglican, non-Episcopal and Roman Catholic clergy in Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney to discuss together their involvement in religious broadcasting. He had strong ideas about the need for a common effort by the churches to respond to what he had perceived to be 'the beginnings of the quest for religion'⁴⁰ which he had found among the soldiers of the First World War in France and which he believed best described the experience of most Australians still.

It was at these meetings that Henderson proposed setting up a committee structure, through which the ABC could be advised by representatives of the main Christian churches. Meetings would be held annually to evaluate programmes and policies and make suggestions. At first, he conceived of two parallel committees - a separate one for the Roman Catholics.⁴¹ He received immediate explicit support from the Controller of Programmes for his suggestion, but, ten years later, was still negotiating it with the ABC administration. By this time, however, he was better

³⁸ A. Robson, Acting Hd Rel., letter to Rev. C.H. Miller, 20.6.52, AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

³⁹ A. N. Finlay, memo to News Editors in Chief, 14.5.52, AA (NSW):SP742/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1. Six years later when Pope Pius XII died (9.10.58), some listeners complained that the Roman Catholic church was receiving a disproportionate amount of broadcast time. The GM responded that it was 'not practicable to apply a percentage formula to church news'. His letter suggests that it had been strong objections from listeners that had prompted the 1952 directive and that in the intervening years he had been persuaded of its silliness. C. Moses, letter to D. Wheeler, 23.10.58, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.20.

⁴⁰ K. T. Henderson, *Khaki and Cassock*, Melville and Mullen, Melbourne, 1919, p. 151.

⁴¹ K. Henderson, report to C. Progs, 18.11.42, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.

placed, as Federal Supervisor of a separate Department, to urge a favourable decision. Also, now there was no talk of two committees.⁴² This is one small example of the changes wrought by ten years of collaboration and communication across denominational barriers. The first annual meeting of the FRAC took place on August 6-7, 1953, and the Committee continued in existence until 1976.⁴³

The prevailing emphasis in religious programmes was on what was generally acceptable to Christians in the mainstream churches, but the intention was to serve the spiritual life of every listener irrespective of her, or his, participation in believing communities. Even when differences of belief and practice were consciously brought into focus, for example in broadcasts of liturgies and worship services or of religious and philosophical discussions and debates, Henderson and his staff tried to ensure that listeners would not be alienated but informed and broadened by their contact with other ideas and other ways.

Indeed, the contribution of ABC religious broadcasting to ecumenical reconciliation in Australia has yet to be fully told and assessed. It has certainly been a strong influence Australia-wide in promoting a spirit of community among people, at least in relation to the mainstream of Christianity, through the content, quality and style of its programmes, in the breadth of collaborative effort involved in putting them to air and in the working relationships it encouraged through such bodies as the FRAC. On the other hand, some small religious communities who were rarely heard on radio and Christian church communities, like the Greek Orthodox, whose first language was not English, would surely want to speak of ABC bias and failure in ecumenical breadth. With what justification?

We have earlier noted Henderson's disregard for a number of small religious groups. In a memo to the Controller of Programmes in 1953, he put his point of view clearly: The larger Christian groupings (namely, Church of England, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Congregational, Church of Christ, Lutheran and Salvation Army) could 'talk a language which they can all understand without difficulty. They can listen to each other's broadcasts'. But the ideas of Christian Scientists, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, Christadelphians, Plymouth Brethren, and others unnamed, were 'eccentric, confined to very small groups of people and unintelligible and annoying to the large body of listeners'. He had no objection to giving such groups an opportunity to expound their views in a radio talk but, beyond that, he did not want to include them, nor associate himself and the ABC

⁴² K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 9.3.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁴³ Cf. ch. 8. Members were drawn from the various States and were mostly clergy in the main Christian churches, personally appointed by the Commission for a fixed term.

Religion Department with what he saw to be a persistent effort by some (the Christian Scientists were mentioned specifically) to be recognised as belonging in the mainstream of Christian tradition.⁴⁴

For the Greek Orthodox church it was a quite different problem. The Greeks were obstructed by the ABC's policy on broadcasting in languages other than English. It was the monocultural, assimilationist policy of the political parties and the people of Australia at that time: the use of languages other than English was firmly discouraged; immigrants were to learn English as quickly as possible. Consequently, Greek requests for broadcasts of Orthodox liturgies at times of festivals inevitably created a flow of memoranda and letters arguing the case for and against and ending normally with a decision from the General Manager that was meagre and restrictive. This occurred even while radio broadcasts of Roman Catholic liturgies in Latin were commonplace.

For example, in 1954, the church asked for a thirty-minute pre-recorded broadcast of a Good Friday liturgy to go to air from 10.30 to 11.00 p.m.(EST). The liturgy was to be in Greek with an English commentary. The Department recommended it: there would be a good choir of forty voices, the facilities were also good and a high quality broadcast was possible. The first response from Keith Barry, the Controller of Programmes, was a firm refusal: 'we do not broadcast in foreign languages'.⁴⁵ N. Symeonides, the Organising Secretary of the Greek Orthodox Community of NSW appealed to Richard Boyer, the Chairman of the Commission, to enable them to 'broadcast the Religious Ceremony on Good Friday of the Lamentation of the Entombment at the Holy Trinity church, Bourke Street, Surry Hills'. He argued: 'This year more than ever such spiritual solace in the early steps of the Greek New Australians becomes imperative. Some working inland, in the bush, the railway lines, may be able to hear this religious ceremony in Greek, at the nearest radio'.⁴⁶ Boyer was sympathetic; ABC management was pressed to accede. The General Manager and the Controller of Programmes, in the end, agreed to an emasculated 'about fifteen minutes containing mostly music'.⁴⁷

In support of its opposition to the use of languages other than English, management quoted part only of the ABCB's policy statement of 1952 on 'broadcasting in foreign languages':

...broadcasting services should be one of the means of helping those who have migrated to Australia from foreign countries to become assimilated into the

⁴⁴ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 15.1.53, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁴⁵ K. Barry, memos 5.3.54 and 12.3.54, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁴⁶ N. Symeonides, letter to Chairman, 16.3.54, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁴⁷ GM, memo to C. Progs, 7.4.54, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

Australian nation rather than of encouraging their segregation into non-English-speaking communities.

The Board had gone on to write: 'Judicious use of foreign languages in special circumstances may be necessary and desirable'⁴⁸ and in the following section of the same Report had stated that restrictions on the use of languages other than English were 'not applicable to foreign languages used in religious services'. In fact, both the Control Board and a number of commercial stations were more liberal than the ABC at that time about broadcasting in other languages.⁴⁹

A year later Henderson was writing again to the Controller of Programmes recommending the Greek Orthodox request for broadcast time on Good Friday and Christmas Day. He pointed out, repeating the plea of the NSW Greek community the year before, that there were '60,000 Greeks scattered all over Australia - many in work camps - who would travel to the nearest radio to share in the service'. A week later he strengthened his argument with: 'they would be entitled to about two services per year on our census basis'. The appeal to the census decided the matter. The Good Friday liturgy was broadcast, as requested, in 1955.⁵⁰ One might assume, from the fact that there was no further reference to it in the files, that the Christmas liturgy also went to air that year.

It is evident that resistance to broadcasting Greek Orthodox liturgies came from ABC management, not the Religion Department, nor Chairman Boyer, and that it was not a religious issue but stemmed from excessive caution and profound unease about 'foreigners'.⁵¹ These were attitudes that were widely held by Australians at the time and, though diminished, still remain strong in some quarters.

⁴⁸ ABCB, *Annual Report 1952*, s. 131.

⁴⁹ For evidence of the extent of commercial stations' broadcasting in languages other than English, cf. ABCB, *Annual Report 1953*, s. 116; and *Annual Report 1954*, s. 118.

⁵⁰ Cf. a series of memos exchanged among K. Henderson, K. Barry and C. Moses, 21.3.55-31.3.55, AA (NSW): SP714/1, file 19/1/2, pt 2; and SP587/1, file 8, pt 2.

⁵¹ As late as 1965, Archbishop Ezekiel was denied access to ABC airwaves to send a Christmas message in Greek to people of the Greek Orthodox church in Australia. The Chairman at the time, Dr J.A. Darling, gave this explanation for the refusal: 'The danger is, of course, that every other foreigner would want to do the same thing and this might crowd out the programmes with foreign languages'. Cf. letters of J. A. Darling and T. Duckmanton (GM) to Archbishop Frank Woods, Melbourne, who had taken up Archbishop Ezekiel's cause, 3.12.65, AA (NSW): SP1299/1, file 17/1/1, pt 3. This stance was, in fact, a regression. In the early 1950s the ABC had put a 20-minute session to air on Christmas morning so that ten clergy could each broadcast for two minutes 'greetings to New Australians in their own languages'. The programme had been called 'We Hear them Speak in our Tongues'. The vehement opposition to this from the Royal Orange Grand Council of Australia, invoking the Federal Govt's assimilation policy on its side, had, however, prevailed. Cf. exchange of letters between K. Barry, L. Potemra from South Australia and the President of the Grand Council, 21.12.51-9.1.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.5.

Just as the Department was an advocate for the Greeks, so Henderson had shown similar concern during the Second World War for another Christian group with 'foreign' connections. On the grounds of national security during the war, the Australian Government had banned the broadcasting of Lutheran church services. Henderson and other ABC staff members had supported members and friends of the Lutheran communities in Queensland and South Australia in questioning the justice of the directive and the authorities had been persuaded to lift the ban and replace it with a set of regulatory requirements for church services on radio which broadcasters and Lutheran churches cooperated to meet.⁵²

Caution with controversy

The ecumenical spirit in religious programmes was constrained by the strong desire of Henderson and the ABC to avoid controversy in religious matters.⁵³ This inhibited discussion on air between people with conflicting views.

From 1948, the ABC had the statutory authority to broadcast controversy,⁵⁴ but it continued to be very careful with controversial religious broadcasting. According to the Chairman, the Commission had had some bitter experiences of the division of the Christian churches when doctrine was expounded on air.⁵⁵ This is one way ABC policy was expressed:

Controversy, as between Christian denominations, is not permitted...It is understood amongst our broadcasters that they must not attack or refer provocatively to the views of other religious bodies...Denominational viewpoints are not obtruded except where they are asked for...⁵⁶

Besides controversy between the churches, there was also the question of debating religious and anti-religious views on radio. The ABC found that this, more often than not, proved quite unsatisfactory 'because they never came to grips with each other...While religious speakers were expressing one...religious outlook, their adversaries were attacking another'.⁵⁷ Forums, and discussions avoiding head-on collisions, had proved interesting, however, so that further progress along these lines

⁵² Cf. AA (NSW): SP1558/2, box 65.

⁵³ Comments of a member of the NSW Advisory Committee, Mr Miller, were recorded in Minutes as follows: 'The ABC whilst not shirking political controversy appears to be avoiding controversy in religion'. Cf. Minutes of meeting 27.5.52, AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

⁵⁴ Cf. ch. 2, fn. 50.

⁵⁵ R. Boyer, letter to President of Sunday Christian Observance Committee, Melbourne, 6.12.48, AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

⁵⁶ ABC, 'Controversial (including political) broadcasting', Paper for British Commonwealth Broadcasting Conference, May 1952, p. 7, AA (NSW): SP714/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

⁵⁷ K. Henderson, comment recorded in FRAC Minutes of meeting 6-7.8.53, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

seemed possible and desirable.⁵⁸ Alan Robson, who said that he was expressing Kenneth Henderson's views, wrote to management:

...controversies are easier to start than to stop...[we] do not wish to start up the unlettered who easily become excited on these matters, nor awaken in sects an expectation that they may lay claims upon us.⁵⁹

This suggests a third factor influencing Department policy: Henderson's high valuation of the educated mind and his low estimation of marginal and idiosyncratic religious groups.

A certain blandness was the risk he ran in pursuing his twin desires of promoting unity and avoiding controversy. Some felt this. Rev. Leo Dalton, MSC, a respected thinker in the Roman Catholic church and member of the FRAC, was led to complain towards the end of 1954 that the programmes were 'rather too nebulous' and that 'impartially regulated controversy might be an improvement'.⁶⁰ On the other hand, a report written in the same year by the Director of Programmes in Queensland read:

Services broadcast from churches seem to have made little forward movement over the years...Religious talks, however,...seem to be planned always with an eye to presenting non-sectarian Christianity in an extraordinarily effective way.⁶¹

John Munro, Henderson's assistant in Melbourne from 1953 and his successor as Head of the Department, would have agreed with Leo Dalton. He was keen for more free, open-ended exchange among people with different views. In the memorandum already referred to, Alan Robson had continued, still claiming to do so in Henderson's name:

We should not be ashamed to say that we exist for the purpose of furthering the Christian religion and building up Christians in their faith but, as a means to elucidating the truth and resolving difficulties and doubts, we are prepared to make careful use of controversy; but there must always be an efficient Christian answer.⁶²

This was not Munro's mind. At the first FRAC meeting in August 1953 he advocated 'dialectical discussion [which] may open genuinely searching listeners, i.e. a conversation that did not arrive at a definite conclusion but left the listener to think'.⁶³ Munro always spoke for this approach not only in the years of his leadership of the

⁵⁸ ABC, 'Controversial broadcasting', pp. 7-8.

⁵⁹ A. Robson, Acting Hd Rel., memo to C. Progs, 26.8.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁶⁰ L. Dalton, letter to ABC, 28.12.54, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8, pt 2.

⁶¹ Programme Director Queensland, Report, Jan.-May 1954, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.5, pt 4.

⁶² Robson, memo, 26.8.52.

⁶³ FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 6-7.8.53.

Department but also as a member of the FRAC during the sixteen years' term of his successor, James Peter.⁶⁴

Constructive handling of controversy in a broadcast programme calls for several talents: a high level of competence and confidence in the subject area, skills in communication and human relations, a receptive mind and an adventurous spirit. Henderson had all these in good measure but they were harnessed to his certainties and the store he set on consensus.

Day-to-day faith

It was Henderson's hope that he might help his audiences and broadcasters to integrate faith and life and reject the view that it was appropriate for religion to be confined to Sundays and church-going. Faith and day-to-day experience could be mutually enlightening and enriching. Living as though they were separate and unconnected was a great impoverishment for the person and for society.

This is another important aspect of inclusive religious broadcasting: that no facet of personal or social life be thought of as beyond its realm. To work from this conviction was to do battle against the current of secularisation in Australian society and in the ABC.

Henderson determined to win a place in the mid-week evening schedule for a programme which would be devoted to 'the big basic questions that trouble all who ever think'⁶⁵ and, in 1942, he raised it with the Assistant General Manager:

No dividing line can, or should, be drawn between religious and philosophical questions. Religion and philosophy meet in the vast questions - What is man? What is life meant for? For these addresses the ABC could secure the best thinkers and scholars in Australia, whether clerical or lay. The real sectarianism of today is found not among the churches but rather in a kind of secular intolerance that would confine questions raising religious issues to churches and clergy...In practice, these problems of the meaning of life have to be dealt with in the working week.⁶⁶

He was twelve years coveting a Wednesday evening time-slot; 'Religion in Life' did not begin until July 1954. Even then, it was put to air rather late at 10 p.m.(EST). There were, obviously, staff of the ABC, as there were many Australians, who had difficulty making space for religion in the schedule of the working week.

Meanwhile, 'Readings from the Bible' (1948-91) offered an interesting example of a programme which had made its way into people's busy lives - every

⁶⁴ Cf. ch. 8.

⁶⁵ K. Henderson, memo to AGM, 25.6.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.5.

⁶⁶ Henderson, memo, 25.6.42.

weekday morning at breakfast time at 7.10 a.m.(EST).⁶⁷ It was approximately five minutes of what Henderson described as 'selections from a literature that has profoundly influenced our culture, along with comments designed to elucidate the relevance (then and now) of these selections'.⁶⁸

Both of these programmes will be discussed further in the next section.

Range of programmes

All programmes had their particular objectives and strategies which were made clear to those involved in presenting them. While each was aimed at its own specific audience, it was intended that the full range of programmes together would offer a comprehensive service to the Australian people. It is difficult to categorise them neatly, as they align themselves somewhat differently depending on whether one considers style, or content, or intended audience.

By April 1955, the ABC was advertising a regular weekly schedule of twenty-eight religious broadcasts.⁶⁹ In addition there was a weekly programme of 'Sacred Music', recordings from the finest choirs and musicians, which was not at this time a production of the Religion Department.⁷⁰ As well, there were additional broadcasts at times of special Christian or Jewish festivals or other important occasions, like a Eucharistic Congress or the visit to Australia of the Archbishop of Canterbury or a meeting of the World Council of Churches.

It was generally intended that a denomination could present itself according to its own observance and style only in 'Divine Service' and 'Evensong', and, at times, 'Radio Service'. A mix of people from a variety of Christian traditions were involved in the other programmes, which were supposed to communicate a more general Christian message. Despite the Department's efforts, however, particular denominations tended to dominate in some programmes by default.

'Community Hymn Singing', broadcast weekly on Sunday evenings was half an hour of congregations' singing hymns with a minimum of verbal introduction and

⁶⁷ Cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 16. It was broadcast on Saturdays, too, in Henderson's time, cf ABC leaflet, April 1955, AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 2.

⁶⁸ K. Henderson, memo, n.d., AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

⁶⁹ ABC leaflet, April 1955. In the year 1953-4, the ABC began to produce monthly leaflets for Australian clergy giving details of forthcoming religious programmes. The leaflet's opening sentence was: 'The Religious Broadcasts Department aims at supplementing the work of the Churches'.

⁷⁰ Staff of the record library put these programmes together. The selected records were then trolled into the studio and presented by the announcer on duty from the information on the record covers. Cf. P. Kirkwood, personal interview, 9.5.89.

comment to 'allow the hymns to do their own work'.⁷¹ Henderson insisted that part of this programme's attraction to listeners was its 'homely' atmosphere and so he resisted all efforts to replace congregations with choirs or eliminate ministers of religion as comperes entirely in favour of more skilled radio announcers.⁷² Because there was not enough good congregational singing in other denominations, Methodist congregations were the most often broadcast, even though the Department, conscious of the imbalance, worked hard to find good singing elsewhere and urged local churches to combine their resources in ecumenical presentations.⁷³

The Roman Catholic church was generally under-represented in ABC religious programmes, comfortable with broadcasts of its own liturgies and devotions but unenterprising when collaboration in other programmes was called for.⁷⁴ Archbishop Eris O'Brien, a long-time, respected member of the FRAC, felt impelled to issue a strong statement in June 1952 urging more constructive participation from Catholics.⁷⁵ When a Catholic congregation in Goulburn applied to participate in 'Community Hymn Singing', Alan Robson was pleased and surprised: 'It is unusual for Catholics in large numbers to be able to sing English hymns'.⁷⁶ However, after considerable correspondence the project came to naught because the Goulburn Catholics wanted 'to be loyal to their traditions'⁷⁷ and sing hymns that expressed Catholic doctrine and devotion and not be limited only to those receiving general Christian acceptance, as the guidelines for the programme insisted.⁷⁸ Indeed, the Catholic church had some basic difficulties with ABC religious broadcasts: what the ABC described as meeting with general Christian acceptance was criticised in Catholic circles as 'a kind of watered down religion presented on the air'.⁷⁹

The twenty-eight broadcasts each week (excluding 'Sacred Music') fitted broadly into two classifications of content. There were those aiming to evoke a

⁷¹ B. Molesworth, Hd Talks, memo to all States, 8.1.48, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

⁷² B. Molesworth, memo to C. Progs, 16.3.49, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

⁷³ Cf. A. Robson (following up a suggestion of the C. Progs, 6.6.52), memo to Talks Depts in all States, 8.8.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

⁷⁴ A. Robson, Acting Hd Rel., memo to C. Progs, 15.8.52: the Catholic church was not taking up its full allocation of 'Radio Services' and was not providing its legitimate share of speakers for other programmes such as 'Plain Christianity', AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2.

⁷⁵ Quoted by A. Robson, Acting Hd Rel., memo to C. Progs, 15.8.52, AA (NSW): SP724/1, file 19/1/2, pt 1.

⁷⁶ Robson, memo, 15.8.52.

⁷⁷ A. Robson, memo to C. Progs. 13.8.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

⁷⁸ Robson proposed instead that the Goulburn congregation's singing be used in a 'Radio Service' programme, cf. Robson, memo, 15.8.52.

⁷⁹ Dr Eris O'Brien, quoted by Robson, memo, 15.8.52.

prayerful and devotional response and those that concerned themselves with discussing ideas and issues in society, sometimes debating them.⁸⁰

In the first group were: 'Readings from the Bible', 'Daily Devotional', 'Evening Meditation', 'Epilogue', 'Divine Service', 'Evensong', 'Community Hymn Singing' and a musical programme, 'Prelude'. 'Radio Service' is included here, too, although it carried broadcasts of the second type also. In 1955, this group of programmes accounted for twenty-four of the total twenty-eight broadcasts heard regularly each week.

'Readings from the Bible' (1948-91) has already been mentioned. These short readings were, for many years, arranged in four-week series. The broadcaster responsible was asked to keep comment to thirty seconds, but was allowed a little longer for the first programme in a series.⁸¹ This required a special competence for clarity and conciseness.

Some three hours later in the morning, listeners to national programmes could hear 'Daily Devotional' (1936-71), at 10-10.15 a.m.(EST), comprising a reading and short exposition, a hymn and a prayer which together would make 'a unity of inspiration'.⁸² Remaining 'strictly undenominational',⁸³ it was aimed at a Christian audience of women in the home, invalids and the elderly.⁸⁴ Efforts were made to direct the Saturday session to working men.⁸⁵ The briefing Henderson gave broadcasters for this programme urged them to 'speak as though to a single listener offering one new clear insight into the life he or she is living'.⁸⁶ John Munro emphasised further this connection between life experience and what was said in 'Daily Devotional' when he wrote:

The most effective devotional broadcasting is...achieved by those who, with a certain measure of unpretentious friendliness, convey whatever be their theological point through the confessing grist of their own experience.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Seven programmes, and 'Sacred Music', were broadcast on Sundays.

⁸¹ One broadcaster was responsible for 24 readings., cf. AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3. After 1968, the programme briefing was for 10 readings over 2 weeks, cf. Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'.

⁸² ABC, *Annual Reports 1935-6*, p. 27, and *1970-1*, p. 39.

⁸³ K. Barry, C. Progs, memo to Mgr Queensland, 24.9.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.6.

⁸⁴ ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 16.

⁸⁵ ABC, *Annual Report 1954-5*, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'.

⁸⁷ J. Munro, memo to Talks Dept in BAPH States, 18.11.58, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/5.

Not in April 1955⁸⁸ but later in the year, a programme was introduced on the State network to parallel 'Daily Devotional' somewhat, entitled 'Pause a Moment' (1955-80). This was scheduled at 9.55 a.m.(EST) and consisted of a thirty-second musical introduction, a two-minute story, a hymn of no more than two verses and a prayer.⁸⁹

We needed someone who could tell a story well in two minutes. I remember we had a couple of people with tired voices like frogs calling to their mates, but they got away with it because they could tell stories.⁹⁰

The audience for 'Pause a Moment', like that for 'Daily Devotional', was mostly women and invalids.⁹¹ Over the years, this programme was inserted into the format of various morning sessions, like the 'Russ Tyson Hour' and the 'Hospital Hour'.

'Epilogue' (1937-85) was a meditative programme already being broadcast on Sundays, which went to air for four-five minutes around 11 p.m.(EST) on Sunday nights, reserving a few minutes at the end of the day for thought and prayer prompted by music, an extract from Scripture or literature, and some comment.⁹² From 1953, BBC transcriptions with the same name were used. With 'Evening Meditation' (1946-85), this opportunity for a short night-time reflection was extended to the rest of the week,⁹³ someone spoke 'creatively and quietly at the end of the day'.⁹⁴

'Divine Service' has been discussed earlier in relation to the use of census data in planning programmes. Having been established in the schedules of the Australian Broadcasting Company in the 1920s well before the Commission came into existence, this programme continued on radio until 1986. Henderson aimed to attract the 'non-church-going 90% of the population' with these broadcasts and so sought a service that would sustain interest by flowing smoothly at a good pace and offering a 'succession of stimulations' in its music, preaching and prayer.⁹⁵ He was particularly alert to this programme's rural audiences. It was not only a matter of their being able to listen to it. 'They have something worthwhile to contribute', he wrote to management, and this was one programme where they could do so. He urged the

88 Cf. fn. 69 above.

89 Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/2/2.

90 L. McIntosh, personal interview, 19.6.89.

91 Hd Rel., memo 3.3.70, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

92 Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1936-7*, p. 36; *1945-6*, p. 32; and AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2.

93 Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1945-6*, p. 14; *1945-6*, p. 32; and *Supplementary Information on ABC Activities 1982-3*, pp. 36-7.

94 L. McIntosh, personal interview, 19.6.89.

95 K. Henderson, 'Suggestions to clergy for improvement of church broadcasting', n.d., AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.4.

ABC not to restrict its broadcasts of 'Divine Service' to the city churches, saving money at the expense of the participation of country communities.⁹⁶

'Evensong' (1939-69) aimed at a more limited audience: it was intended 'for regular churchgoers who want orthodox services'.⁹⁷ Broadcast from St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, on Thursday afternoons at 4.45 p.m.(EST), it appealed also to those with an interest in organ and choral music.

'Prelude' (1949-63) devoted fifteen minutes on Sunday evenings to fine choral music of past and present. It immediately preceded 'Plain Christianity - a Word for the Wayfarer'. In 1950, it was attracting only 2% of the total number of sets in use but Henderson was certain of its gaining continuing approval.⁹⁸ From 1953, it was coming under criticism from some members of the FRAC as 'too highbrow'.⁹⁹ As an introduction to 'Plain Christianity', it was blamed for 'losing the wayfarer' before the guest broadcaster had begun to speak,¹⁰⁰ but Henderson defended it vigorously as the 'only high grade programme of religious music on the ABC, except for the Sunday programme at 7.a.m. ('Sacred Music') [which was] inaccessible to most'.¹⁰¹ Both he and Munro persisted with it for some years longer and, even when it ceased to be broadcast, 'In Quires and Places' continued to present small choirs and fine choral works.

'Community Hymn Singing' (1947-85) has been mentioned briefly earlier.¹⁰² The staff at the ABC, having determined the ingredients and their proportions for an attractive programme, persevered over decades in a constant struggle to attain, and maintain, the standards they had set: genuine congregational singing, no choir; no preaching or praying; only a couple of sentences of crisp comment after announcing the title and first line of the hymn, giving listeners time to find it in their hymn books if they wished; eight hymns of no more than four verses, one hymn to be very familiar to a great many churchgoers, five to be well known, while the remaining three might be newer ones with attractive tunes. It was important that what the singing lacked in professional finesse was made up for by verve, spontaneity and simple directness. The audience Henderson had particularly in mind were people who, even if not adult church-goers, would remember some of the hymns from an earlier time in their lives -

⁹⁶ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 2.9.53, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

⁹⁷ ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 15.

⁹⁸ K. Henderson, memo to C. Semmler, C. Progs, 5.10.50, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/10.

⁹⁹ FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 6-7.8.53, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/10.

¹⁰⁰ FRAC, Minutes of meeting 6-7.10.55, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

¹⁰¹ Henderson, memo, 5.10.50.

¹⁰² Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1947-8*, p. 16, and *1985-6*, p. 36.

schooldays, Sunday School, attending services with their parents - and be moved by their memories.¹⁰³ In its first fifteen years of existence, 'Community Hymn Singing' was extremely popular. In its first year, it won one of the largest audiences of all the Commission's programmes¹⁰⁴ and the NSW Director of Programmes reported to the General Manager that it 'was touching a new strata [sic] of listeners'.¹⁰⁵ By 1951, it was being broadcast to thirty-five stations¹⁰⁶ and in 1952, its audience was 20% of available listeners.¹⁰⁷ Henderson urged the Commission in 1954 not to begrudge money to 'a session that draws four times the audience of a Town Hall concert or a race description'.¹⁰⁸

'Radio Service' (1943-64) began as a more highly produced Divine Service, conducted in a church or chapel particularly suited to radio broadcasts, or a studio. Initially, it took the place of the 9.30.a.m. 'Divine Service' on a monthly basis in 1943 and became a weekly Sunday morning programme some seven years later. Over the years, 'Radio Service' also offered an opportunity for experiment and innovation in forms of worship and religious communication: modern liturgies, religious drama, special celebrations, documentaries of the churches at work, talks, discussions.¹⁰⁹ Henderson wanted to appeal to the large 'religious non-ecclesiastical public who are...responsive to the appeal of religion when it comes in a form they can accept'.¹¹⁰ By 1950, he was writing to the Talks Department in Adelaide: "The record, "Church Bells - Summons to Service" is not to be used as an introduction. We are anxious to do all we can to "de-ecclesiasticise" these services".¹¹¹ 'Radio Service' afforded the Religion Department a lot of flexibility, so that it did not always fit into this first classification of prayerful and devotional programmes, although it often did.

Before moving to examine our second group of programmes, 'The Man Born To Be King' deserves some mention, since it had a wide appeal and was repeatedly

¹⁰³ K. Henderson, memo to State Mgr Perth, 6.2.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.1.

¹⁰⁴ B. H. Molesworth, Hd Talks, memo to all States, 8.10.48, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

¹⁰⁵ J. J. Donnelly, memo to GM, 24.2.48, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

¹⁰⁶ K. Henderson, report to management 1951, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

¹⁰⁷ A. Robson to C. Progs, 8.8.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

¹⁰⁸ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 8.1.54, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1950-1*, p. 4; *1954-5*, p. 21, *1955-6*, p. 28. Examples of programmes were medieval mystery plays from the BBC, 'The Play of Daniel' performed in Sydney, the blessing of the fishing fleet in Ulladulla, a discussion in Perth on 'Can Man Save Himself?' with Rev. David Read of Edinburgh and two agnostics. Cf AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.5, pt 4.

¹¹⁰ K. Henderson, memo to AGM, 25.6.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

¹¹¹ K. Henderson, memo to Talks Dept, South Australia, 7.7.50, Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'.

broadcast by the ABC over a number of years from 1944 - not, however, from the Religion Department but from the Drama Department. It was a series of twelve plays by Dorothy Sayers, which dramatised the life of Jesus Christ from the Nativity to the Resurrection, in 'modern speech and with a determined historical realism about the characters'.¹¹² They were BBC transcriptions for which the ABC originally paid £180 for rights for three years. Over time, the series increased in cost to thousands of dollars and was heard here no more.¹¹³ The plays were compelling and insightful recreations of the original story and captured attentive audiences. Finely written and acted, they challenged the spirituality of modern Christians, as they brought the Gospels to people with startling immediacy.

The second group of four programmes - 'Facing the Week', 'Religion in Life', 'Religion Speaks' and 'Plain Christianity: a Word to the Wayfarer' - were talks and discussions about issues of life in society.

'Facing the Week' (1945-80) was a short 'fairly simple, racy kind of talk'¹¹⁴ on some religious or philosophical matter at 6.40 a.m.(EST) every Monday. Henderson wanted it 'to combat Mondayitis and restore the zest for life and the sense of its meaning'.¹¹⁵ It was clearly intended for workers. He reported in 1954 that the programme had 'found an audience among country people and got a fair amount of fanmail from early workers'.¹¹⁶

'Saturday Afternoon Talks' (1948-59) was not listed in the Department's publicity leaflet of April 1955 because, in that quarter of the year, the Talks Department was taking responsibility for it, but it is inserted here because it was at least a part-time responsibility of the Religion Department intended for much the same audience as 'Facing the Week': 'those interested in fundamental questions of life and conduct'.¹¹⁷ This programme began as a ten-minute talk produced by the Religion Department to go to air at 2.50 p.m.(EST). Listeners sent in problems to be discussed.¹¹⁸ However, the ABC agreed with the NSW State Advisory Committee that literature and poetry also had a place on radio on a leisurely Saturday afternoon and so, from 1953, the time-slot was shared between the two Departments, Talks and

¹¹² D. Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King*, Gollancz, London, 1945, Preface.

¹¹³ Cf. AA (NSW): SP613, file 19/3/4.

¹¹⁴ K. Henderson, memo to K. Barry, C. Progs, 27.4.54, AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3.

¹¹⁵ K. Henderson, letter to Rev. Frank Borland, 1.11.55, cf. Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'.

¹¹⁶ Exchange of memos between K. Barry (C. Progs), and K. Henderson, 20.4.54 and 27.4.54, AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3.

¹¹⁷ ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1949-50*, p. 13.

Religion, each arranging alternate quarters of the year.¹¹⁹ In 1956, the Religion Department devoted its share of the programme to reviews of 'religious best-sellers'¹²⁰ which made a nice connection with the sessions provided by Talks.

Local and overseas speakers were invited to contribute to the Wednesday night programme, 'Religion in Life' (1954-c.1972), which Henderson had spent twelve years arguing for before it was finally scheduled. He wanted his speakers to 'make contact with people's problems', to help them 'clear their heads'.¹²¹ The programme was constructed on the assumption that all confusions could find clarity and resolution in Christianity.¹²²

John Munro worked closely with Kenneth Henderson in shaping 'Religion Speaks' (1953-65), along different lines. Three speakers were invited each Sunday afternoon at 3.45-4.00 p.m.(EST) to bring their different theological perspectives to a contemporary issue or event of broad social interest. The strategy of the programme was this: It was to be unscripted, but adequately rehearsed, and it would follow the pattern of an opening concrete remark, a conciliatory sentence or two, contradictions and criticisms from various angles, an exploration of the theological ground of the topic, concluding with pointers towards solutions, statements of agreement and acknowledgment of remaining tensions.¹²³ Obviously no requirement here that there 'always be an efficient Christian answer'.

When the ABC decided in 1946 that two morning broadcasts of services were enough each Sunday, Henderson proposed a Sunday evening programme to be called 'Plain Christianity for Everyman'. The name was later changed to 'Plain Christianity - a Word for the Wayfarer' (1947-69). It went to air at 6.45 p.m.(EST) and was a forty-five minute presentation by a single, highly regarded speaker, drawn from Australia or some part of the English-speaking world.¹²⁴ In 1953, we find Henderson requesting approval for expenditure to record up to ten overseas speakers

119 Cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/11; and SP463/1, file 8.3.

120 Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'.

121 K. Henderson, letter to Dr J. Burton, 26.1.55, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8, pt 2.

122 Some programme topics were: Rev. David Sheppard, English cricketer, on 'What has Christianity to say on Sport?'; 'Is There a Retreat from Christianity?'; and a series with the not so sparkling title of 'My Chief Difficulty is...', featuring speakers' experiences of orthodox and institutional Christianity. Cf. K. Henderson, memo 1955, Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'; Henderson, memo to GM, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.5, pt 4; Henderson, memo to State Mgrs, 6.5.54, Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'.

123 J. Munro, memo, 27.10.53, AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3.

124 L. McIntosh remembers that 'Melbourne accepted a lot of the burden of "Plain Christianity" as there was a lot of strength in the State at that time - young eminent theologians were beginning to make their mark, e.g. Davis McCaughey', cf. personal interview 19.6.89.

for six months of the programme, the contacts being made through T.W. Bearup, the ABC's representative in London.¹²⁵ Henderson sent this brief to his speakers:

In this session, we ask the speaker to imagine himself seated in spirit with a group of 3-4 intelligent and respectful people who are interested in what he has to say but do not necessarily share his assumptions.¹²⁶

The style, then, was to be personal and intimate. Within these guidelines, speakers chose their own subjects. After two years, the talk was reduced to thirty minutes and the first quarter of an hour given over to 'Prelude'.¹²⁷ Other changes to the internal design of the programme were made from time to time, combining in different ways the elements of scripted talk, readings, prayer and music, but the intention never changed: 'to reach those without very definite religious commitments'¹²⁸ with a programme that explored 'the effect of contemporary conditions on religious faith and the impact of dynamic faith on modern life'.¹²⁹

'We are now inviting the best religious speakers in the English-speaking world', Henderson reported to the 1954 meeting of the FRAC.¹³⁰ '[It is] by far the most consistently worthwhile thing that we do', Munro wrote to the Controller of Programmes in 1957.¹³¹ Lawrence McIntosh, working in Melbourne from 1956 to 1960, remembers it as 'offering a fresh image of faith to people, to arrest, to crack open the mind'. He recalled how 'Kenneth Henderson and John Munro worked hard on the scripts beforehand in dialogue and debate with the chosen speakers'.¹³² These appraisals of 'Plain Christianity' were supported by an Anderson Survey in 1955 which rated it equally with serious music. Also around this time, this programme stimulated the second highest number of letters to the Department after 'Community Hymn Singing', which was receiving the most letters of all ABC programmes.¹³³

Both 'Religion Speaks' and 'Plain Christianity' showed the influence of John Munro on the Department's production. In both, there were more open-ended explorations of issues, into which Henderson was less inclined to venture, but which Munro preferred.

¹²⁵ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 20.5.53, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

¹²⁶ K. Henderson, letter to Rev. Frank Flynn, 6.10.54, Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'.

¹²⁷ Cf. B. Molesworth, memo to C. Progs, 20.7.49, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.8.

¹²⁸ K. Henderson, letter to All India Radio, 19.2.53, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

¹²⁹ ABC, *Annual Report 1956-7*, p. 32.

¹³⁰ FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 28-29.10.54, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

¹³¹ J. Munro, memo to C. Progs, 14.5.57, AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

¹³² L. McIntosh, personal interview, 19.6.89.

¹³³ Cf. AA(NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

Resources

The achievements of the Religion Department were hard won with a very small staff and budget. It was essential that presentations be attractive and of good quality, for one must please in order to persuade, and Henderson was as much preoccupied with high standards of production as anyone else in the ABC. 'Beauty has missionary value', he once wrote to his broadcasters.¹³⁴

As we noted earlier, Henderson circulated to broadcasting clergy a thousand copies of a booklet he wrote, *Broadcasting as a Religious Opportunity*. He ran courses in effective broadcasting in many locations around Australia. He and John Munro wrote precise briefing notes to particular broadcasters and tutored them in what was required. As much as time allowed, they probed topics with speakers and edited their scripts. Alan Robson gave his expert attention to the technical quality of broadcasts. They all evaluated their programmes, constantly looking for ways of improving their effectiveness.

However, Henderson often bewailed his lack of resources. Scripts were not being re-written with attention to the impact of every sentence, speakers were not rehearsed with playback so that they could hear themselves and do better.¹³⁵ The files of 'Community Hymn Singing' are weighty with decades of memoranda about problems with PMG officers' technical standards, some poor performances and presentations, too much preaching, unpleasant 'parsonical' voices, too many unfamiliar hymns, the same hymns too often repeated, questions of whether church congregations or their ministers or their organists should be paid a fee, and more.¹³⁶ Similar trials beset other programmes and there were simply not enough skilled staff available to deal with them. It was particularly difficult to maintain standards when programmes emanating from all States except NSW and Victoria were in the hands of Talks Department staff who might have little competence or enthusiasm for what they were doing. Yet, it was an important aspect of comprehensive broadcasting that all States participated in the production of programmes and were not confined just to listening. Henderson insisted on this, even though frustrated by the unevenness of presentation that resulted.

In fact, the sources for the programmes of such a tiny Department were astonishingly diverse and widespread, encompassing the contributions of many thousands of participants from all over Australia: worshipping and singing

¹³⁴ K. Henderson, 'Suggestions to clergy'.

¹³⁵ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 2.2.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

¹³⁶ Cf. AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

congregations and their ministers and musicians, choirs and orchestras and their conductors, theatre groups and their directors, theologians, philosophers, writers, composers, story-tellers. More than this, many renowned people from every continent in the world were presented to Australian audiences by the Department. A limitation, which was hardly thought of as such at the time, was the lack of women speakers in programmes. There were scarcely any. There were very few laymen for that matter.¹³⁷ The fact that the audience for 'Daily Devotional' from Monday to Friday consisted mainly of women impinged upon the FRAC sufficiently in 1953 for them to suggest that there be a woman speaker in this programme once a week. Henderson agreed and Munro maintained this practice from then on.¹³⁸ There was a very occasional woman speaker in 'Plain Christianity'.¹³⁹

For ideas for programmes, and, at times for their realisation, too, the ABC looked most of all to the BBC. Indeed, all the programmes described here were inspired by the BBC and some of them were BBC transcriptions.¹⁴⁰ Still, the Department, for the most part, spoke with a genuinely Australian voice, responded to Australian events and circumstances and honestly tried to serve the Australian community as best it could.

Serving Australia

Lord Reith, the founding spirit of the BBC, had likened the British Corporation to a school. The same imagery found its way into ABC language of this period, also. Henderson was one of a number of programme makers in the ABC who set out explicitly to aim their programmes just a little in advance of public taste or current public awareness, as they judged it, in the expectation that people would thus 'become capable of enjoying life at a higher level'.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ For example, Frank Sheed, a renowned writer in the English-speaking world, was the only layman used in 'Plain Christianity' in the whole of 1955, cf. Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'.

¹³⁸ FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 6-7.8.53, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8; SP1687/1, file R17/2/5.

¹³⁹ Mrs Geoffrey Fisher was one, cf. Hyde 'Files of the Fifties'. In fact, the women who did broadcast were most often wives of bishops or clergy, occasionally a deaconess or a nun, cf. AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8; SP1687/1, file R17/2/5; Hyde, 'Files of the Fifties'. Philippa Green, a Roman Catholic single laywoman, who spoke a number of times in 'Daily Devotional', was rare indeed. At the time, Green was presenting a regular programme of book reviews and comment on 2SM, sponsored by the Catholic Central Library which at that time was directed by The Grail, an international women's movement to which Green belonged. Cf. Green, personal interview, 1.6.91.

¹⁴⁰ The transcription service from the national broadcaster in the United Kingdom offered a great range of materials that gave support and enrichment to smaller and poorer broadcasting services in the English-speaking world.

¹⁴¹ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 25.1.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

The *Annual Report 1947-8* announced that 'a significant section of all classes in the community are devotees of the ABC'.¹⁴² However, McNair Anderson surveys of listeners from about that time showed that, in the areas where there was a choice between commercial stations and the national broadcaster, it was a minority who were committed ABC listeners.¹⁴³ This suggests that the majority of people were resistant to the improvement that the ABC planned for them. If you are broadcasting to a minority, how can you perceive yourself to be rendering a vital service to the whole community? Henderson, in a submission he made to an internal ABC Committee on Programme Policy in 1951, gave a firm, clear answer, which he recommended to the Commission as a whole. It is 'the fruitful minorities from whom all initiatives proceed' that are the concern of the national broadcaster. These provide the leadership in the community. Developing their capacities is to develop the community.¹⁴⁴

Pathways for the future

There is no doubt of Henderson's intention to be comprehensive with his broadcasts. The census provided an objective numerical basis for determining how to be comprehensive with balance. Small religious minorities did find a place in the broad sweep of programmes but not frequently, and some never. Adherents of non-religious philosophies of life were not considered to have a rightful claim in the scope of the Department's programmes, but they were invited to speak in discussions and debates organised in conjunction with the Talks Department. This was usually to express their views on particular issues, however, rather than to make coherent presentations of their philosophies. Rabbi Brasch, leader of the Jewish community at the synagogue in Woollahra, Sydney, protested once that, instead of census data, another measure for judging a religious group's claim to air-time might be the commitment of its members.¹⁴⁵ Certainly, the census did no more than provide numbers of nominal adherents and not active participants, but most religious communities did not keep reliable records of 'practising believers' and judging the quality of a community's faith was impossible of achievement.

Henderson set out to reconcile and unite Australians through his religious broadcasts.¹⁴⁶ This was a comprehensive mission arising from his deeply convinced,

¹⁴² ABC, *Annual Report 1947-8*, p. 4.

¹⁴³ Inglis, p. 142.

¹⁴⁴ K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs, 25.1.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.

¹⁴⁵ Rabbi Brasch, letter to Hd Rel., 20.5.76: 'Census statistics are not a sufficient basis for planning. The ABC should take into account the number of practising believers and the intensity of their faith.' Cf. File POL/CPP, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁴⁶ His experiences of war in Europe and of sectarian animosities in politics, society and religion at home intensified his desire for reconciliation among people. This became the

modern, Christian faith. Both his modern and his Christian certainties enabled him to range wide and confident in his area of specialisation, but also limited his openness to other ways of believing that did not belong in the liberal Christian 'mainstream' and made him uneasy with controversy on air which did not arrive at an acceptable Christian resolution before the session ended.

His programmes were varied in style and content in order to be broadly attractive, but there was a marked bias towards themes of practical devotion. A number of programmes of this kind were broadcast five and six times a week; they were short, but they were frequent.

Trying to produce quality programmes and aiming for broad appeal and participation proved, at times, to be conflicting objectives. To achieve the first, one needed to exclude poor performers ruthlessly. This was not so easily done with 'Divine Service' where schedules were drawn up on quite another basis; nor when the success of 'Community Hymn Singing' required a spread of congregations which were not all equally capable; nor when the Department's production rosters shared responsibility for programmes among all the States, whether or not staff members had the talent for, and interest in, the task to be accomplished. On the other hand, 'Radio Service' with all its flexibility, diversity and breadth, would not have come into existence but for Henderson's wish for more control over the quality of presentation.

Henderson's potential audience was inevitably limited by the audience reach of the ABC. People who listened only to commercial radio were beyond the direct reach of his programmes. He believed, however, that indirectly they too might be influenced by what he and his staff were able to achieve, so long as the leaders in Australian society were listening to the ABC.

We know now the structures Henderson put in place and the course he set for religious broadcasting. With this detailed examination of 'the Henderson years', the major themes for a study of comprehensive religious broadcasting have been set. These will be pursued further as we explore the years that followed.

preoccupation of his last years when he laboured long on a book on this theme which was never published. Cf. Henderson, personal papers.

PART III

ACROSS BARRIERS OF BELIEF

CHAPTER 6 IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

John Munro, 1956-61

While affirming his own adherence to Christianity and the large part that it played in the way of life of Australians, John Munro wanted to acknowledge, more than Kenneth Henderson had done, that world views that were not Christian, or even religious, contained truths which it was the business of religious broadcasting to air. His primary concern was that the Religion Department further the search for truth.

The leadership of the Department changed in November 1956, when Kenneth Henderson retired and Dr John Munro, now thirty-nine years of age, moved from Melbourne to take his place. Continuity was strongly maintained but there were some significant differences of approach. The issues involved in these differences became matter of public clamour in the 1970s and in this Part III of our study we will focus on them, that is, on questions related to the broadcasting of other than religious world views in programmes of the Religion Department. Munro participated in the efforts of the Department to determine its stance on these questions over some twenty years. His employment in the Department spanned the years 1953-61, the last five of these as Federal Supervisor. He then took a higher administrative appointment for two years as Federal Director of General Programmes (Radio).¹ In the years that followed, he was employed part-time as a religious broadcaster and consultant² and was a member of the FRAC when the scope of the Department's programmes became the focus of long and loud public controversy between 1975 and 1977.³ Throughout this whole period, John Munro held a consistent view, which was, however, never more than partially realised in practice.

How differently Munro and Henderson understood their task of comprehensive religious broadcasting is the subject of this chapter. First, we will survey what continued from Henderson's period of leadership through that of Munro.

Continuity

To begin with, Henderson himself did not cease to work for the Department after retiring as its Head. He was employed part-time under contract to broadcast in a new

1 'General Programmes' covered the Religion, Talks, Youth Education and Rural Departments, cf. Inglis, p. 201.

2 File, Dr J. A. Munro re contract, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

3 Cf. ch. 8.

programme, 'Frontier', and also to write programme briefs, to edit scripts and to contribute ideas for programmes.⁴

Henderson and Munro both valued highly the role of reason in faith, aiming in all their programmes, including the devotional ones, to address the reasonableness in people. Both insisted also that religious faith and life were integral to each other. Lawrence McIntosh, who began working with the Department in Melbourne in 1956, put it this way:

We attempted to be loyal to an apologetic stance, which we were taking at that time. We avoided banality and over-simplification...It seemed to be a time to appeal to people's intelligence.⁵

'An apologetic stance' meant one which sought to present and explain clearly and directly the response of religion to questions put to it from human experience.

The use of census statistics to keep in balance the allocation of programmes to different religious groups continued. The ABC maintained its monocultural broadcasting policy in accordance with the national social policy of the time, even though, with every year, more and more immigrants were arriving and adding to Australia's cultural diversity. There were some slight modifications to earlier practice, such as presenting more expressions of Asian and Orthodox Christianity and loosening the restrictions on broadcasting religious services which celebrated the national days of different countries.⁶

The educative role of the Department, which included opening Australians to the world, was maintained and further developed. Geoffrey Ward, who joined the staff in 1958, remembered the efforts they made, under John Munro's leadership, 'to put new information to air to help people develop a global view'. The example Ward gave came from a memory of 1963, two years after Munro had left the Department, but it was typical of the approach he had fostered as its Head: when Bishop John A. Robinson's 'Honest to God' was published in 1963, the Department promptly had a copy flown out from England, which arrived in Melbourne on a Friday. Rev. Barry Marshall of Trinity College studied it over the weekend and had his review available to

⁴ File Rev. Kenneth Henderson, held at Religion Dept, Sydney. Neither Henderson nor Munro after him had any superannuation and both were glad to be able to go on earning a small income in this way, cf. J. Peter, personal interview, 31.5.89.

⁵ L. McIntosh, personal interview, 19.6.89.

⁶ C. Progs, memo to Hd Rel., 15.7.57, AA (NSW): SP 587/1, file 8.4, pt 6. Where, in 1954, the ABC had refused to broadcast services in recognition of any national days of immigrant groups, this memo announced permission for such broadcasts for those who had consular representation in Australia.

the Department for broadcasting on Monday. Ward claimed that the Department at this time was 'in advance of society and church' in Australia.⁷

Both Henderson and Munro aspired to present their listeners with the best obtainable: in ideas, in speakers, in music, in plays.

Munro understood the reasons for Henderson's aversion to controversy and stayed careful here, choosing speakers thoughtfully and continuing to urge the virtues of courtesy, goodwill and tolerance on all his broadcasters and staff. Former members of his Department have told of the hours he spent discussing in advance the content and presentation of a talk or sermon with a speaker and of his careful editing of scripts.⁸ In view of the ABC's mandate to broadcast comprehensively, John Munro was convinced of 'the impossibility of allowing the air to be a divisive factor in the community'.⁹ McIntosh remembered, however, that he had made a distinction 'between raising issues and deliberately raising controversy'.¹⁰

All the programmes developed by Henderson remained on air through Munro's time. Only one new radio programme was added, 'Frontier', which was a programme of international news and comment, the first of its kind in Australia. Munro began it in 1958.¹¹ 'Frontier' took the time-slot of 'Religion Speaks' once a month and replaced it entirely in 1965.¹²

While he favoured opening the Department's programmes to more religious and ideological plurality, Munro nevertheless attached great importance to presenting the Christian church at worship according to the various historic traditions, convinced that worship of God lay at the heart of any profession of Christian faith. 'Humble, painstaking, clear-thinking acts of worship can be most compelling'.¹³

⁷ G. Ward, personal interview, 8.5.89. Ward commented that one only had to look at the church press of the day to realise how advanced the Department was at this time. One would have to except from this generalisation Brian Doyle, editor until 1959 of the *Catholic Weekly*, Sydney, and then of the *Catholic Leader* in Brisbane, who was outstanding in his day in the speed and spread of his international reporting.

⁸ Cf. McIntosh, interview, 19.6.89, and Ward, interview 8.5.89.

⁹ J. Munro to GM, draft reply to Fiji Broadcasting Commission, 28.2.57, AA (NSW): SP 1687/1, file R17/2/5.

¹⁰ McIntosh, interview 19.6.89.

¹¹ An even more significant fact about 'Frontier' was that it was the first Australian religious programme which had no antecedent in the BBC. In fact, there was still no religious news programme on BBC radio in 1971. Cf. David Winter (who retired as BBC Head of Religious Broadcasting in April 1989), 'A fight for life on the air', *Tablet*, 27.5.89, p. 589.

¹² ABC, *Annual Report 1958-9*, p. 14; and AA (NSW): ST 3051/1, file R17/2/2.

¹³ J. Munro, 'Communicating the Christian message through television', Address to Christian Television Association, Sydney, September 1959, p. 2.

From different perspectives

Kenneth Henderson and John Munro had much in common. Both were ordained Anglican priests, both were family men, both graduates of Melbourne University and both had spent some time in England doing postgraduate studies. Both were frustrated in the church in Australia. They were good friends who admired each other and collaborated well together. As Head of Department, each offered to his staff the freedom to use their talents well, while always being available to them and clear about goals. Yet, they were very different personalities.¹⁴

John Munro graduated from Melbourne University with First Class Honours in Philosophy and, then, while chaplain at Kings College, London, read for a Master of Theology in comparative religion and then for a Doctor of Philosophy under Professor E. O. James. Social anthropology and theology were brought together in his doctoral thesis to focus on the concept of prayer in Melanesian religion. Here is the first important difference between Munro and Henderson: Munro came to religious broadcasting from a background of broad studies in the religions of peoples, whereas modern Christian theology was the field of Henderson's postgraduate work and was always his primary focus.

In comparison with Henderson, Munro perceived himself as 'the more cognitive', Henderson 'the more affective' personality. He contrasted their relationship with their church in this way: Henderson was a genuinely liberal and loving man who wanted 'to help the churches by doing for them what they were unable to do'. His fidelity and commitment to his church was beyond question, yet he was never offered a place in the structures of the church. Munro, on the other hand, was much more critical of the church, yet, after he left the ABC in 1963, he became pastor of parishes in Sydney and Canberra, was Archdeacon in Albury and, in 1973, was appointed Chairman of the Australian Board of Missions, which was a recognised step to a bishopric. This was a step never taken, however, because he rather soon resigned from the Board, finding little satisfaction in his work. The experiences of the two men in their church were paradoxical: the one more structurally involved was the one more removed intellectually and emotionally from it; the one with the stronger personal bonds with his church was the more excluded from holding office within it.¹⁵

¹⁴ John Munro provided the following biographical information about himself, cf. J.Munro, personal interview, 21.7.89.

¹⁵ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

More complexity

John Munro's period of leadership of the Department was a time of increased, and increasing, plurality in society and in the communications media. As well, he, himself, took a more complex view than his predecessor of the task of religious broadcasting.

The social changes occurring at this time have already been outlined.¹⁶ One example of how these changes made religious broadcasting more complicated for Munro concerns the growing number and variety of Orthodox traditions in Australia. As the different groupings established themselves and acquired some self-confidence in their new land, ABC religious broadcasters had to become alert and sensitive to the interplay of religious, cultural, ethnic and political factors within and among these groupings.¹⁷ In 1957, Munro suggested that broadcast Orthodox services be extended to include more than only the one tradition of the Greeks, at the same time noting the need to proceed with caution.¹⁸ The Catholic tradition, also, was diversifying and Masses from, for example, the Ukrainian Rite began to be broadcast in this period. Asian Christianity, too, was more frequently aired from the late 1950s and into the 1960s. By this time, it had become ABC policy to permit the broadcasting of music and prayers of liturgies in a language other than English, but not sermons. Munro recalled how a bishop of a certain immigrant church community ignored this ruling and unexpectedly preached in his own language at the end of a broadcast liturgy one day. The sermon was heavy with political denunciation of the masters of his home land. The bishop won the day with his strategy of surprise; Munro ruefully registered the need for his staff to be better prepared and more watchful in the future.¹⁹

It is important to remember that Munro took over from Henderson just when television was being introduced into Australia. When the ABC was given responsibility for national television as well as national radio, its programme departments were called upon to produce material for both media.²⁰ The fact that Munro initiated only one new radio programme has to be placed in this context. An

¹⁶ Cf. ch. 4.

¹⁷ Post-war immigration strengthened existing Orthodox churches, such as the Greek, Russian and Syrian, and brought new foundations of others including Ukrainian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Coptic and Romanian. Cf. Breward, pp.66-7; and *A Yearbook for Australian Churches 1993*, Christian Research Association, Melbourne, 1992.

¹⁸ J. Munro, memos to C. Progs, 18.3.57, 10.6.57, AA (NSW): SP 587/1, file 8.4, pt 6.

¹⁹ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

²⁰ Cf. ch. 2.

entirely new medium was demanding attention and everything produced for that was new. Besides, the immediate popularity of television drew audiences away from radio, especially in the evening, and it took some years for people working in this medium to re-think broadcasting as a whole and discern the future of radio alongside television.²¹

Munro was an excellent scholar, intellectually tough and probing. Colleagues of his in the ABC spoke of his flexible mind, his lateral thinking. He was 'a challenging spirit', but without harshness; at once stimulating and courteous.²² Like Henderson before him, Munro dominated the Department since its staff were few and much less experienced than he, but he is remembered by them as an admirable leader and an able administrator who, with a minimum of bureaucratic structures and procedures, created a Department with a strong team spirit and clear goals. 'We had a map in our own heads' is how McIntosh described it.²³ Together, then, they continued to produce the programmes already put in place by Henderson, but marked now by the different emphases Munro brought to them.

A developing philosophy

In 1975, John Munro was invited to become a member of the Religious Education Curriculum Project Team within the Queensland Department of Education. 'Religious education' was not to be confused with 'religious formation' - the latter being the goal and function of a particular religious community as it engages in its own mission.

The Team identified three dimensions of religious education in a modern society and insisted that an adequate syllabus would need to encompass and inter-relate all three. The Team's assertions in relation to religious education are strikingly consistent with Munro's approach to religious broadcasting in the ABC. The first dimension was described as 'the general range of experiences which are part of our shared human existence'. These raise questions about the ultimate meaning, value and purpose of life and are the substance out of which faith responses arise. The second consists of the different belief systems which, over time, have formulated particular faith responses and have provided frameworks of meaning within which significant numbers of people have lived their lives. These systems may be religious or non-religious. The third is concerned with the patterns of belief, interpretation and

²¹ In 1959, the Commission noted that there had been initial shifts of 70%-90% away from radio to television in countries overseas, ABC. *Annual Report 1958-9*, p. 4. 'Australian radio generally began a re-think in the 1960s', according to Patrick Kirkwood (Hd Rel. 1977-86), personal interview, 9.5.89.

²² Ward, McIntosh and Kirkwood, interviews 8.5.89, 19.6.89 and 9.5.89 respectively; also, Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties', p. 203.

²³ McIntosh, interview, 19.6.89.

meaning which individuals develop for themselves under the influence of various agents within the culture. These may, or may not, lead people to make a commitment within one or other of the established faith communities.²⁴ There were many indications during his period of influence in the ABC of John Munro's seeking to build a philosophy of religious broadcasting around these perceptions.

In our complex, pluralistic society [the medium] provides valuable opportunities...to talk across not only denominations but also the barriers of conscious unbelief with those who, though they profess not Christianity, share with us a common concern for truth.²⁵

Munro wanted the Department's programmes to speak to those with a concern for truth. Like Henderson, he had in mind both committed Christians and 'those on the fringe of the recognised life of the churches, or outside them',²⁶ but he also wished for more communication with conscious unbelievers, people who professed intellectual grounds for rejecting religious faith and seeking meaning in other systems of thought and practice.

It was Munro's view that the responses of Christian faith to the ultimate questions raised by human experience had a particular status in a society historically shaped by a Christian view of reality, but that they could not properly claim a monopoly of the air-waves in a modern society, plural and secularised. The answers offered by other world religions and by secular ideologies had a legitimate place in the programmes of the Department, although humanism presented difficulties because of its highly individualistic character.²⁷

The audiences he sought were Australians who were open, or might be opened, to the questions of life underlying the events, relationships and choices they confronted. 'Experience should provide the agenda.'²⁸ There did not have to be 'neat certainty' in everything that was said. The paramount requirement for strong and significant religious broadcasting was that the audience be able 'to sense the struggle of all involved in the programme to face the truth honestly'.²⁹

²⁴ Religious Education Curriculum Project Team, 'Religious education - its nature and aims', Queensland Department of Education, Brisbane, 1977.

²⁵ Munro, 'Communicating the Christian message', p. 4. While the medium referred to here is television, this was Munro's mind regarding the use of radio, also.

²⁶ Munro, 'Communicating the Christian Message', p. 2.

²⁷ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

²⁸ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

²⁹ J. Munro, 'Possibilities for religious television programmes', *Religious Telecasting in Australia*, Report of Consultation, Ormond College, Melbourne, August 1966, Advisory Committee on Religious Programmes to ABCB and Australian Frontier, Canberra, July 1968, pp. 64-78.

That the Commission had a responsibility to support and promote social unity was fully accepted and the Department made every effort in its programmes to foster tolerance and reasonable judgment. However, Munro did not believe this required avoiding the airing of differences and conflict.³⁰ On the contrary, genuine unity depended on truthful exchange. Furthermore, the dynamism in the exchange of different views made for lively and interesting programmes and he thought it was possible to present these without being offensive or inflicting hurt on others.

The Department and the churches

Munro was convinced that the proper location for the churches to speak and act was in the midst of the 'hurly burly of opinions and attitudes'³¹ in Australian society, not just in the more controllable world of their own places and people and professions of faith. He advocated, and tried to facilitate, their working together to show people the relevance of Christian faith to the contemporary world. He reproached the churches for the continuing scandal of division among Christians³² and urged an ecumenical spirit among them, with which vigorous, open-hearted debate was not inconsistent.

His criticisms of the churches' performance in relation to the broadcast media rang with more asperity than Henderson's, although the judgments of the two men did not differ much. Munro told the main Christian churches bluntly that they had been 'culpably neglectful' of the media.³³ They were too narrowly focussed on morals and censorship, devotion and doctrine. It was as though the 'whole gamut of man's creative life' and the uses of power in society were not of concern to their faith or to their reason for existence.³⁴

Staff working with Munro in religious broadcasts remember his 'liberalising, critically-edged approach'.³⁵ The new programme, 'Frontier', reporting religious news and calling for the more detached approach of journalism to religious life and

³⁰ As has already been noted, the Department was aware of the theological debates of importance that were taking place with great vigour overseas and wanted to play a part in opening Australians to their influence.

³¹ J. Munro, 'Some reflections on television - from an old media man', *St Mark's Review*, July 1973, pp. 22-6. Munro had been a member of a Commission on Mass Media set up in 1968 by the General Anglican Synod and was here commenting on the Commission Report.

³² Munro, 'Some reflections', p. 25.

³³ Munro, 'Some reflections', p. 23.

³⁴ When the introduction of television into Australia was being planned, church members, clerical and lay, were, disappointingly, concerned with territorial questions like 'How much time for us?' and 'What programmes will we do?' rather than participating strongly in shaping the medium as a whole along balanced and responsible lines. Cf. Munro, 'Communicating the Christian message', p. 1.

³⁵ McIntosh, interview, 19.6.89

activities, represented a further development in the critical stance of the Department towards what proponents of religion said and did. The intention of this programme, however, was consistent with the spirit of service that generally motivated the Department: to be accurate, truthful and helpful, to seek the resolution, not the exacerbation, of the issues raised.³⁶

The Religion Department was bound by the obligation of the national broadcaster to provide comprehensive programming; at the same time, its functioning depended on co-operation with religious, and mainly Christian, institutions of faith. A certain ambivalence in the relationship of the Department to the churches was unavoidable.

Once Henderson had taken control of religious broadcasts, the ABC ceased being only a communication channel for the major Christian churches; it initiated and developed programmes guided by its own vision and standards. Under Munro the Department gained a little more strength in numbers and competence, aired more diverse opinions and began to loosen its ties with the religious establishment. It is important not to exaggerate this point; one might make the mistake of depicting Henderson as milder and less challenging to the churches than he was or of portraying Munro as less encouraging of them than he was. There is no doubt that Munro and his staff worked very hard and generously to enable the churches to overcome their deficiencies in communication. However, his preference for programmes where human experience was explored from different religious and philosophical points of view, and where speakers would open themselves to critical and conciliatory discussion, led in the direction of greater detachment from the authority of the churches. Yet, these centres of religious belief and practice in Australia were the natural allies of a Department committed to keeping religion on the public agenda. Their support was essential at times when the Department's programmes, even its survival, were under threat. Not Henderson nor Munro, but all their successors had to confront such crises.

We have identified two enduring sources of unease between the Department and religious communities, or sectors of them. One lay in the difference, alluded to above, between the concern of religious bodies that people receive formation in faith and the Department's interest, rather, in offering broad religious education to its audiences. The second was the liberal bias of the Department which encouraged an independence of thought and action unacceptable to those adhering to conservative traditions.

³⁶ Ward, interview, 8.5.89.

A developing department

It was clear that to achieve its purposes, the Department had to have staff who were capable of informed critical judgment and could work from an ecumenical perspective. They needed to be competent in appraising the content of scripts as well as in the techniques of broadcasting.

One can easily confuse the merely traditional with what is the essential tradition....theologically skilled people [are needed] in the formulation and development of programme ideas.³⁷

Henderson and Munro were of one mind in this and they chose new staff members carefully according to these requirements. Staff at this time were mostly male clerics, since it was these who had access to theological training at this time. Lawrence McIntosh, appointed to Melbourne in 1956, was an ordained Methodist minister, who read well and widely in contemporary theology and had a special interest in the theology of communication. Richard Connolly, BA, who joined the Sydney staff in the same year, was a Roman Catholic layman who had, however, considered priesthood and had studied philosophy and theology in Rome for some years. He was also creative and skilled in music and drama. Geoffrey Ward, appointed to Melbourne by Munro in 1958, was an Anglican priest from Sydney experienced in parish work with an enthusiasm for broadcast media - a rare mix.³⁸

These specialist appointments, however, were to Sydney and Melbourne only and did not resolve the production problems Henderson and Munro faced in 'the BAPH States'.³⁹ Both men knew what it was to feel frustrated and disappointed when programmes were less well presented than they might have been because the responsible staff members did not have the religious knowledge and sensitivity that was needed, whatever their good intentions. As Australian society and its religious composition became more complex, so religious broadcasting demanded more and more skilful attention. In 1953, Henderson, along with the Acting Manager for Queensland and Loftus Hyde in the Talks Department in Brisbane had joined forces to recommend that an extra person with the necessary qualifications for religious broadcasts be appointed to Talks in Brisbane and devote two-fifths of his time to

³⁷ Munro, 'Possibilities for religious television programmes', p. 64.

³⁸ Cf. File Staff Establishment, held at Religion Dept, Sydney; also, McIntosh and Ward, interviews, 19.6.89 and 8.5.89 respectively. When Mona Birrell, already the Department's secretary in Sydney, was made a broadcasts officer under Munro, she became increasingly responsible for children's programmes.

³⁹ This is ABC jargon for Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania. BAPH, pronounced 'baff', stood for Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart. These four States were also sometimes called 'the outer States'.

religious programmes.⁴⁰ In 1954, a Conference of Talks Supervisors had recommended that such an appointment be made in all States, pointing to the employment of Munro in Melbourne in 1953 as a model of what they were seeking elsewhere. The Federal Controller of Programmes, Dr Keith Barry, had not supported their submission, however, expressing the view that 'the situation in Victoria was not satisfactory' and that 'John Munro should be a full-time officer of Religious Broadcasts'.⁴¹ His memo said no more than this and it is not clear what inference can be drawn. Was he suggesting that there should be full-time officers for religious broadcasts in all States?

Hyde, as Supervisor of Talks in South Australia,⁴² continued to argue for appointments in the BAPH States of people with 'specialist knowledge, belief, sympathy and, if possible, religious background' to deal with religious broadcasts. In 1959, he sent a long memo to Munro to this effect, writing that such broadcasts should not be 'left in the care of agnostics, even though these might be consistently doing their best as a matter of duty'.⁴³ Munro, with this support, repeated the request to management for additional specialist staff. Then, in January 1961, Hyde received an urgent telegram from Munro asking him to make his submission again. The Talks Supervisors in the other States were similarly contacted; submissions from them all arrived in Head Office in Sydney within days of one other. In 1962, Munro's successor, James Peter, gained the assistance of specialist staff in every State. They were appointed to Talks, but were available to give two-thirds of their time to religious programmes.⁴⁴ Munro had acquired more power to facilitate this development once he had become Federal Director for General Programmes in 1961, and, in later years, cited it as one of his most significant contributions to the Department.⁴⁵

Concluding comments

When we consider the vigorous and conflicting currents stirring in the world and in Australia at the time, we can readily accept John Munro's statement of his objective in the five years he was Head of the Religion Department: 'to attempt what was

⁴⁰ There had been repeated criticisms of the quality of broadcasts of 'Divine Service' and 'Community Hymn Singing' from Brisbane. Hyde confessed 'that he was completely at sea in judging the quality of choirs'; nor had he enough time from other duties to produce these programmes well. Cf. R.C. Glenister, A/Mgr Qld, memo to K. Henderson, 14.9.53, File Need for a religious broadcasts officer in Queensland, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁴¹ Talks Supervisors, Minutes of conference, 7-9.6.54, and memo, SP 411/1, file 8.5, pt 4.

⁴² Cf. ch. 3, fn. 14.

⁴³ Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'.

⁴⁴ File Staff establishment (1959-62), held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁴⁵ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

possible'. 'It was a difficult time', he said, 'not ripe for me to do much other than steer through the minefields of controversy'.⁴⁶ He did not achieve all that he had hoped for, but this is not to say that his liberalising vision was not realised in programmes and did not live on in people with whom he had worked.

In the 1970s, when Australian society had become considerably more diverse and secularised, the question of how widely the programmes of the Religion Department should range became a matter of lively, sometimes strident, public argument. By then, different men were in the relevant positions of leadership in the ABC, although John Munro was still making a contribution to the discussion of policy as a member of the FRAC. This controversy of the 1970s is recounted in detail in chapter 8.

⁴⁶ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

CHAPTER 7 AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY (2): SINCE THE 1960s

Continuity with the 1950s

The post-war economic growth and affluence of the Western world continued unabated through the 1960s and into the 1970s in Australia. It was with the Federal Budget of August 1975 that the society as a whole was confronted with the need for economic restraints and warnings of difficult times ahead. The mood of the country, however, remained generally optimistic. There was, by this time, a mentality of affluence in Australia such that, at the end of the 1980s, the society was still slow to respond appropriately to the symptoms of economic ill-health. Other features of the world of the 1950s which continued into the following decades and had a strong impact on Australia were: decolonisation, migration and international alliances determined by the 'Cold War' and economic self-interest.

Decolonisation

Decolonisation continued around the world and more and more new nations took their seats in the General Assembly of the United Nations. The Australian poet, Les Murray, commented in 1982: 'The rhetoric of decolonisation has...shaken our old superiorities'.¹ The point is relevant to our study. Decolonisation not only shifted political power away from colonial governments, in particular regions and in the United Nations General Assembly, but also challenged long-held cultural assumptions and interpretations. 'The rhetoric of decolonisation' evoked the ideals of universal human dignity, equality and freedom, integral human development and social justice. The Christian churches of the West, and their missions at home and abroad, were as much confronted by it as secular authorities and institutions.

Migration

As one decade followed another, there was no lull in the steady and large migrations of people around the world. For some, migration was a change they freely chose; for many in intolerable political or economic circumstances it was a necessity for survival.

Between 1961 and 1971, and again in the next ten years to 1981, Australia's population increased by approximately 2.2 million each decade, a growth over the twenty years of some 41%. In the same period, the foreign-born component of the population increased 74%.² By 1981, 20.6% of Australia's population had been born

¹ L. Murray, 'Some religious stuff I know about Australia', *The Shape of Belief*, eds D.Harris, D Hynd and D. Millikan, Lancer, Homebush (Sydney), 1982, p. 23.

² *Historical Statistics*, pp. 8-9.

elsewhere. This percentage was considerably higher in several of the capital cities.³ Without all the necessary data from the 1991 census, we must be content with 1986 information. In the five years, 1981-86, the Australian population grew 5%; the foreign-born component of the population increased less than 5%. This was a marked change from earlier trends.⁴ Those identifying themselves as Aboriginal in the 1986 census totalled 206,000, that is 1.3% of the total population.⁵ By 1986, Australia contained about one hundred ethnic groups speaking eighty immigrant languages and one hundred and fifty aboriginal languages.⁶

While immigrants streamed steadily into Australia, the mix of cultures among them changed perceptibly in the 1970s. For example in the period, 1971-86, the proportion of Asians in the population almost trebled.⁷ The largest group of immigrants remained those from the United Kingdom and Ireland, but they and immigrants from Europe became an ever decreasing proportion of the total foreign born population.⁸

Immigration was one factor that changed the religious profile of Australia. This will be discussed in the course of this chapter.

International alliances and influences

Australia was more and more drawn into interaction with the rest of the world. Australians travelled overseas, opened their land and society to immigrants from every

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- ³ Perth 35.4%, Adelaide 34.4%, Melbourne 33.2%, Sydney 28.2%, Darwin 25.3%. Cf. ABS, Census 1981.
- ⁴ *Historical Statistics*, pp. 8-9 and Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Multicultural Australia*, ABS, Canberra, 1991, p. 3.
- ⁵ Torres Strait Islanders accounted for an additional 21,000. Cf. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, ABS, Canberra, 1991, p. 1. These residents of Australia were formally included in the census from 1967. The definition of 'Aboriginality' comprised three elements: having Aboriginal ancestry, identifying oneself as Aboriginal and being accepted as such by the Aboriginal community. Cf. L. Behrendt, 'Self-determination and Australia's indigenous people', unpublished lecture at The Grail Centre, Sydney, 19.6.93.
- ⁶ Committee of Review of Migrant and Multicultural Programs and Services, *Don't Settle For Less*, Report Stage 1, AGPS, Canberra, 1986, p. 42.
- ⁷ *Historical Statistics*, pp. 8-9 and *Multicultural Australia*, p. 3. 'Asians' in this context include 'Western Asians', that is, people from the Middle East and Asian Turkey. In 1966, Australia had entirely removed racial discrimination from its immigration policies. War in Lebanon and tensions in the Middle East generally, but, most of all, the catastrophes of Vietnam and Cambodia and their effects in Indo-China, dramatically increased the migrant intake from Asia. In 1978 alone, 10,000 Indo-Chinese refugees were accepted for permanent residence. In the late 1980s, 'business migrants' with capital to invest in Australia were sought and encouraged. This policy attracted immigrants from the middle class of a number of prospering East and South-East Asian countries.
- ⁸ Immigrants from the United Kingdom and Ireland declined as a proportion of the foreign-born population from 42.6% in 1961 to 32.3% in 1986. Europeans similarly declined from 47.7% to 31.3%. Cf. *Historical Statistics*, pp. 8-9 and *Multicultural Australia*, p. 3.

continent, negotiated international contracts in trade, industry and finance, implemented foreign policies in line with those of chosen allies and enthusiastically embraced each new achievement in communications technology to admit the ensuing rapid flow from abroad of information, ideas, music and images, and their attendant values and assumptions. These trends were evident in the 1950s but gained momentum in succeeding decades. The culture of the United States of America grew particularly pervasive in Australia from the 1960s.

Australia committed troops to Vietnam in 1964, as it had done in the Korean war in the 1950s, demonstrating its alignment with the policies of the United States⁹ and encouraging the Americans' continuing involvement with the Asian-West Pacific region. However, in the words of a song on the lips of masses in the mid-1960s, the times were a-changing. Public disillusionment in both countries with the war in Vietnam swelled to a tide of protest which forced a military withdrawal and left both societies wounded and divided by recriminations and shame. The size of America's military commitment in Vietnam was massive; Australia's contribution was quite small.¹⁰ The Australian Moratorium movement followed in time and was modelled on that of the United States.¹¹ Whether supporting or opposing participation in the war in Vietnam, Australian attitudes and conduct in relation to the war reproduced those of the people of the United States.

In 1973, the United Kingdom entered the European Economic Community, radically changing its relationships with Australia and New Zealand and, since then, Australia's involvement with Asia has accelerated in every significant field of endeavour.

A strong dialectic in Australian history, of independence and dependence of spirit, is evident in this period. While much that occurred in Australia was highly derivative, the 1960s and 1970s were marked by strong expressions of Australian self-esteem, increased public and private patronage of artistic creativity and a maturing sense of national identity.¹²

⁹ 'All the way with LBJ', announced Prime Minister Harold Holt in 1966.

¹⁰ American numbers reached a peak of half a million compared with 8000 Australians. Cf. Rickard, *Australia*, p. 213. Rickard's chronology of events in this book has been helpful in constructing this chapter.

¹¹ Oct. 1969 in USA, May 1970 in Australia.

¹² The 1960s saw the construction of national monuments in Canberra. The Sydney Opera House was completed in 1973. The Whitlam Labor Government (1972-5) acted immediately after winning the election to promote the image of Australian independence in practical and symbolic ways: appeals to the Privy Council were stopped, the Queen was titled 'Queen of Australia', Australian Honours were introduced, large sums were allocated for diversification and extension of education and for the arts. The Fraser Liberal Government, elected in 1975, maintained these policies. From the mid-1970s,

Change since the 1960s

In the 1960s, Western societies began to be stirred and troubled by movements for change that amassed considerable energy as they found political, social, cultural and religious expressions to challenge the conventions and establishments of the time.

Two major emphases could be discerned: intense social criticism and sweeping claims for freedom of individual consciousness and choice.

The hope within these movements was for radical revision of contemporary Western society. However, the basic assumptions of modern culture underpinned also much in the 'counter-culture' of protest. As well, movements for change were resisted with great energy by countervailing forces in society. The mobilisation of people around issues of universal justice, equity and peace was dramatic at times through the 1960s and 1970s but, what most endured through the 1980s were those things which gave expression to the individualistic impulses in modern culture. In the 1980s, the social conscience in Australia, as elsewhere in the West, was considerably quieted. Economic goals were put before social concerns, managers took the lead, capitalism acquired renewed vigour.¹³ The individual spiritual journey and search for meaning, inner states of consciousness, self-empowerment and self-transcendence absorbed much of the religious consciousness of the time.¹⁴

Social criticism

Allowing for differences in local circumstances, the social causes taken up in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, and strategies used to press them, replicated those being pursued in other Western societies, especially the United States.

The movement for the civil rights of black Americans with its vision of social integration based on the human dignity and equality of each person, gathered momentum in the 1960s and won a series of legal victories. Gandhi's strategies of public rallies and marches, symbolic actions and peaceful resistance to unacceptable laws and regulations were transplanted into Western societies at this time. The cry for 'rights' and the use of these same strategies spread among other groups, diverse in

both parties also espoused a proud vision of Australia as a uniquely peaceful and united multicultural society.

¹³ Land rights granted to the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory by the Liberal Government in 1976 were diluted by the Labor Government in 1986. 'New Right' ideologues formed 'think tanks' and began to wield their influence in conservative politics. Immigration and multicultural policies came under attack, cf. fn. 27 below.

¹⁴ By the end of the 1980s, Christian centres of study and renewal, like Ammerdown in Somerset, reported little response to programmes on justice, peace and reconciliation, whereas 'people came flocking' to retreats concentrating on 'individual spiritual guidance'. Cf. Melvyn Mathews, 'The director's dilemma', *Tablet*, London, 8.9.89, p. 1024.

their interests and social status but having in common experiences, or feelings, of disadvantage or frustration in society: indigenous peoples, youth, women, homosexuals, exploited workers, advocates of peace and disarmament and of the conservation of the environment, and so on.

Two other key words in the international language of social justice in the 1960s and 1970s were 'development' and 'liberation'. 'Development', used widely in an economic sense to refer to industrial and technological growth, was re-defined to encompass the integral well-being of persons and societies, not merely the commercial exploitation of their resources.¹⁵ However, control of world development remained with those who were industrially advanced and wealthy, and so the language of 'liberation' was taken up extensively as people clamoured for the freedom to grow in self-reliance.¹⁶

In Australia, campaigns for Aboriginal land rights stirred in the late 1960s.¹⁷ The Springbok Rugby Tour in 1971 was a climactic moment for Australians seeking to demonstrate their solidarity with 'freedom fighters' in other parts of the world. Women's Liberation was launched in Australia in 1969, Women's Electoral Lobby in 1972, Gay Liberation in the late 1960s,¹⁸ all of these developing agenda, language and styles owing much to their counterparts in the United States. Mention has already been made of the Vietnam Moratorium movement of 1970. In the next few years, the Federal Government confirmed Australia's commitment to a number of international conventions on citizens' rights,¹⁹ announced in 1973 a new orientation of policy

¹⁵ Cf. such widely read texts as: Barbara Ward, *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1962; Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (The Development of Peoples), Encyclical letter, Vatican, 1967; Lester Pearson, *Partners in Development*, Report, Praeger, New York, 1969; E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered*, Harper and Row, New York, 1973.

¹⁶ 'Liberation' became an international theme in Christian theology. The first major works of Latin American liberation theology were beginning to be read in English translation in the early 1970s, e.g. Helder Camara's *Revolution Through Peace* and Gustavo Gutiérrez' *A Theology of Liberation* were published in English in 1971. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which became a classic statement of principles of liberating education, was published in Portuguese in 1968 and in English in 1970.

¹⁷ Aborigines became citizens with the right to vote in 1967 and the McMahon Liberal Government established a Council for Aboriginal Affairs which began funding incorporated aboriginal groups. Cf. S. Castles, B. Cope, M. Kalantzis, M. Morrissey, *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Nationalism in Australia*, Pluto, Sydney, 1988, p. 21.

¹⁸ Rickard, *Australia*, pp. 238-9. Cf. two international bestsellers on feminism and homosexuality written by Australians at this time: Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1970; Denis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation*, Alan Lane, London, 1971.

¹⁹ For example, Conventions on Political Rights of Women and on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, cf. L. Spender (ed.), *Human Rights: the Australian Debate*, Redfern Legal Centre, Sydney, 1987, ch. 1.

towards a multicultural society²⁰ and enacted legislation against racial discrimination in 1975.²¹ In the 1970s, much of the diversity already long present in Australia found the public voice and institutional encouragement required for it to emerge as a dominant, some would say overwhelming, factor in the social, political and religious life of Australia since that time.

Young people, especially students, were often in the forefront of eruptions of protest against structures of power and authority. The affluence of Western societies in the 1960s and into the 1970s offered young people unprecedented opportunities to assert their independence from, and disapproval of, older generations. In Australia, they were attending universities in ever-increasing numbers assisted by government grants.²² Many could afford to leave their family homes and live independently with their peers. It was said repeatedly in the 1960s that youth and their elders were so far apart in their concepts and values that there was a 'generation gap' of understanding and communication. The mass communications media played a significant part spreading and promoting this message of radical discontinuity in society, which was a source of serious inhibition in encounters between adults and young people.

Those who held institutional power in society responded to pressures for change in different ways: inflexible administration of rules with sanctions against rebels,²³ submission to the will of the dissenters,²⁴ adaptation of their structures and processes sufficient to appease their critics. The changes wrought in national policies in the 1970s regarding immigrants and, by extension Aboriginal Australians, were an example of institutional adaptation with far-reaching effects in Australian society. By the mid-1970s, no political party could safely ignore the immigrant vote. The policy of assimilation gave way to one of 'integration', which allowed for cultural plurality consistent with a unified social structure. Successive Federal and State governments provided and funded multilingual services and encouraged immigrants to maintain

²⁰ Cf. A. J. Grassby, 'A multi-cultural society for the future', Department of Immigration Reference Paper, AGPS, Canberra, 1973.

²¹ Spender, ch.1.

²² In 1975, the number of university students in Australia was ten times that of 1945, cf. B. Wilson, *Can God Survive in Australia?*, Albatross, Sydney, 1983, pp. 71-2. The numbers of young people had also been steadily growing; the number of births in Australia had risen steadily every year from 1946 to 1961, except 1948. Cf. National Population Inquiry, *Population and Australia*, First Report, vol. 1, AGPS, Canberra, 1975, p. 64.

²³ This was the approach of the Queensland State Government which enacted new laws and imposed heavier penalties in the 1970s against street marches and rallies.

²⁴ Authorities in some of the university halls of residence in Armidale, NSW, entirely abandoned their institutions to student management for a time.

expressions of cultural identity.²⁵ In the 1980s, there were signs that Australians were becoming aware of the social significance of the religious faiths of immigrants.²⁶ It was at this same time, however, that conservative Australians were voicing louder opposition to multicultural policies. These criticisms were quieted at the time by prompt statements from the two major political parties affirming their commitment to a multicultural Australia.²⁷ Aboriginal Australians whose impact in the ballot boxes was slight compared with that of immigrants and whose claims were more threatening to the dominant society had, and still have, a harder row to hoe to win and retain equitable social and economic status. Their Aboriginal spirituality has attracted growing interest since the 1970s, as a result of their campaigns for land rights, the appeal and success of their art and specialised research from this perspective.²⁸

The role of mass media, especially television, in the stir and sweep of events in this period was immeasurably great.²⁹ It was both unifying and divisive. It has often been remarked that the war in Vietnam was the first to be televised in all its horror into millions of homes as a daily serial. Journalists and cameramen powerfully influenced public opinion of this war; and all future wagers of war, if they were concerned about world opinion, had to take them into account in their strategies.³⁰ The politics of organised public criticism and dissent at all levels depended heavily on mass media with its power to reach millions with the message of a few. At the same time, the global media played a vital role in the bonding of people across the world; one of the most potent allies of group solidarity, music, and especially song, was borne on the airwaves from country to country.

²⁵ The 'Galbally Report', 1978, set out the programmes and services needed. Already in 1975 publicly funded ethnic radio stations had been opened and SBS, which was to be responsible for multicultural broadcasting by radio and television, had been set in place in 1977. Multicultural television was launched on a permanent basis in 1980, cf. 'Dix Report', ss. 12.26 ff. The ethnic communities won another political victory in 1986 when their public protests and lobbying persuaded the Federal Government to withdraw its proposal to amalgamate SBS with the ABC.

²⁶ Many of Australia's immigrants came from societies where religious faith was a significant component in the people's aspirations and political activities: e.g. Latin America, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, East Timor, Vietnam, the Middle East, to mention a few. The Access and Equity Project in Springvale, Victoria, 1988-9, showed the way to other City Councils by giving the faith communities of the city and their leaders a central role in fostering a tolerant, co-operative community.

²⁷ Well-known historian, Geoffrey Blainey, alarmed Australians with his assertions that 'multiculturalism' was a dangerous illusion. What 'multiculturalism' actually meant to the various parties involved in this debate was not made clear. For an informed discussion of the subject, see Castles, Cope, Kalantzis and Morrissey, *Mistaken Identity*.

²⁸ For example, Swain, *Interpreting Aboriginal Religion*.

²⁹ Television, having reached Australia in 1956, spread rapidly in the 1960s and utilised satellite transmission from 1968. Colour was widely introduced in 1975. Cf. *History and Development of the ABC 1932-86*.

³⁰ Media management was an important part of the Falklands and the Gulf Wars.

Public demonstrations of protest, hopeful of television coverage, have endured to become almost a daily occurrence in the major cities of Australia. Social reform in the 1980s, however, had none of the euphoria of the late 1960s and early 1970s; it had become the dogged labour of a dedicated few, while most concentrated on securing their own well-being. National and personal confidence was greatly undermined by Australia's poor economic performance, high levels of unemployment and increasing poverty and homelessness. But worse, the unprecedented exposures of deception, waste and irresponsibility in private enterprise and public service cast doubt on the moral capacity of Australia as a whole to become a just and peaceful society. Australians in the 1980s became anxious and sceptical.³¹

Freedom of individual consciousness and choice

'Liberation' was both a call for social justice for those who were oppressed and a claim for unfettered, individual self-expression and self-enhancement. It was the common theme of these two movements within Western culture which, in other respects, were conflicting currents flowing through events and decisions of the time.

The self-focussed search for liberation took Australians along many different paths. There were those who turned towards education and training. Many women, particularly, took this option to develop their potentialities and re-define their social worth and they entered, or re-entered, the workforce in large numbers. Insertion into the structures of society formerly resistant to them was the route to emancipation that these chose.³² In a contrary direction, others moved to detach themselves from established social patterns and norms. The quest for liberation in interpersonal relationships led many to leave their current commitments in search of alternatives which offered more spontaneity and vitality. These trends, along with the so-called 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s and 1970s - explorations of human sexuality which disregarded the conventions of earlier generations - had an extensive and deep impact on the daily lives of people. Men and women's perceptions of themselves, of their

³¹ By the end of the 1980s, 60% of patients in the surgeries of general practitioners were said to be exhibiting anxiety symptoms, cf. Hugh Mackay, 'Australian society', Address to Anglican Church, Melbourne, videotape, 1991. Mackay spoke of an 'epidemic of anxiety' among ordinary Australians and a great sense of loss of control over their lives. He noted the increase in the number of 'swinging voters' from 5% in the mid-1970s to 30% at the end of the 1980s.

³² Women's participation rate in the work force increased from under 40% in the early 1960s to over 55% in 1986, cf. ABS, Labour force participation rate, census data for 1961 and 1986.

meaning for one another and of their respective roles in society were profoundly affected.³³

The focus on self-empowerment and on the feelings of the moment brought a new perspective to morality and ethics. Moral norms and authorities of the past were irrelevant to judgments based on 'what feels right for me now'. Relative ethics of this kind was another fragmenting factor in society, making social moral consensus on almost any issue difficult, if not impossible, and the ethos of the society more and more susceptible to effective pressure groups and convincing publicity.³⁴

Religious and spiritual experiences oriented to self-enhancement attracted many devotees. People explored a variety of ways of achieving inner tranquillity, or heightened states of consciousness, or self-mastery, or happiness in communion with a greater reality. This focus on the individual increased religious diversification in Western societies.

World Council of Churches and Vatican II

Religious communities and associations, and their members, participated in, and were affected by, these movements for change in Western societies. Two world-wide Christian bodies, very different from each other, gave ample evidence of this: the Roman Catholic Church from the time of the Second Vatican Council, 1962-5, and the World Council of Churches (WCC) from around the same time.

Vatican II, to use the familiar abbreviation for the Second Vatican Council, set the official seal of approval of the Roman Catholic Church on a number of modern reforms and insights touching all aspects of its life: Scripture, doctrine, theology, liturgy, mission, ecclesiology, ethics, law. The church turned more benignly towards the modern world, acknowledging the presence and action of the Holy Spirit there and committing itself anew to serving God's will for love and justice within it.³⁵ The fact that this opening of the church to the modern world coincided in time with the stirrings within modern societies that have been described had the effect of intensifying

³³ By 1990, in 40% of marriages in Australia one or both partners had been previously married. The nuclear family of two parents and their children accounted for only 26-7% of households. Cf. Mackay, 'Australian society'.

³⁴ Cf. such issues as the availability and use of addictive drugs, genetic engineering, patenting life forms, costly medical procedures for the affluent as against world-wide basic health, euthanasia, ethics in business and politics, pornography, nuclear technology, violence in society. The lack of moral consensus was very clearly demonstrated in the Australian Values Systems Study (AVSS) 1983, when respondents were asked to indicate which of 24 given actions they considered could never be justified. Cf. G. Bouma and B. Dixon, *The Religious Factor in Australian Life*, MARC Australia and ZADOK Centre for Christianity and Society, Melbourne, 1986, p. 124.

³⁵ Cf. W. M. Abbott (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1966.

movements for change in both domains of church and world. The church added strength to efforts for peace, democracy, the just sharing of resources, racial equality and the protection of minorities³⁶ and, at the same time, itself was changed more radically and more dramatically than Vatican II had envisaged or intended. As many Catholics claimed a greater role for individual consciousness and choice and demanded more responsible participation in decision-making, official statements and policies began to meet with outspoken dissent. Pronouncements might be condemned as inappropriate to contemporary times, or judged to be erroneous departures from inviolable tradition.³⁷ The Roman Catholic Church became simultaneously more engaged with the contemporary world and more diversified and divided on many issues.³⁸

The WCC was more strongly influenced by contemporary social and cultural movements in Western societies than the Roman Catholic Church, because already more permeated by the assumptions of modern culture. In turn, the Council and its member bodies made their impact on these movements. One has only to read the Introductions to the Reports of the Central Committee of the WCC, produced just prior to every Assembly, to realise the extent to which the events and prevailing currents in the world shaped the Council's agenda over the years. The Fourth Assembly in Uppsala in 1968, however, marked a significant shift in WCC policy.³⁹ The Council determined from this point in its history 'to be relevant to the challenges' of the time and to pursue a policy of 'bold and open confrontation' against racism and other forces for oppression identified by the Council.⁴⁰ The WCC set its priorities and strategies accordingly and its subsequent vigorous engagement in various parts of the world was both applauded and condemned in its member churches at the national

³⁶ Cf. the spiritual and intellectual contribution of liberation theology to political movements in Latin America, the Philippines, South Africa and other parts of the world.

³⁷ Cf. the widespread dissent in the affluent West from Pope Paul VI's encyclical, 'Humanae Vitae', in 1968, and particular debates on abortion, homosexuality, divorce, married clergy, roles for women in the Church, involvement of clergy in politics; and denunciations by 'traditionalists' of various decisions of Vatican II.

³⁸ For a sociological reflection on plurality in the Roman Catholic Church in Australia, see R. Ireland and P. Rule, 'The social construction of the Catholic Church', *Religion in Australia*, ed. A.W. Black, pp. 20-38.

³⁹ There was a record number of young people at Uppsala. Special provision was made for their participation and their influence on the Assembly was intense. The Assembly took place just as violent clashes between student protesters and police were occurring in several countries, e.g. student barricades in Paris streets. Cf. E. Carson Blake, 'Uppsala and afterwards', *The Ecumenical Advance: a History of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Harold E. Fey, vol. 2, 1948-68, SPCK, London, 1970, pp. 413-45.

⁴⁰ P. Potter, 'Introduction', *From Uppsala to Nairobi, 1968-1975*, Report of Central Committee of WCC to 5th Assembly of WCC, Friendship Press, New York, pp. 17, 21.

and local levels.⁴¹ Opposition from some churches and sectors of churches arose out of their deep dismay that the WCC seemed to be abandoning its primary vocation of Christian evangelisation in the world based on the only reliable sources for a life pleasing to God: revelation and guidance from Scripture and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.⁴²

As we have seen, contemporary relevance had become a complex objective. Authorities at every level of church life had to decide how best to act in these circumstances of conflict and contradiction. As the Roman Catholic Church and other churches in the 'mainstream' of the Western Christian tradition sought close engagement with the contemporary modern world, they acquired, themselves, a more secular spirit and became more plural in belief and practice.⁴³ Profound differences within them strained the bonds uniting their members. There were other churches and church organisations that firmly resisted these intrusions into their faith and ethos, such as conservative evangelical communities and groupings which insisted on fundamentalist interpretations of Scripture, including Pentecostal churches with their 'theology of distrust in the world'.⁴⁴

The 1960s and 1970s saw the Roman Catholic Church establishing closer ties with the WCC and its member churches.⁴⁵ Parallel to the commissions and co-operative projects of Rome and Geneva and their affiliates, a second stream of ecumenism also gathered momentum. As churches became more internally diversified, people began to discover more compatibility of faith and hope with others across denominational barriers than they could find in their own communities.

⁴¹ The most controversial WCC project was one in its Programme to Combat Racism: sending funds for humanitarian aid to armed liberation movements in Africa. Cf. Engel, *Times of Change*, pp. 270-1.

⁴² For Visser't Hooft, Uppsala marked a new orientation for the WCC. He was uneasy with the Council's being too much driven by the agenda of the secular world and not enough by the will of God for the world as revealed in Scripture. He advocated holding both poles in tension and represented a moderate position between enthusiasts on either side. Cf. his *Memoirs*, pp. 363 ff.

⁴³ An international best-seller received as a prophetic work by many Christians at the time was Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, in which Cox argued the case for the churches' positively embracing secularisation.

⁴⁴ W. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, SCM, London, 1972, p. 485.

⁴⁵ From 1961 onwards, Catholics were observers at WCC Assemblies and there were non-Catholic observers at Vatican II, which produced the important Decree on Ecumenism in 1964. In 1968, the WCC and the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace jointly formed Sodepax, a committee for Society, Development and Peace, which functioned for a few years. Formal inter-church collaboration in all areas of church life markedly increased not only at the international level but also nationally and locally. For an Australian account, see Engel, *Times of Change*.

Religious plurality in Australia

86.2% of Australians identified themselves as Christian in the 1971 census.⁴⁶ This had reduced to 73% by 1986.⁴⁷ The difference was accounted for in an increase in the numbers of four groups of respondents: those claiming no religion, those declining to answer the question,⁴⁸ adherents of non-Christian religions and those whose responses could not be interpreted. Those claiming to have no religion increased, as a proportion of the population, from 6.7% in 1971 to 12.7% in 1986.⁴⁹ Also in the same period, followers of religions other than Christian increased 150%, although they were still only 2% of the population.⁵⁰

Nominal connection with a particular religious grouping need not mean vital religious belief and practice.⁵¹ On the other hand, what 'no religion' meant to those who described their position in this way cannot be interpreted with any certainty, either. The Australian Values Systems Study (AVSS) of 1983 showed that many people made a distinction between identifying with a particular religious group and perceiving themselves as religious persons. In this study, 3% of those identifying as Anglicans and nearly 2% of Protestants declared that they were convinced atheists and over 30% of those who identified themselves with a Christian denomination did not

⁴⁶ This represented a small decline of 2% during the 1960s which occurred in the latter half of the decade.

⁴⁷ This decline did not occur uniformly among the Christian churches. The Catholic and Orthodox churches increased in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the population, these churches being the most likely to gain additional adherents from among immigrants. A number of other small Christian groups either maintained or increased their numbers; the Pentecostal churches showed more than 100% growth in the ten years 1976-86. The decline in numbers as a percentage of the population occurred in the Anglican and major non-conformist denominations. Cf. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Religion in Australia*, ABS, Canberra, 1991, p. 2; and G. Bouma, 'Australian religiosity: some trends since 1966', *Practice and Belief*, eds A. Black and P. Glasner, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, p. 17.

⁴⁸ Cf. ch. 3, fn. 7. It is known that there has always been some opposition on religious grounds or for reasons of privacy to the inclusion of this question in the census and that the refusal to answer need not indicate unbelief or indifference.

⁴⁹ Up until 1971 those claiming no religion in the census totalled less than 1% of the population. The 1971 figure showed a dramatic increase of more than eight times the 1966 figure. For the first time in 1971, this instruction appeared on the census paper: 'If no religion, write "none"', cf. ABS, *Religion in Australia*, p. 1. This directive would have provided some positive encouragement to respondents who had previously been reluctant to answer in this way. It might be that in 1971 people were more honest because declaring that one had no religion had become more socially acceptable. If so, then the responses to this question prior to 1971 would have been correspondingly inaccurate.

⁵⁰ For all the statistics in this paragraph, cf. ABS, *Religion in Australia*, p. 1.

⁵¹ A recent study of nominalism in Australia can be found in P. Bentley, P. Blombery and P. Hughes, *Faith Without the Church?: Nominalism in Australian Christianity*, Christian Research Association, Melbourne, 1992.

consider themselves religious persons.⁵² Furthermore, 21.2% of those who claimed to have no religion described themselves as religious persons.⁵³ The National Social Science Survey of 1989 revealed that almost a quarter of this group 'affirmed belief in a personal God and another quarter in a higher power'.⁵⁴ One is left to wonder what 'religion' and 'religious' connoted for all these people. Their responses in these surveys demonstrate something of the complex and diverse interpretations of these words in contemporary Western societies, which were discussed in the first chapter of this study.

Religious nominalism is usually measured in terms of frequency of attendance at church.⁵⁵ The percentage of Australians attending church more often than once a month has almost halved in thirty years since 1960.⁵⁶ Factors involved in this decline have been explored in the sources quoted.⁵⁷ How appropriate it is to measure the religious, or Christian, commitment of Australians over this period by the convention of frequent church attendance is a matter for argument. One of the effects of the cultural and social movements that shook Western societies in the 1960s was to change the ways people expressed their religiosity and participated in communities of faith. Another measure, suggested by the findings of the AVSS 1983, might be eclecticism, the extent to which individuals have withdrawn from commitment to one tradition and have made their own selection of doctrines, devotions and principles of conduct from the available range.⁵⁸

Pentecostal churches, while still only a small fraction of the population,⁵⁹ grew dramatically in Australia from the mid-1970s in contrast to the 'mainstream' of Christian churches.⁶⁰ They offered a felt experience of God in community with

⁵² Bouma and Dixon, p. 11.

⁵³ Bouma and Dixon, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Bentley, Blombery and Hughes, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Bentley, Blombery and Hughes define 'nominalism' in terms of identifying with a denomination but attending church less frequently than once a month, p. 1.

⁵⁶ Bentley, Blombery and Hughes, p. 23.

⁵⁷ Such factors as the exceptionally high level of church attendance in 1960 following the Billy Graham Crusade in 1959, changed immigration patterns, reduction in the size of families, as well as people's personal loss of religious faith. Cf. Bentley, Blombery and Hughes, pp. 23-5.

⁵⁸ Cf. ch. 1, fnn. 22, 40-3. The AVSS 1983 recorded that an extraordinary 25% of Australians believed in re-incarnation, even though only 3% of the sample surveyed claimed adherence to a non-Christian religion.

⁵⁹ 0.7% of the population, cf. Bentley, Blombery and Hughes, p. 38.

⁶⁰ Between 1977 and 1986, the Assemblies of God, accounting for 60% of these churches, recorded a threefold increase in the number of their congregations and a sevenfold growth in the number of adherents, cf. D. and G. Smith, *A River is Flowing: A History of the Assemblies of God in Australia*, Assemblies of God in Australia, Adelaide, 1987. This growth in Pentecostalism has been a world-wide phenomenon.

others, definitive answers to people's problems and anxieties and a religious way of life centred on personal salvation.

Charismatic Christianity, of which the Pentecostal churches are a particular organised expression, began to spread in Australia from the late 1960s. Charismatic Christians attach 'supreme importance...to the subjective religious experience of being filled with, or possessed by, the Holy Spirit'.⁶¹ Charismatic groups attracted Christians in the various denominations, most of whom remained faithful to their own congregations while finding more scope for spontaneity and emotional expression and more intimacy in these prayer groups. Bringing Christians together in their subjective experiences of faith, the charismatic movement was part of the unofficial second stream of ecumenism referred to above. However, inherent in charismatic Christianity are tendencies towards fundamentalist interpretation and application of the Scriptures, devaluation of the secular world and elevation of individual inspiration above established authority. For a number of charismatic Christians, then, the gap between them and their churches widened as they adopted these criteria for appraising a life of faith in the contemporary world. This was a separating trend that worked against the ecumenical flow in the charismatic movement.⁶²

Immigrants further diversified religion in Australia. As the years passed, more and more Christian churches with distinct national or cultural loyalties and customs secured their places in Australian society.⁶³ As immigration from Asia increased, so also did religions of Asia: Moslem, Buddhist, Hindu, Baha'i and others. In innumerable neighbourly encounters, Australians were becoming acquainted with the faith and ways of others formerly quite alien to them. There were many immigrants, as well, who avowed no religious faith and reinforced the body of secularist opinion and outlook within the society.

Dissatisfaction with their own society and a corresponding taste for what was new and different led numbers of people in the West in the 1960s and 1970s to seek personal peace, meaning or enlightenment in the spiritual and disciplinary traditions of the East. Numbers of Australians, especially young people, set off to Asian countries

⁶¹ R. Mapes Anderson, 'Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity', *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, p. 229.

⁶² In connection with this point, Hollenweger argued that it was sociologically necessary for Pentecostal churches to avoid ecumenical involvement because they had to maintain 'clear landmarks' between themselves and those they perceived to be contaminated by the world, cf. pp. 485-6.

⁶³ Cf. ch. 6, fn. 17 for list of Orthodox churches. As well, there were Uniate Catholics, such as the Armenians, Chaldeans, Maronites, Melkites and Ukrainians, and other nationally, or culturally, based churches including Dutch Reformed, Swiss and Chinese Protestant, Moravians and Mennonites, Lutherans from different European countries, and others. Cf. Breward, p. 66, and *Yearbook for Australian Churches 1993*.

where they joined their peers from around the world in this quest. At the same time, 'gurus' from the East travelled to Western countries to find followers there. New religious movements began to proliferate. They grew around attractive and persuasive leaders and endured where the induction processes were effective and where there were stable structures to sustain relationships and the mission of the movement.⁶⁴

No picture of religion in Australia would be adequate without reference to the individual, private, often eclectic religiosity of people with no affiliation to any church or identifiable religious grouping. Australians who claimed to have no religion appeared in the 1983 Survey among those who considered themselves religious persons and among those for whom God was important.⁶⁵ They were among those who regularly meditated and prayed.⁶⁶ They could be found espousing New Age notions of spiritual wholeness and access to revelation and guidance.⁶⁷ They could be heard speaking on radio and television of their encounters with the Sacred in nature and in human creativity and relationships.⁶⁸

The point was made earlier that Australians in the 1930s generally had a poor knowledge and understanding of religion and religious life.⁶⁹ Forty years later, Hans Mol, reflecting on religion in Australia in 1971, observed: 'As in Britain, the goodwill towards religion is counter-balanced by a massive woolliness of thinking about it'.⁷⁰ In the 1970s and 1980s some departments for the study of religion opened in a few Australian universities, a number of tertiary Christian institutions developed undergraduate and postgraduate theology studies for lay people and State Education Departments designed curricula and materials for religious education in primary and

⁶⁴ Well-known movements established in Australia include the Children of God, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the Church of New Faith (Scientology) which L.Ron Hubbard had begun earlier but which attracted new interest in the 1960s, the Unification Church, Ananda Marga, The Forum, the Da Free John movement, the Rajneesh Meditation Centres.

⁶⁵ According to the AVSS 1983, 21.2% of respondents who claimed no religion considered themselves personally religious; God was of some importance to 38% of them (very important to 6%), while 58% affirmed their belief in a personal God or Spirit or Life Force. Cf. Bouma and Dixon, pp. 11, 13, 15.

⁶⁶ In the same survey, 17% of these prayed, meditated or contemplated often (6% most days); only a little over half never did. Cf. Bouma and Dixon, p. 10.

⁶⁷ For an Australian description of 'New Age', see D.Millikan and N.Drury, *Worlds Apart?: Christianity and the New Age*, ABC, Sydney, 1991.

⁶⁸ For example, in such ABC radio programmes as 'Search for Meaning', 'Encounter', 'Sunday Night Talk', 'Late Night Live'. Significant in this connection is the discovery by Alistair Hardy's Religious Experience Research Unit in Oxford that the vast majority of people living in an industrial society have experiences which they call religious. Cf. A. Hardy, *The Spiritual Nature of Man*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1980.

⁶⁹ Cf. ch. 3.

⁷⁰ H. Mol, *Religion in Australia: a Sociological Investigation*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1971, p. 302.

secondary schools.⁷¹ All of these advances were informed by overseas scholarship and experience and they stimulated and promoted professional research, which has increasingly provided reliable insights into religious life and influence in Australia.⁷² While 'massive woolliness' still prevails, these developments of the last two decades have enabled a growing number of Australians to comprehend religious perceptions of reality more deeply as well as the cultural and social significance of religion in the life of the nation.

The ABC and social change

Dr Earle Hackett, Deputy Chairman of the Commission, described the difficulties of the ABC in 1976 in these terms: 'Social changes put a national broadcasting system on the rack'.⁷³ Surveys of public opinion conducted in 1973 and 1979 showed that there was no national consensus on the role of the Commission.⁷⁴ The following chapters will describe something of the complexity and contradiction in the task that confronted the Religion Department of the ABC from the 1960s, as it tried to communicate in an 'adequate and comprehensive' way to the people of Australia.

⁷¹ For example: the Dept of Education in South Australia began to develop new courses in Religious Studies for State schools in 1973 and a Religious Studies Dept was introduced into the College of Advanced Education in 1974 (now part of the University of South Australia) to prepare teachers; also in 1974, the University of Queensland set up a separate Dept of Studies in Religion and in 1975, the Qld Dept of Education began its Religious Education Curriculum Project; religion became an Area of study at Latrobe University in 1976 and was made a Division in 1985; the Religious Studies Department in Sydney University opened in 1977; in 1974, Yarra Theological Union opened its courses to lay people, who accounted for nearly 60% of the enrolment by the end of the 1980s. (Information obtained from these institutions.)

⁷² Mol's book, published in 1971, was the first major sociological study of religion in Australia.

⁷³ ABC, *Annual Report 1975-6*, p. 9, report of address to National Press Club, Canberra, 15.6.76.

⁷⁴ Hoare, Wheeler and Lenehan Public Opinion Survey, August-Sept 1979. The results closely paralleled a 1973 survey. Cf AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R 2/9/2.

CHAPTER 8

'WISE DECISION' OR 'LOST OPPORTUNITY'?

James Peter, 1961-77

In 1961, the ABC advertised for a new Federal Supervisor of Religious Broadcasts. Dr John Munro was moving to the position of Federal Director of General Programmes.¹

Rev. James Peter was appointed third Head of the Religion Department in October 1961.² Whereas his predecessors, Henderson and Munro, were Melbourne Anglicans greatly influenced by their experiences of postgraduate studies in the universities of Oxford and London respectively, he was a Presbyterian who had done all his tertiary studies in Sydney.

Intending to become an ordained minister in his Church, Peter graduated a Bachelor of Arts with a Diploma of Education from Sydney University in 1940 but, then, joined first the Army then the Air Force, marrying in 1942. Immediately after the Second World War, he returned to studies for the ministry and was ordained in 1948. From his pastoral posting at St Andrew's, Maroubra, he continued studying and, with a Bachelor of Divinity with Honours in Church History and Old Testament, took up an appointment in Queensland in 1952 to teach theology and church history.³ There he remained until joining the ABC ten years later at the age of forty-two. He already knew something of the Religion Department which he inherited from Munro, because he had broadcast a number of talks under the Department's auspices and had been, for three years, a member of the FRAC.

James Peter's commitment to Christian ecumenism was long and strong. He was a Presbyterian delegate to the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches (renamed Australian Council of Churches in 1960)⁴ for twenty years and a member of its Executive from 1962 to 1965. He was a delegate to the WCC Assembly in Evanston in 1954 and attended the Uppsala Assembly in 1968, also.⁵

¹ Cf. ch. 6.

² The personal biographical material in this and the next three paragraphs was provided by J. Peter, personal interview, 31.5.89.

³ Peter was Professor of Theology and occupied the Caldwell-Morrow Chair in Church History at the Presbyterian Theological Hall in Brisbane and lectured in theology under the aegis of the Board of Studies in Divinity at the University of Queensland. J. Peter, personal interview, 31.5.89.

⁴ Cf. ch. 4, fn. 32.

⁵ From Uppsala, Peter prepared a weekly report for the Sunday morning 'Encounter' programme. He sent material to the Dept through the week and, in addition, provided at the latest possible time a 10-minute bulletin of up-to-date news from the Assembly. As a

He was an advocate of, and worker for, the uniting of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches, which substantially became a reality in 1977. His involvement in religious broadcasting in the ABC fostered this ecumenical spirit. It offered opportunities to collaborate with many people with different views from his own and to travel overseas, discovering what others were thinking and doing in the field of religious communication.⁶

James Peter brought to his task as Head of Department a clear, orderly mind. Many of his memoranda are masterpieces of inescapable logic, not always welcomed by the recipients, and he was a meticulous administrator. The Senior Officers' Association of the ABC appreciated his competencies: he was a member of its Executive 1969-77 and during this period was elected President for a term, in which capacity he sat frequently on the Promotion Appeals Board. Through the 1970s, he was called on to respond to widespread public scrutiny of his Department, to arrange and preside at many consultations and meetings and to write a number of major policy papers, for all of which his gifts for organisation and clarity made him especially capable.

By 1973, there were fifteen members of staff in the Department responsible for both radio and television programmes.⁷ In 1962, the religious specialists in Melbourne were detached from the Talks Department and assigned to the Religion Department, with Geoffrey Ward appointed as the first Victorian Supervisor. In 1971, the same shift of staff took place in the BAPH States.⁸

A strong, logical mind has its limitations when it comes to imaginative broadcasting ideas. However, Peter set up structures for some delegation of authority in Sydney: after Alan Robson's retirement in 1974, two Federal Assistants were

result, the Religion Dept was reporting newsworthy items from the Assembly in advance of the News Dept. R. Saunders, personal interview, 10.9.92.

- 6 The ABC was a corporate member of the World Association for Christian Broadcasting (later, the World Association for Christian Communication). Peter represented the Commission at the Association's first congress and was a member of its Central Committee, 1968-77, which required his attending meetings every 18 months.
- 7 At that time, there were 6 'integrated' depts in the ABC (i.e. depts that worked to both media) and Religion was the smallest. The others were Young People (17 staff members), Sporting (38), Rural (91), Music (120) and Education (141). Cf. McKinsey and Co. Inc., *The Use of ABC Resources*, ('McKinsey Report'), ABC, Sydney, 1973, exhibit 2-4.
- 8 Cf. File Staff Establishment 1962, Religion Dept, Sydney; and Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'. It is relevant to the matter of this chapter to note that the Dept's producer in South Australia, 1971-9, was an agnostic, Herbert Davies, who had no formal religious or philosophical background but was an excellent producer, a genuine, thoughtful inquirer and a sympathetic interviewer. Peter declared that the best interviews he did were produced by Davies. P. Kirkwood and J. Peter, personal interviews, 9.5.89 and 31.5.89 respectively.

appointed - Ronald Nichols in radio and Patrick Kirkwood in television.⁹ There were, also, regular departmental conferences, where staff members could offer proposals and where programme responsibilities were allocated to them. The programme rosters, which required every State to contribute to a range of regular programmes, and the administrative procedures that Peter carefully followed were routines that most found restricting at times, but members of staff with their particular skills and talents - and there were a number of creative people among them - were able to argue for new approaches, which, once agreed upon, they were given the freedom to put into effect.¹⁰ There were times when Peter would broadcast quite controversial programmes, such as Denis Potter's 'Son of Man' which was a modern colloquial portrayal of the humanity of Jesus, or Graham Bond and Peter Weir's comic Christmas piece, 'Man on a Green Bike', which some thought outrageous - both on television in 1969.¹¹ James Peter's was a conservative personality, averse to structural change but inclined to these occasional sorties into novelty and experimentation.

Questions of policy for the 1970s

In November 1968, the FRAC at its fifteenth annual meeting recommended a consultation be planned to develop guidelines for religious broadcasts for the next decade.¹² The vigorous diversification and secularisation that was occurring in Western societies and the contentious spirit abroad was forcing the Religion Department, like others, to self-appraisal and new decisions about the path forward into the future. It had been reflecting some of this critical spirit and diversity in individual programmes. A list of these in 1967, headed 'Critical programmes and other than Christian', consisted of forty-three titles - not far short of one per week - which showed that the Department was well aware of the trends and issues of the

⁹ Kirkwood joined the Dept in Melbourne in 1961 and was brought to Sydney by Peter in 1963, where he remained to become Peter's successor as Federal Director of the Dept in 1977. Nichols began his career with the ABC in Perth in 1955. After 15 years' experience in radio and television in Perth and Melbourne, he spent some months in East Africa teaching broadcasting methods to students of the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation and 2 years establishing religious broadcasting in Papua New Guinea before moving into the Dept in Sydney in 1973. Kirkwood and Nichols, interviews 9.5.89 and 16.11.92 respectively.

¹⁰ Kirkwood, speaking on the occasion of Peter's retirement said of him: 'He ran a tight ship [but] we were allowed to do our own thing and take our problems to him'. Kirkwood acknowledged the constraints of the rosters, but noted: 'This system guaranteed that the States had access to the national network. It was not so in other Depts where someone in one of the State branches might work very hard but still not make it to air. Sometimes it meant a loss in standards but it offered more opportunity for State branch staff'. Kirkwood, interview, 14.11.89.

¹¹ P. Kirkwood, interview 9.5.89.

¹² FRAC, Minutes of meeting 28-29.11.68, File FRAC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

time.¹³ Mention has already been made of 'Son of Man' and 'Man on a Green Bike', the latter described by one senior member of the Department at the time as 'almost nihilistic'.

The responses from its audiences during this period were, predictably, mixed. The President of the Lutheran Church in Australia praised the ABC for being 'singularly fair', for providing 'information which is of public value' and for giving 'outstanding service'¹⁴ while another Lutheran accused the ABC of slanting its broadcasts against the conservative position and giving 'the World Council of Churches the status of Protestant establishment'.¹⁵ The Anglican Diocesan Synod of Riverina declared its concern 'at the growing percentage of non-Christian material in what used to be exclusively Christian programmes'¹⁶ and was supported in this by the Dioceses of Newcastle and Murray, but not by the Bishop of Willochra.¹⁷ The Presbyterian General Assembly in Western Australia applauded ABC radio and television,¹⁸ but Rev. L. Wade was impelled to warn the ABC that 'popular religion is a very unstable thing' and it seemed now to be providing 'only "mod" religious programmes'.¹⁹ Humanists objected to the 'privileged situation' of the churches and discrimination against opponents of religion.²⁰ The Australia-Rhodesia Association accused the ABC of 'political misuse of religious broadcasts' when Garfield Todd, the Queen's representative in Rhodesia who supported the country's movement to independence, was interviewed in a religious programme.²¹

In 1970, Peter set himself to arranging the consultation recommended by the FRAC for four days in December. Unfortunately, the dates he chose coincided with the visit of Pope Paul VI to Australia and the consultation was cancelled.²²

In the same year, in April, Clement Semmler, Assistant General Manager, circulated a policy statement to all departments, entitled 'The inclusion of religious

¹³ The existence of this list indicates that the Christian and critical role of the Dept was under discussion at this time. AA (NSW): ST3051/1, file R17/1/4, pt 6.

¹⁴ Rev. M. Lohe, letter to ABC, 25.8.69, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

¹⁵ K. Hamilton, letter to ABC, 22.6.69, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1 pt 4.

¹⁶ Minutes of Synod, 14-15.9.70, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

¹⁷ Bishop of Willochra, letter to Chairman, 28.10.70, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

¹⁸ Letter to Chairman, 28.5.68, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

¹⁹ L. Wade, Peak Hill, letter to Chairman, 29.9.69, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

²⁰ Qld Humanist Society, letter to Chairman, 30.7.69, AA (NSW): SP1423/1, file R17/1/1, pt 4.

²¹ Letter to Chairman, 4.71, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R 17/1/1.

²² J. Peter, letter to R. Busch, Brisbane, 21.7.70; and memo to C. Progs, 28.9.70, File FRAC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

material in ABC programmes'.²³ The statement did not address directly the issues raised in the comments above but aimed at setting limits and keeping broadcasts which touched on religious matters under authoritative control.

Semmler's 1970 memorandum combined earlier policy statements from Kenneth Henderson's day with a short paraphrase of a paper James Peter had recently prepared. In view of the loud, public controversy surrounding ABC religious broadcasts, which waxed and waned through the years, 1973-7, the policy documents of 1970-1 warrant our attention. However, rather than pursue Semmler's paraphrase of Peter, it would be more useful to turn to the paper which Peter prepared around this time, entitled 'ABC religious programmes', where he dealt with policy matters more fully. His plans for a consultation in late 1970 having been thwarted, he wrote this background paper 'for the 1971 series of meetings of State and Regional Advisory Committees', as an alternative way of consulting a wider circle of people.²⁴ The main points in his paper are summarised in the following paragraphs.

Religious broadcasts policy 1970-1

Peter re-asserted the current definition of a religious programme as one which dealt in one form or another with 'beliefs concerning a supernatural being (or beings) together with the activities such beliefs engender'. He rejected, on the one hand, a notion of 'religious' that would encompass 'everything which influences a person's view of the world and so renders it indistinguishable from 'philosophy'. He also rejected a narrow perception which would tie religion to some organisation, or church, 'and so render it indistinguishable from group conformity'. Religion was certainly something that bore upon life in a profound way but much in anyone's world view came from other than religious sources; religion was certainly communal, but it was also personal, such as might lead someone to take a stand against the group.²⁵ He acknowledged that the definition was unsatisfactory to those who chose to speak of 'ultimate reality within' rather than of 'a Being beyond' and to those sociologists who would prefer simply a functional description of religion. Still, he personally found the definition acceptable and considered that most others would, too.²⁶

²³ C. Semmler, memo to all depts, 21.4.70, AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R2/7/21.

²⁴ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1. With very little amendment, this paper appeared again as an article, 'The treatment of religious issues in broadcasting', *St Mark's Review*, Canberra, July 1973.

²⁵ J. Peter, 'ABC religious programmes', s. I-1, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

²⁶ *St Mark's Review*, p. 12. In 1963, speaking to Christians concerned with religious communication on radio and television, Peter had said that 'the overall purpose [of religious programmes] must be this: to present Jesus Christ as the definitive and focal operation of God in the affairs of men...this is, in the last analysis, the content of religious broadcasting'. Cf. J.F. Peter, *Principles of Religious Broadcasting*, ABC, Sydney, 1963. This Christocentric statement of 1963 and the more general exposition of

Many of the ethical patterns, social customs and public ceremonies in society had their roots in Christian faith and practice. While some people consciously maintained this connection between their religious commitment and their personal and public lives, there were others who led exemplary lives of honesty, compassion and self-sacrifice with no conscious religious motivation at all. ABC programmes about ethics, or social customs and rituals, might treat these subjects with, or without, reference to religion. Whatever the treatment, some members of the audience would applaud and others be offended. But, where the broadcaster had integrity and the listener some openness of mind, there was the opportunity for promoting understanding among people of different views.²⁷

The ABC with its Charter to provide adequate and comprehensive broadcasting throughout Australia could not but produce programmes of an explicitly religious character.²⁸ At the last census only 0.8% of the population had professed no religion.²⁹ While 89% of the population professed Christian belief, adherents of other world religions in Australia, such as Jews, Moslems, Buddhists and Hindus, also needed to be considered. As well, there were people critical of, or quite opposed to, religion and yet with a genuine and significant interest in it, whose views required some attention.³⁰

Just as the ABC would have regard to what the Teachers' Federation thought of its educational programmes for schools, or how the Law Society appraised the legal information and analysis it offered, so it was sensitive also to the opinions of churches, ecumenical bodies, church welfare agencies and centres of religious and theological studies about its religious programmes. It could never yield to an outside body the final determination of what was actually broadcast, however. It was Peter's view that 'the most useful advice will probably come from knowledgeable people whom the [broadcasting] organisation employs as specialists in the field of religious broadcasting'.³¹

the proper content of religious programmes in his paper in 1970 are significantly different from each other, but it would be wrong to assume that this difference marks a total change of view in the intervening years. In 1963, he was primarily addressing himself to the churches' use of the media to carry their own particular Christian message; in 1970, he was concerned with ABC religious broadcasts which were obliged to take a comprehensive approach to the whole society.

²⁷ Peter, 'Religious programmes', ss. I-2,3,4.

²⁸ Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. I-6.1.

²⁹ Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. II-1.

³⁰ Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. II-1.

³¹ Peter, 'Religious programmes', ss. I-7.5, 8.

There was a place in its religious broadcasts for questioning Christian tenets but it would be quite inappropriate to the community it served if the ABC allowed this approach to religious life and issues to dominate its religious programmes.³²

A balanced presentation of an issue did not mean 'giving a turn to every denomination and to every other group with a professed concern for the topics treated'. Decisions on topics and speakers were made in accordance with broad policy lines laid down by the Commission for all its programmes.³³ Statistically, 89% of those who had professed a Christian religion in the last census had claimed adherence to one of four denominations: Anglican (38%), Roman Catholic (30%), Methodist (11%) and Presbyterian (10%). Most broadcasters in religious programmes, therefore, were drawn from these churches, and from five other communities - the Baptist Union, the Lutheran Church, the Conference of Churches of Christ, the Congregational Union and the Salvation Army - who, with the major four, were considered to represent the 'mainstream' of the Christian tradition. The Federation of Orthodox Synagogues and the Union for Progressive Judaism were the normal sources for Jewish religious programmes and opinion.³⁴ However, the ABC selected individuals to broadcast according to their knowledge and capacity for the task. They might or might not be the nominee of their religious group.³⁵

These aspects of religious broadcasting that Peter set out to clarify in 1970-1 were the stuff of the public controversy that reached its height in the period 1975-7. He was to do a great deal more writing and re-writing in the years ahead on the same themes:

- the meaning the Religion Department gave to the word, 'religious';
- the Christian roots of Australian culture and society;
- the appropriateness of explicit Christian content in programmes when the great majority of the population identified themselves in the census as Christian;
- balance in programming based on census data, in the classifying of religious groups as 'mainstream' or not, and in a discriminating choice of individual broadcasters by ABC staff;
- the rights to air-time of adherents of other world religions and of those who concerned themselves with religious questions even if from the critical perspective of non-belief;
- the sensitivity of the Religion Department to the appraisal of its work by bodies with a particular interest in religion;
- the place of critical questioning of Christian tenets in the Department's programmes.

³² Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. I-2.2.

³³ Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. II-2.3

³⁴ Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. II-1.

³⁵ Peter, 'Religious programmes', s. II-2.3

Movements for change, 1973-5

In 1973 there was a marked increase in public protest from secular humanists and rationalists that religious broadcasting was receiving favoured treatment from the ABC.³⁶ There were a number of Federal Labor parliamentarians in government who also expressed this view.³⁷ The Council of Australian Humanist Societies made a formal submission in this year to a Senate Standing Committee on Education, Science and the Arts, which was inquiring into broadcasting. The Council suggested that the separate Department for religion in the ABC be eliminated and that religion and philosophy be taken up into the Talks Department.³⁸

At the end of 1973, the 'McKinsey Report' was published, the result of an examination of the structures and organisation of the ABC to discern how best it might address what the Report called the three 'areas of impact' to be considered by a national broadcaster: cost impact, quality impact and audience impact. Among other things, this Report proposed that 'product management' be separately structured for radio and television and that all the existing programme departments be fitted into this basic organisation. Further, that a number of presently separate departments in radio be grouped in an integrated larger structure.³⁹

³⁶ Humanist Societies sprang up in the various States of Australia between 1960 and 1967 with the Council of Australian Humanist Societies being formed in 1965. The NSW society was the first, founded in reaction to the Billy Graham Crusade of 1959. It was also the largest and most active, reaching a peak of 900 members in the early 1970s, but declining sharply in 1974. The NSW humanists distinguished themselves from the rationalists quite explicitly: their vision of the evolution of society was 'based not only on reason but also on concern for other human beings' and the Rationalist Association of NSW was, in their view, too negative in its anti-religious stance. Cf. A.W. Black, 'Organised irreligion: the NSW Humanist Society', *Practice and Belief*, eds A. Black and P. Glassner, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1983, pp. 154-6.

³⁷ Kep Enderby, MP, Minister for Secondary Industry and Supply, wrote to Senator Douglas McClelland, Minister for Media, in May 1973, asking him to give consideration to humanists' having the same opportunity as religious groups for presenting their point of view on the ABC, to which McClelland replied that he would take the matter up with the ABC and the ABCB. Cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5. Senator James McClelland, Chairman of the Senate Committee inquiring into broadcasting at this time, was an advocate of the humanists' view. Cf. J. McClelland, 'The role of the media in modern society', *Australian Humanist*, Sept. 1974, pp. 4-9.

³⁸ The Council's submission was published in the *Australian Humanist* (ed. B. Muirden), Summer 1973-4, pp. 33-5. British humanists had been making exactly the same objections against BBC religious broadcasting and had been proposing the same solutions since the late 1950s. However, the UK Religious Broadcasting Dept had considerably more status and dominance in the BBC than its Australian counterpart had in the ABC. Cf. Margaret Knight, 'Humanists and the BBC', *New Statesman*, 17.5.58.

³⁹ The McKinsey recommendations for the Religion Dept were that it be split into two sections along media lines, i.e. one section in radio and one in television, and that, in radio, a decision be taken whether to keep it as a separate Dept or integrate it into a larger programme production structure titled 'Talks and Public Affairs'. Cf. 'McKinsey Report', s. 2-10, exhibit 2-5.

It will be remembered that, although the ABC had been broadcasting religious programmes from 1932, a separate Religion Department had not come into being until 1949 and producers of religious programmes in all other States except NSW had worked from within the Talks Department until 1962 in Victoria and 1971 in the other States. In the period, 1949-71, the Department had striven hard for the autonomy and structural identity within the ABC that other specialist sectors enjoyed. It had done so in order to gain more control over the quality of its programmes, the selection of capable staff for its work and separate funding. The humanists' submission to the Senate Standing Committee and the 'McKinsey Report' in 1973, despite differences in their approach to the matter, were both suggesting structural changes that would shift religious broadcasting into a position in the organisation akin to its pre-1949 situation. While effective religious programmes had been produced in the past by staff located in Talks, the assertive secular spirit of the 1970s, which was as evident in the ABC as in the wider society, promised an unreliable future for religious broadcasting once the Department lost its structural identity and distinctive role. Resistance to such changes began to be voiced by the Department and its church constituency in 1974 and gathered strength in the next two to three years as fears grew that these proposals, and others surfacing at this time, could seriously threaten the status of religion in the ABC and even bring about its ultimate demise.

After making their submission in 1973, humanist societies in Australia, and individual members of them, continued to press for the elimination of what they judged to be excessive 'free propaganda time' for the Christian churches on the ABC. So wrote the Western Australian Humanist Society (Southern Symposium Group) on June 22, 1975, to Moss Cass, MP.⁴⁰ Cass replied according to information he obtained from the Commission Chairman, Professor Richard Downing,⁴¹ that religious programmes did already include material from other than Christian sources and that time given to them in the year, 1973-4, amounted to 2.7% of radio broadcasts in metropolitan areas, 3.2% on regional radio and 1.36% on television.⁴²

Others who called themselves 'atheists' or 'rationalists' also voiced their objections to religious broadcasts. 'Readings from the Bible' was a particular focus of antagonism. Often, those who turned on their radios a little early to be sure of hearing the full news bulletin, caught the Bible reading and this was irksome, even infuriating, for some. The ABC received letters pointing out what seemed to the writers to be

⁴⁰ Cass who had been Minister for Environment and Conservation took over the Ministry for Media from Douglas McClelland during 1975, cf. *Australian Govt Directory: Names Supplement*, AGPS, Canberra, 1973-5.

⁴¹ Downing was a Professor of Economics and Assistant Vice-Chancellor at Melbourne University, Chairman of the Commission 1973-5.

⁴² Cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5.

patently obvious, that religious broadcasting was entirely out of place during the working week and should be confined to Sundays where it belonged. This was a view quite at odds with that of the Department, which, trying to connect religion with life, had put a lot of effort into securing this particular time-slot. Secularists wrote asking for the writings of secular sages to be read: Epicurus, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell and H. L. Mencken were mentioned. There was one letter from a listener declaring that 'Taoists, Buddhists, Jews and Orthodox Greeks' were offended by the Bible reading programme also. This may have been so, though the files of the period contain only his assertion of it.⁴³

In March of 1975, the *Nation Review* carried an article by Bruce Muirden of Adelaide headed 'ABC plans to cut Bible down to size'. Muirden was editor of the *Australian Humanist* and a member of the South Australian State Advisory Committee of the ABC. He reported enthusiastically that the Committee, having been 'mildly restive for some time now about religious broadcasting', had agreed unanimously to recommend to the Commission that every fifth week the morning readings should deal with 'such matters as personal ethics, peace and freedom' from secular texts, the remaining four weeks continuing to be Bible readings. He predicted that the proposal was 'quite likely to get high level endorsement by the Commission itself'. He seemed to base his prediction on the fact that Dr Earle Hackett, a respected humanist and chairman of the South Australian Committee, was also Deputy Chairman of the Commission. Muirden concluded his article:

For the present it appears to have been established in starchy old Adelaide that the bible does not constitute the sole guidance for people's morals and that perhaps there are voices around other than those from the ethereal regions. Who knows where it will all end?⁴⁴

A few months later on July 27, Rev. Alan Walker of the Sydney Central Methodist Mission gave a public address entitled 'Faith for Australia in crisis', extracts of which were issued to the press. Both the *Sun* in Sydney and the *Canberra Times* published these extracts the following day. Walker thundered the warning that 'anti-Christian forces, aided by some Federal Government Ministers, were trying to change Australia into a secular nation'. He cited a number of events as evidence of this, among them a speech of Senator James McClelland to the 1974 Annual Meeting of the NSW Humanist Society. McClelland had concluded his address with reference to religious broadcasting by the ABC. He had commended the Society for its submission to the Senate Standing Committee, of which he was chairman, and had expressed his confidence that the majority of the Committee would favour it. He had added:

⁴³ Cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5.

⁴⁴ *Nation Review*, 21-27.3.75.

...I would be no more in favour of banning 'Evening Meditation' or 'Readings from the Bible' than 'Number 96' or 'The Box', although I believe their appeal is basically to intellects of similarly stunted growth. But I do believe that...the monopoly of the transcendentalists in the ethical field should be broken.⁴⁵

When, a year later, Alan Walker publicised McClelland's disparagement of those who listened to these religious programmes, public controversy began to spark.

Quite apart from attitudes of particular ministers to particular programmes, another factor crucial to the fortunes of the ABC, and so of the Religion Department, at this time, was the capacity and willingness of the Government of the day to provide finance for the ABC's projects and plans. The Budget brought down in August 1975 beat the retreat from expansion and expenditure that had characterised the Whitlam Labor Government's first years in office.⁴⁶ There never could be enough money to fund all the projects that ABC departments thought desirable, and so it had always been one of the tasks of a Head of Department to argue for funds in competition with other sectors of the organisation. When funds contract, the contest for available resources intensifies and people covet more what others receive. If the number of competitors is reduced, there is more for those who remain. Such thoughts might have entered ABC minds at this time and been given voice in one way or another, but there is no evidence of an attempt from within the ABC to get rid of religious broadcasting. Yet, this became a growing public perception.

'Present practice, possible changes', 1975

We have seen that as far back as 1968 the Department had felt the need to reflect on its purposes and practices and plan for the future and we know that James Peter had wanted to call a conference for this purpose at the end of 1970 but had been prevented from doing so. Instead, he had written a paper and circulated it for consideration in the 1971 series of meetings of the ABC's Advisory Committees. It was out of the discussion that this paper had engendered that the South Australian Committee arrived at its 1975 recommendations on 'Readings from the Bible'.

Religious broadcasting was on the agenda of the Commission meeting in May 1975 and Peter was asked to prepare another paper for this meeting, to which he gave the title, 'Religious programmes: present practice, possible changes'.⁴⁷ The General

⁴⁵ McClelland, 'The role of the media', p. 9. By 1975, James McClelland had become Minister for Manufacturing Industry.

⁴⁶ The ABC's annual budget had grown from \$74.4 m. in 1972-3 to \$140.6 m. in 1975-6, an average annual increase of a little less than 30%, compared with an average 4% increase per annum in the three years following, well below the annual rate of inflation. The shift from prodigality to contraction provoked a lot of internal dislocation and frustration. Cf. C. Semmler, *The ABC - Aunt Sally and Sacred Cow*, Melbourne University Press, 1981, p. 73.

⁴⁷ Cf. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

Manager presented it to the Commission, together with comments on it from the Acting Assistant General Managers for Radio and Television, the Acting Controller of Radio Programmes and the Deputy General Manager.

This paper was clearly responding to the criticism that the Department's programmes occupied too much of the schedule and were too conventionally Christian. Peter listed the regular broadcasts offered on radio and television. They numbered thirty-four per week on radio and two per week on television. However, he made the point that twenty-three of the radio broadcasts were of only four to five minutes' duration and he reminded the Commission that religious broadcasts occupied only a very small percentage of total air-time.⁴⁸

He repeated what he had written previously about the Department's 'regard for the religious profile of the community' in its programme planning, but was emphatic that the Department looked for 'the individuals and groups best able to do the particular things we have in mind, their denominations, or indeed their antipathy to all denominations, being of secondary significance'.⁴⁹ He drew particular attention to the content of the Sunday evening series of television programmes, 1974. 65% of these, he said, were Christian in content.⁵⁰ This analysis of one programme series might suggest a certain approach but fell far short of providing evidence of the balance of content in the total output of the Department.

Peter defended the current policy of drawing members of the FRAC from 'mainstream' Christian churches. Since most of the content of broadcasts was 'mainstream' Christian, 'members of other persuasions' would find much of the discussion at Committee meetings 'inconsequential'. The intention in setting up the Committee was to provide to the Commission 'the voice of the churches' and it fulfilled this role.⁵¹

He argued against a number of points in the humanists' submission to the Senate Standing Committee, 1973. He reminded his readers that there were a number of programmes, other than those emanating from his Department, particularly 'Lateline', 'AM' and 'New Society', in which secular moralists were represented extensively.⁵² He also noted that religious broadcasting utilised such a variety of forms of expression - interviews, music, drama, features - that it would be quite inappropriate to confine it in 'an augmented Talks Department'; in fact, 'Talks' as a

48 Cf. fn. 42 above.

49 Peter, 'Present practice', s. 3.3.

50 Peter, 'Present practice', s. 3.3.1.

51 Peter, 'Present practice', s. 4.2.

52 Peter, 'Present practice', s. 7.1.

name for a department had been dropped because it had too limited connotations.⁵³ A conference of Religion staff from the various States, held in May 1974, had discussed the possibility of another name for the Department but had found no suitable alternative.⁵⁴

This factual presentation and firm defence of the Department's present policy and practice was paralleled, in the second part of Peter's paper, by a surprisingly open exploration of a different basis of operation. Here, he questioned whether the definition of religion presently adhered to⁵⁵ was appropriate and quoted an alternative definition which had been put forward at the World Congress of Philosophy in Varna, Bulgaria, in 1973: 'A religion is that set of practices and/or doctrines which one believes will lead to liberation or fulfilment of one's being'. 'If some such wider understanding were made the base for defining a religious programme,' he wrote, 'the Religion Department would feel freer to move into areas which have hitherto been regarded as the province of others.'⁵⁶ The present common understanding of religion, particularly when it is taken to mean "Christianity" or, even more, "alignment with the churches", has hampered the Religion Department, but there are many in Australia who have no other understanding.' If it were to adopt a wider concept of religion, the ABC would need to work to achieve general acceptance for its new approach and, organisationally, would need to 'redraw the lines between the Departments'. Renaming the Religion Department might be a helpful first step.⁵⁷

The comments on this paper made by senior management varied considerably in their quality of analysis and argument. While accepting the statistical information Peter provided, most believed that there was, nevertheless, too much time devoted to 'dealing specifically and uncritically with what broadly could be called Christianity'.⁵⁸ C. A. Symons, Acting Assistant General Manager of Television, made a distinction between individuals' claims of adherence to Christianity recorded in the census and the social authority and status of the Christian churches. Taking one into account and not the other in the name of balance did not seem satisfactory to him. Peter Dell, Acting Controller of Radio Programmes, pointed out that, of the minority of programmes which did not put forward an unquestioned Christian position, most still dealt with Christian concepts and issues, so that there was very little exploring of other than

⁵³ Peter, 'Present practice', s. 7.3.2.1.

⁵⁴ Peter, 'Present practice', s. 6.5.1.

⁵⁵ Cf. fn. 25 above.

⁵⁶ The Varna definition of religion was very loose and allowed for extreme plurality. In this sense only might it be said to be a 'wider understanding'. It was so individualistic that it might better be described as 'narrow'.

⁵⁷ Peter, 'Present practice', s. 6.

⁵⁸ P. Dell, A/C. Progs (Radio), AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

Christian ideas in their own terms. Dell and D. Miley, Acting Assistant General Manager of Radio, also noted that it was the number of religious programmes, rather than their duration, that was significant in people's perceptions of the amount of air-time given over to them. Those who addressed the issue supported the idea of including other than Biblical material in the morning programme of readings. The existence of an entirely Christian FRAC was questioned by most. The majority also favoured organisational changes for a number of departments, of which Religion was one, with a view to more integration of resources and effort and better quality of performance.⁵⁹

At its May meeting the Commission 'accepted' the material presented to it by Peter and asked for a Seminar to discuss policy for religious broadcasts, suggesting that the participants should be the Commission members, Senior Managers including the Federal Director of Religious Programmes, the FRAC and selected members of Humanist Societies, secular moralists and philosophers.⁶⁰

Peter then submitted to the next meeting of the Commission in June a draft of a short policy statement, with some brief notes attached.⁶¹ Compared with the ten pages of argument presented the month before, the stark brevity of this statement, formulating a new stance on what constituted religious material, is quite startling. Within a few weeks, this statement was to play a major role in stirring public controversy about the future of the Department, and so will be quoted here in full:

The ABC's role in the field of religion is to provide avenues of information about beliefs and activities, platforms from which representatives of different viewpoints can be heard, forums for the discussion of different viewpoints and opportunities for worship and meditation. *It understands religion to be any set of practices and/or ideas which one believes will lead to liberation or fulfilment of one's being and it understands also that for many people an essential expression of religion is communal.* In selecting from the material available, the ABC's officers apply the criteria appropriate to all programme building. The officer primarily responsible for seeing that there is a balanced presentation is the Director of Religious Programmes.⁶²

Peter explained, in the accompanying notes, that he had amended the Varna definition of religion in two ways. He had replaced its 'practices and/or doctrines' with 'practices and/or ideas', in order to avoid a word that connoted 'something formally set out and perhaps prescribed by authority'. Secondly, he had added at the end of the definition the clause, 'and it understands also that for many people an essential expression of religion is communal', because 'it remedied what the Varna definition

⁵⁹ All these comments can be found in AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

⁶⁰ Commission, Minutes of meeting, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

⁶¹ Cf. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁶² Italics added to the original by this writer.

lacked' and carried the implication that the ABC 'must take account of organisations which exist because their members engage in common enterprises'.⁶³

This is not one of Peter's best efforts. Varna's secularised, individualistic and shallow definition of religion was not 'remedied' by his amendments. By changing 'doctrines' to 'ideas', he removed the concept of communally held teachings and further loosened the original definition. His second amendment was both awkward and confusing. He was wanting to draw attention here to the established religious communities - the Christian churches, the Jewish synagogues, and so on - and the ABC's commitment to broadcasting their services and liturgies, but he did so in entirely secular terms and in such an oblique way that readers could be forgiven for missing his point. He went on to write:

Some people may regard the definition as too wide, but none can rightly complain that they are excluded. It is a definition different from that we have been working with and its inclusion in the statement would mean a different understanding of what constitutes religious material.⁶⁴

He was apparently uneasy with what he had written. Why had he drafted such a statement? He seems genuinely to have wanted to try to accommodate the criticisms of secularists. In addition, if the trend of thought in the Commission favoured moving in this direction, then the survival of the Department as a distinct entity might necessitate its taking this widely inclusive approach to its work.

The Minutes of the Commission meeting of June 1975 recorded that the Director of Religion had provided a draft policy statement with explanatory notes on the ABC's role in religious broadcasting. They also announced the Commission's firm decision that a Seminar would be arranged to discuss the subject further, the proceedings of which would then be circulated to State and Regional Advisory Committees for their comments.⁶⁵

It was to be another eighteen months before this Seminar, in fact, took place on December 7-8, 1976. Peter proposed to Semmler, the Deputy General Manager, that it be held in October 1975, but was told that existing commitments were too heavy to permit anything before December.⁶⁶ The December meeting of the Commission deferred decision on a date until after a budgetary review in January 1976. A week later, Peter informed the management that he would be on leave for five months from March 1976 so that the Seminar, if he were to be present, would have to be held in February, or put off until later in the year. He saw two disadvantages in postponing

⁶³ Cf. File POL/DBC.

⁶⁴ Cf. File POL/DBC.

⁶⁵ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/6.

⁶⁶ Cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5.

it: firstly, the FRAC had not met since May 1974 and, secondly, policy questions had already been awaiting decision for a long time. However, if a later date were to be decided on, a position paper he would prepare before he left could be widely circulated in the intervening months so that public discussion could feed into the Seminar. This would also permit Seminar costs to come from the next year's budget. Management supported the later date and three hundred copies of Peter's position paper were printed and sent to all Advisory Committees, relevant members of staff and, on request, to anyone else interested.⁶⁷ Peter suggested September 1976 for the Seminar, but it was not until October that the Commission committed itself to firm dates in December, in response to the urging of Keith Mackriell, the Assistant General Manager of Radio:

While I appreciate that some of the immediacy and heat has, in the passage of time, been dissipated from the question of our Religious Broadcasts, I nevertheless think we should be open to criticism if we do not hold the seminar.⁶⁸

Mackriell's choice of the word, 'heat', in relation to the public discussion of 1975-6 was appropriate. Before reviewing the Seminar and its outcomes, we need now to return to the second half of 1975 to follow the events of that period, discover the main protagonists and examine their views.

We have already established in the background of the agitation of that time the objections of secularists to religious broadcasting on the ABC, some wanting it entirely discarded, others lessened. These complaints began to develop into an organised effort of protest from 1973. There was also the 'McKinsey Report', 1973, which recommended changes in the organisation of the ABC that were not acceptable to the Religion Department and aroused some apprehension about its future security. The 1975 Federal Budget reduced the ABC's funds, forcing it to contract - another cause for anxiety among those already worried about the status of the Religion Department within the whole enterprise. Before all of these events and continuing through them, was the process of consultation about religious policy which the Department had itself initiated in 1970 and which courted questioning of all of its present practice.

Public controversy, 1975

On July 25, 1975, Patrick Kirkwood, one of Peter's two Federal Assistants, advised management in a note: 'There is an obvious campaign by humanists. Religious

⁶⁷ The paper was called 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes' and dated Feb. 1976, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁶⁸ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/6.

people are also reacting. Policy decisions should not be pressured by these representatives'.⁶⁹

Letters from those Kirkwood called 'religious people' began to deluge the Commission, ABC management and Members of Parliament, reaching a peak in September.

Rev. Alan Walker, as we have seen, made a speech, two days after Kirkwood wrote this memorandum, in which he sounded an alarm in defence of religious broadcasting. In 1975, the 'Green Inquiry' into Australia's entire broadcasting system was taking place. Commissioned by the Federal Government, it was charged with the extensive task of reporting on 'the machinery and procedures for the control, planning, licensing, regulation, funding and administration of the system, especially the structures of the ABCB, the ABC and other relevant bodies and their inter-relationships, including their relationship to the Public Service Board'.⁷⁰ Since all radio and television production, public and commercial, might be affected by the recommendations resulting from this inquiry, everyone with an interest in religious broadcasts was very alert at this time. On September 14, Rev. Bernard Judd, who broadcast regularly on 2CH,⁷¹ told his listeners that religious broadcasting was under threat and encouraged them to make themselves heard.⁷²

Men and women individually and in groups, pastors and parishes and bishops wrote to the ABC, the Minister for Media and other Parliamentarians on both sides of the House arguing for the retention of the Religion Department. They approached the matter from many different perspectives:

Listeners to religious programmes may be a minority of the population, but the ABC traditionally gives air-time to minority and majority views.

Other ABC programmes surely do not please listeners, but no one is crusading to take them off the air.

Life is more than minds and bodies and it is good to be reminded of this.

Devotion is a basic need.

⁶⁹ Kirkwood, memo to GM, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R 17/1/5.

⁷⁰ Cf. Committee of inquiry, *Australian Broadcasting* ('Green Report'), Report, AGPS, Canberra, Sept. 1976, p.6.

⁷¹ 2CH was a partnership of the NSW Council of Churches (cf. fn. 74 below) who held the licence and AWA, who owned the station. There was a contractual arrangement that the NSW Council of Churches would have guaranteed access to the airwaves for religious programmes. There were few direct links between commercial religious broadcasters and those working in the ABC, although occasionally someone would move between the two regimes, e.g. Ross Saunders who worked both for the ABC and 2CH. Cf. Saunders, interview, 10.9.92 and ch. 10, fn. 149.

⁷² There was a fear that the 'Green Report' might recommend removing the legislative requirement that commercial licensees broadcast religious matter. The coincidence of this apprehension with uncertainties about the future of religious broadcasting in the ABC stirred the religious communities in Australia to concerted action.

Isolated people are dependent on radio and in an egalitarian society, cutting out religious broadcasts would be to deprive people of what they consider a right.

There is a wide choice of other programmes for those who do not care for Christian programmes.

Invalids, elderly people, people who are handicapped and some shiftworkers cannot attend church services and they rely on radio for these.

Religious broadcasts have been food for the spirit and brought people to prayer. They build up the moral fibre of the community.

Balance, fairness, broad-mindedness and freedom in a democratic society require the continuance of religious broadcasts.

The media frequently under-estimate public interest in religion. The church is an important stratum of society.

Religion is a part of life of every human community.

The Bible holds up a faithful mirror to reflect the deep blemishes on society's face.

The various religious traditions in Australia contribute very significantly to the nature of Australian society and culture.

This steady flow of moderate reasonableness through the mail was disturbed only once or twice by fervent outbursts warning the Commission of 'God's judgment and vengeance on those who know not God'.⁷³

ABC management resorted to a standard reply, irrespective of the particular points emphasised by the writers. There was an absurd incongruity at times between the cool, bureaucratic response and the deep conviction, sometimes passion, of the protest:

...It is usual for the Australian Broadcasting Commission to review progressively the operations of each of the ABC's specialist programme departments and in accordance with this practice, the Commission is now engaged in a review of religious broadcasts. The Chairman however offers his assurance that no decision has been taken to abandon the ABC's Religion Department.⁷⁴

It was in September 1975 that the draft statement with its accompanying notes which James Peter had formulated and submitted to the Commission's meeting in June, was dropped into the public arena by the Chairman of the Commission, Professor Downing. At 4.30 p.m. on September 25, Downing sent this telegram to Rev. Alan Walker at the Central Methodist Mission:

I understand you have organised public meetings this weekend concerning religious broadcasting. The Commission's attitude set out hereunder should be made clear at any such meeting. The Commission does not intend to disband its Religion Department or discontinue religious programmes. It understands religion to be any set of practices and/or ideas which one believes will lead to liberation or fulfilment of one's being. And it understands also that for many people an essential expression of religion is communal. In selecting from the material available ABC officers apply the criteria appropriate to all ABC

⁷³ For all this correspondence, cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5.

⁷⁴ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

programme building. A balanced presentation must bear some relationship to the attitude held in the community at large. Downing, Chairman ABC.⁷⁵

In the section, 'It understands religion to be...ABC programme building', Downing had quoted Peter's draft exactly. His last sentence was a loose rewording of something Peter had written in the notes he had attached to the draft, where he had explained what he meant by 'balanced presentation'. Balance was not achieved, Peter had written, 'by giving a turn to everyone professing an interest in any issue. Nor is it achieved by inserting in every programme, or even in every series, mention of every viewpoint. It is achieved when the whole output bears a reasonable relationship to the interests represented in the audience as a whole'. Downing's version of this is considerably less careful and clear. He was to die suddenly two months later. Who knows what may have been at work within him at this time affecting his actions and judgments? In any case, whatever fears might have been removed by his assurance that the Religion Department and its programmes would continue were rapidly reinforced by his announcement, in the name of the Commission, of an understanding of religion that made no reference to a transcendent reality of any kind. On October 9, there was a deputation of thirteen churchmen representing the NSW Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church at his door.⁷⁶

How correct was Downing in using this new definition of religion at this time in a public statement in the name of the Commission?

K. S. Inglis, in his history of the ABC, wrote that Downing quoted James Peter's definition of a religious programme 'before it was considered or accepted'.⁷⁷ It was certainly considered at the Commission's meeting in June 1975. The Minutes recorded this, although they did not record that it was affirmed. However, on October 14, James Peter drew up a report of the October 9 deputation of churchmen based on notes he took at the time. He had attended the meeting along with the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the General Manager. At the conclusion of his precise and clear account he offered two recommendations, the second of which read:

...that the position paper being prepared for the Seminar include material drawn from the representations of the deputation, to make more plain the difficulties

⁷⁵ Cf. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁷⁶ Cf. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney. The NSW Council of Churches comprised representatives of the Anglican, Baptist, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches, the Churches of Christ, the Salvation Army and the NSW Temperance Alliance. This body was established in 1925 to unite churches 'in joint action particularly concerning such matters as Sunday observance...and moral issues'. When the Australian Council for the World Council of Churches was formed in 1946 (later re-named the Australian Council of Churches), the NSW Council of Churches did not wish to be absorbed into this, and so a second separate State Council affiliated to the WCC was set up in NSW. Cf. Engel, pp. 36, 127.

⁷⁷ Inglis, p. 380.

many people may have in respect of the understanding of 'religion' *accepted* by the Commission at its June meeting.⁷⁸

Earle Hackett, Vice-Chairman of the Commission (and Acting Chairman for a short time after Downing's death), seemed to think that the Commission had affirmed the definition. In an undated letter to Senator H. Young sent some time around the end of 1975, he wrote:

The definition...was advisedly *adopted* in its rather broad terms so as to make it acceptable to the widest circle of people with a serious concern in the matter.⁷⁹

The Minutes of the South Australian Advisory Committee, dated February 2, 1976, repeated the same word 'adopted': 'Earle Hackett said that the Commission had adopted a new definition of religion'.⁸⁰ Again, the Minutes of a Commission meeting, held just a few days later on February 5-6, recorded Vice-Chairman Hackett as saying that the purpose of the Seminar was 'to inform all interested bodies and parties of the revised approach to Religious Broadcasts *agreed to* by the Commission at its June 1975 meeting and give them the opportunity to comment on the proposals'.⁸¹

At the same time, James Peter was writing in his position paper, 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes': 'There is now *under consideration* by the Commission the following statement...' and he then quoted in full the draft statement which he had submitted for the Commission meeting of June 1975.⁸²

'*Accepted*' and '*under consideration*' from James Peter, '*adopted*' and '*agreed to*' from Earle Hackett. The ambiguous status of the new definition of religion seemed to lie in people's perceptions of the role of the Seminar in regard to the definition. Certainly, it was expected by all that the Seminar would discuss it. The new definition had not yet been enshrined in an official ABC policy statement and it is clear that the Commission did not intend to produce such a statement until after the Seminar. But, to what extent was the definition already endorsed by the Commission, to what extent was it subject to the outcome of the Seminar? There is no room for doubt as to what Hackett meant to convey with his choice of words. What of Peter's use of different words at different times? His recommendation at the end of his report on the October 9 deputation seems to offer an insight into his train of thought. It suggests that, for Peter, the new definition and policies flowing from it remained tentative until they

⁷⁸ Italics added to the original by this writer. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁷⁹ Italics added to the original by this writer. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5.

⁸⁰ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R 17/1/1.

⁸¹ Italics added to the original by this writer. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

⁸² J. Peter, 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes', Feb. 1976, s. 2.5, italics added to the original by this writer, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

appeared in an official policy statement and so might be changed or deleted at any point up till then. This problem of ambiguity remained throughout the whole of 1976, since the Seminar did not meet until December of that year. Patrick Kirkwood, acting as Federal Director in James Peter's absence on leave, wrote in August 1976 to the General Manager seeking some clarification on the matter, with no results. It was an occasion, however, for him to make clear to management that the new definition was not a proposal of the Department, as the Department had not formally discussed it.⁸³

Peter went on leave from March 8 to August 13, 1976, having prepared the promised position paper for broad discussion in his absence. No sooner was it distributed to Commissioners, relevant staff, Advisory Committees and those who had been suggested as participants in the Seminar, than other interested groups and persons requested copies also. Among them were the NSW Council of Churches, the Bible Society, various church authorities and writers of religious comment in the press. Promptly and then steadily through succeeding months, comments on it appeared in the ABC mailbag, while the secular and church press carried some related articles and reports.

There was little in this paper of Peter's that he had not written previously and that we have not already noted. In the section dealing with the definition of religion, however, he set out two options (the definition accepted by the Department for many years⁸⁴ and his amended Varna definition⁸⁵), and indicated what he saw to be the advantages and disadvantages of affirming the one or the other.⁸⁶ Clearly, in Peter's view, the new definition had, as yet, no official status. His paper was a dispassionate, orderly document that focussed in turn on the categorisation of programmes as religious, defining 'religious', the retention of the Department or its incorporation into another, the FRAC and the Department's programme output. J. Cameron, Controller of Television Programmes, was moved to write a quick memo to him on February 9 after receiving his copy of the paper: 'Congratulations on a first class paper for discussion...I would like the chance to sound you out on your own views on the matters it raises so precisely and objectively'.⁸⁷

⁸³ P. Kirkwood, memo to GM, 10.8.76, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney. In his management of the Dept, Peter preferred to keep to himself operational policy in relation to the GM, the Commission and outside bodies. As an administrative method, it had the advantage of allowing staff to continue to give their full attention and time to the production of programmes. Kirkwood, interview, 28.7.89.

⁸⁴ Cf. fnn. 25-6 above.

⁸⁵ Cf. fn. 62 above.

⁸⁶ Peter, 'The treatment of religion' 1976, s. 2.

⁸⁷ Cf. File POL/PPP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

For those in the churches already agitated about what changes the ABC might make to its Religion Department, Peter's paper offered little peace of mind. In its studied impartiality it contained options which for them were 'very disquieting'.⁸⁸ They maintained their strong critical stance and publicised their views widely. The NSW Council of Churches ensured that what it had said about religious broadcasting on the ABC in its submission to the 'Green Inquiry' in June 1976 was reported in the press: namely, that reference to a Supernatural Being should be inserted into the new definition of religion since this conformed to people's general understanding; that Australia was still regarded in some sense as a Christian country by an overwhelming proportion of its people; and that it made a nonsense of the notion of 'fairness' to extend it to mean giving space in religious programmes for the contributions of the 'irreligious'.⁸⁹ The Anglican Press Service, the *Australian Baptist*, the *Australian Church Record* and Alan Gill in the *Sydney Morning Herald* all gave this submission good coverage.⁹⁰ The Council's Annual Report of the same year adopted a more aggressive tone in an uncompromising attack on what it held to be the excessive influence of humanists in the Federal Cabinet 'and other places of power' and on 'a defective definition of religion' which, it asserted, had already been accepted in the Religion Department judging by some programmes it had made during the year.⁹¹

The Australian Conference of Catholic Bishops took a quieter approach. After giving close attention to Peter's position paper in committee and in plenary sessions, the Conference commissioned a study and report on it, which, entitled 'A Catholic Comment', was mailed to the ABC. It supported retention of the Department and its present name and advocated keeping the FRAC with the addition of Greek Orthodox and Jewish members. It opposed the new definition of religion, arguing that it was unsatisfactory not only for those who believed in a transcendent God but for atheists and secularists, too, many of whom held religion to be inimical to personal fulfilment and liberation. Concerned that future planning of programmes might be based on the new definition, the Conference also wrote letters to the Minister for Post and Telecommunications, the Acting Chairman of the Commission and the Federal Director of Religious Programmes, informing them of the Conference's formal rejection of the new definition.⁹²

⁸⁸ B. Judd, letter to Chairman, 30.10.75, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁸⁹ NSW Council of Churches, Submission to Govt inquiry into broadcasting, 8.6.76, File POL/PPP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹⁰ Cf. File POL/PPP and POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹¹ Cf. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹² In this connection, the response to Peter's paper from Lewis Keeble, Professor of Regional and Town Planning, University of Queensland, and humanist participant in the Seminar, is of interest. Keeble thought the first definition was 'excellent' and found the second quite inadequate, since it might 'reasonably be thought to include all kinds of

Meanwhile, the comments lodged from State Advisory Committees, members of the FRAC and proposed participants of the Seminar offered conflicting advice.⁹³ Most thought there was value in categorising some ABC programmes as 'religious', particularly in a modern society which made little of religion in the public realm, and most wanted to retain a separate Religion Department, though with a broader scope for its programmes encompassing ethics, various world-views and the deepest beliefs, meanings and values informing human life. The Victorian State Advisory Committee suggested adding Human Ethics to the name of the Department.⁹⁴ None were content with either of the two definitions of religion. Some amended the new definition by adding reference to the supernatural; one suggested inserting reference to the communal nature of religion into the old definition; from two States came letters suggesting dictionary definitions which they thought better than either of the two offered in the paper. Most were of the opinion that the ABC's understanding of religion needed to be that of the majority of ordinary people. Some were sure that the FRAC was necessary, but needed a more diverse membership including people of faiths other than Christian; others were equally certain that ad hoc consultation of people with a wide variety of abilities and experiences would serve religious broadcasting better. Suggestions for future programming brought both general and detailed responses, but predominantly there was a wish for the Department to be, in Bishop Oliver Heyward's words, 'open and adventurous'.⁹⁵

Final preparations for Seminar

Peter returned to work in August 1976 to absorb all that had happened and had been written in his absence and to bring the process to a point of decision. By now, all the individuals and groups who intended to had aired their opinions and feelings; all was quiet. Already a year before, it had been decided who would be invited to participate in the Seminar. There would be six categories of participants: the Commission, senior management, the FRAC, humanists and rationalists, religions other than Christian and Religious Studies scholars in tertiary institutions. James Peter had suggested that the Commission invite in the fourth category those whom Earle Hackett had nominated in a letter he had written to the General Manager in July 1975.⁹⁶ During 1976, some

things which hardly anyone would think of as falling within the field of religion: blue films, fine wines, the glorious try of the wing threequarter'. Objections to the new definition, therefore, came from both secularists and religious believers. L. Keeble, letter to J. Peter, 12.4.76, File POL/CPP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹³ Cf. File POL/CPP, Religion Dept, Sydney; AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

⁹⁴ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1 R17/1/1.

⁹⁵ Bishop O. Heyward, letter to J. Peter, 26.5.76, File POL/CPP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹⁶ J. Peter, memo to C. Semmler, Deputy GM, 20.8.75, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/6.

other church organisations asked for a place in the Seminar, perhaps expecting, wrongly, that it would have decisive power over ABC policy. Of these, Peter diplomatically recommended to the Commission that Rev. Campbell Egan from the NSW Council of Churches be invited.⁹⁷

He prepared three more documents for Seminar participants:

- (1) Appendix A: a supplementary paper in which he summarised the comments received on his position paper and clarified some facts;
- (2) Appendix B: a list of titles and subjects of programmes broadcast in the three radio series, 'Encounter', 'Crossways' and 'By The Way' and in a weekly television series during the period, September-November 1976;
- (3) Appendix C: a report on audiences for religious programmes for the period, middle to late 1976.⁹⁸

The clear purpose of the second of these was to demonstrate the already wide-ranging content of programmes put to air. Fifty-two individual programme titles in the four series were listed. Of these, a little over 65% concerned themselves with Christian living and with social and cultural issues treated within a Christian frame of reference. Explicit appraisal and criticism of the Christian churches, in their relationship to contemporary culture, politics and social change, occurred in about one quarter of these programmes. Nearly 26% of the air-time taken up by these four selected programme series was given over to other than orthodox Christian ideas and activities: some explored general questions of religious perception and others exposed the listener or viewer to Hindu, Australian Aboriginal, Jewish and humanist beliefs and practices. The remaining 9% of the programmes did not lend themselves to ready categorisation because they dealt with broad cultural themes and current affairs with no explicit reference to a particular religious or philosophical stance. What their audiences understood to be the implicit point of view in these programmes would have depended on the different perspectives and convictions which they brought to their listening.

The analysis of these four programme series broadcast over three months presented a partial view. The Department was producing at the time sixteen regular programme series on radio and two on television. A number of these were wholly and uncritically concerned with the inner life of the Christian churches, e.g. 'Divine Service' on radio and television, 'Community Hymn Singing' and 'Readings from the Bible', while much in the others drew almost entirely on Christian sources and material. If the proportions of programmes presenting Christian, and other than Christian, views were calculated in relation to the total production of the Department,

⁹⁷ J. Peter, memo to GM, 1.9.76, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/6.

⁹⁸ Cf. File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

they would be considerably different from the figures mentioned. A careful estimate would suggest that explicitly Christian programmes occupied more than 80% of the air-time.

In Appendix C, Jackie Bonham of the ABC's Audience Research Section reviewed all the religious programmes on both Radio 1 and 2 in the capital cities of Australia from middle to late 1976 and reported that several of these were highly esteemed and had won substantial audiences, often larger than those of comparable programmes. Comparisons were made with programmes going to air at or around the same time on other ABC and commercial stations, and with programmes which had a similar appeal. 'Readings from the Bible', 'Sacred Music', 'Frontier', 'Crossways', 'With Heart and Voice', 'Encounter' and 'Community Hymn Singing' were the successful programmes Bonham referred to.⁹⁹ Bonham's comments on 'Readings from the Bible', a particular focus of public attention at this time, are all that need concern us at this point. Each weekday morning, this programme averaged 46,000 listeners, 25,000 more than for the quarter-hour immediately preceding it. Audience Research interpreted this information to indicate that the readings picked up a number of people who had switched on their radios a few minutes early to hear the news that followed immediately after the reading. The Department had never yielded its claim to this time-slot over the years for this reason. It was this proximity of Bible readings to the news that so pleased the Department and, as we have already noted, so annoyed some secularists.

Seminar 1976

The ABC is arranging a Seminar on the treatment of religion in ABC programmes. The General Manager of the ABC, Mr T. S. Duckmanton, announced that it will be held in Sydney, on Tuesday and Wednesday, 7 and 8 December.

So began an ABC press release, November 19, 1976.¹⁰⁰

Twenty-one people from outside the ABC met for the two-day Seminar under the chairmanship of James Peter. The General Manager, the Assistant General Manager for Television and the Acting Assistant General Manager for Radio were present at various times during the consultation. The chairman stressed from the start that participants were there in their own personal capacity, even though they had been drawn from various groupings in the community whom the ABC thought should be included. Although they were, consequently, listed in the report of the Seminar

⁹⁹ Details of audience responses to these programmes appear in ch. 10, 'Audiences and their responses'.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. File SRP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

simply in alphabetical order and not grouped in categories, they have been grouped here for the sake of clarity. The twenty-one were:

Members of the FRAC

- Sr Valerie Burns (Hobart), Religious Education Co-ordinator, Catholic Education Office,
 Rev. Kevin Burton (Sydney), Director of the Sydney Catholic Communications Centre and nominee of FRAC member, Roman Catholic Archbishop Francis Rush, Brisbane,
 Rev. Keith Dowding (Perth), General Secretary of the Western Australian Council of Churches, Congregationalist,
 Rev. Ian Fardon (Armidale), Methodist,
 Anglican Bishop Oliver Heyward (Bendigo),
 Rev. T. V. Jones (Adelaide), Anglican,
 Rev. Dr. David Merritt (Melbourne), Joint Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian,
 Rev. Dr. John Munro (Brisbane), former Head of the ABC Religion Department, Religious Education Advisor to the Queensland Education Department, Anglican,
 Mr Russell Rollason (Sydney), Publicity Officer, ACC, Anglican,
 Very Rev. Stephanos (Sydney), nominated by FRAC member, Archbishop Stylianos, Greek Orthodox,
 Dr Barbara Thiering (Sydney), Anglican;

Humanists and rationalists

- Mr Kevin Anderson (Sydney), replacing Dr Ian Edwards, humanist,
 Dr W. Glanville Cook (Melbourne), rationalist,
 Ms Beatrice Faust (Melbourne), humanist,
 Ms Bridget Gilling (Sydney), humanist,
 Prof. Lewis Keeble (Brisbane), humanist;

Religions other than Christian

- Dr Qazi Ashfaq Ahmad (Sydney), the nominee of M.K. Hussain of the Council of Islamic Affairs, NSW,
 Rabbi B. Brasch (Sydney), nominated by Rabbi Apple of the Great Synagogue;

Tertiary educators in Religious Studies

- Dr Norman Habel (Adelaide), South Australian College of Advanced Education, Lutheran,
 Rev. Dr. Michael Mason (Melbourne), Yarra Theological Union, Roman Catholic.¹⁰¹

Finally, Rev. Campbell Egan (Sydney), NSW Council of Churches, Presbyterian, was added to the original invitation list on Peter's recommendation 'in view of his particular interest'.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Cf. AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R17/1/6.

¹⁰² J. Peter, memo to GM, 1.9.76, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R 17/1/6.

The official Minutes of the Seminar are really inadequate, recording only formal motions and resolutions and not the discussion, which is an important feature of any seminar.¹⁰³ Peter gave some account of parts of the discussion in a record of the meeting that he wrote for the General Manager a week later with his own personal comments interspersed.¹⁰⁴ This, and other participants' comments, offer a little more detail about the two-day conference.

The main resolutions of the Seminar were:

- (1) that there be 'some positive recognition of the pluralistic nature of [Australian] society' in the ABC's programmes and structure;
- (2) that 'to this end...the Religion Department be widened' to enable it to give due expression to this pluralism in its programmes;
- (3) that this 'widening of the Department's responsibilities be achieved without diminution of the programmes it now presents';
- (4) that 'the Department be renamed the Department of Religions and World Views';
- (5) that the present FRAC be dissolved and replaced by 'ad hoc seminars at least once a year'.

The Seminar also proposed for the Commission's consideration a statement on the role of the ABC in respect of religion. It repeated a good deal of Peter's draft statement and notes, presented to the Commission in June 1975, but dropped its definition of religion - indeed, it avoided defining religion at all - and widened the original statement to include 'world views', as well as 'religions'. Since it was objections to 'Readings from the Bible' that had contributed to stirring up this wider examination of the ABC's policy regarding religious broadcasts, the Seminar discussed this programme and made this recommendation : that the programme be retained (four people opposed this) and that another be introduced presenting readings from the sacred texts of other world religions and from literature dealing with deep human values.

As already indicated, not all resolutions were unanimous. Kevin Burton opposed the second resolution, although he did not vote against it but abstained. He argued an alternative position. Recognising the place of world views, philosophies and ethical systems in a comprehensive national broadcasting service, he suggested that, perhaps, another specialist department was needed for these. Religions had enough in common that was different from philosophies to warrant their being handled in a distinct department of their own. He believed it inevitable that widening the Religion Department would result in a weakening of focus on religions. Although he was alone in opposing the second resolution, all the Seminar participants

¹⁰³ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

¹⁰⁴ J. Peter, report to GM, 15.12.76, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

accommodated his last concern in the recommendation that followed. Since the policy statement which the Seminar proposed for the Commission's consideration embraced all the resolutions, Burton abstained from voting on the policy statement also. Three participants voted against the new name for the Department. Peter commented afterwards that this resolution 'should be understood as a counsel of desperation'; that the Seminar, after a good deal of trouble probing for an acceptable name, eventually had decided not to waste further time on it. Two motions were put regarding future community consultation on religious broadcasting. The motion which failed recommended keeping the advisory committee structure with slightly revised criteria for membership. The great majority, however, preferred to move to ad hoc seminars.

By and large, the two-day meeting seems to have been a positive experience for almost all. John Munro was pleased with the open spirit that prevailed and with the Seminar's resolutions.¹⁰⁵ Bridget Gilling, a humanist participant from Sydney, wrote to James Peter:

The December Seminar was a most inspiring experience, a creative effort well focussed by your splendid chairmanship. It was a true (though non-religious) revelation to me that such potentially diverse people should come together in amity and unity on the need to broaden the base of religious programming.¹⁰⁶

The Seminar was over. What remained now was for the Commission to consider its recommendations and declare its policy with regard to 'the treatment of religion in ABC programmes'. This was not done until March 1977. Between December and March, some church leaders and Christian organisations again waged a war of words, protesting against the Seminar's recommendations. A remarkable amount of what was said and written was decidedly inaccurate.

Public controversy resumes, 1976-7

Alan Gill wrote a piece in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, headed 'ABC Tinder', predicting some fiery reactions from 'conservative churchmen' to the Seminar's recommendation that the Religion Department incorporate 'non-transcendental philosophies' in its scope.¹⁰⁷ He was right in his prediction and fanned the flames himself by reporting, both incorrectly and inadequately, on the status of the new definition of religion. Gill quoted only this definition, although two definitions had been put to the Seminar for discussion, and presented it as though it had already been accepted by the Department, making no mention of the fact that the Seminar had discarded it.

¹⁰⁵ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

¹⁰⁶ B. Gilling, letter to J. Peter, 29.3/77, File SRP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁰⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18.12.76.

Two months later, the *Australian Church Record* announced that the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Marcus Loane, had written to the Chairman, J. D. Norgard, strongly condemning the new definition. The report went on to state that this definition of religion was 'on the agenda for the next meeting of the ABC Commissioners' having been 'recommended by a seminar of twenty-two people held in Sydney in December'.¹⁰⁸ Although this was not true, *Church Scene* repeated it a week later.¹⁰⁹ James Peter and Chairman Norgard were doing their best to correct such misapprehensions as they appeared, but with little success.¹¹⁰ In October 1975, a deputation of church leaders had made clear to the Commission their rejection of the new definition; yet, more than a year later, it was still being discussed. Its continuing appearance anywhere, whatever the context, stirred mistrust of the ABC.

There were many anxieties expressed in the three months between the Seminar and the Commission's publication of a policy statement.

Archbishop Loane said 'there were fears that Bible readings would be replaced...with readings of political radicals like Bertrand Russell and Voltaire'. He foresaw the hours formerly devoted to religious programmes being taken up by all sorts of social groups 'from Weight Watchers Anonymous to yoga enthusiasts', all of whom would qualify for inclusion under the new definition.¹¹¹ Kevin Burton, nicely appraising the pragmatic realities, repeated in the *Catholic Weekly* the fear he had expressed at the Seminar: that, in a time of economic contraction, enlarging the brief of the Religion Department to include non-religious world views would inevitably lead not to an expansion of the Department but to a reduction in religious programmes, no matter that the Seminar recommended otherwise.¹¹² Others, like the Festival of Light and those who produced *News Weekly*, sought to convince people that there were enemies of Christianity within the ABC who were working to a strategy to bring about its 'de-religionising'. The Festival of Light spoke of 'Left wing influence' in the Special Projects Department and 2JJ.¹¹³ *News Weekly* agreed, citing as proof 'the extreme Left' bias of 3ZZ, the 'free rein' 2JJ gave to 'the counter-culture' and 'the generous exposure given to the women's liberation view' by the ABC Women's

¹⁰⁸ *Australian Church Record*, Sydney, 17.2.77. It is worth noting that the Record's report of the Seminar and its implications for ABC religious policy, printed on 20.1.77, was the only accurate account to be found in the press, both church and secular.

¹⁰⁹ *Church Scene*, Sydney, 24.2.77.

¹¹⁰ In 1981, the 'Dix Report' perpetuated the mistake of presenting the amended version of the Varna definition of religion as the approved ABC definition, cf. vol. 2, s. 11.147.

¹¹¹ *Age*, Melbourne, 2.2.77.

¹¹² *Catholic Weekly*, Sydney, 6.1.77.

¹¹³ Australian Festival of Light, 'Media release', Sydney, 25.1.77. Some Sydney suburban papers ran this release verbatim, e.g. *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader* and *Manly Daily* printed identical reports on 9.2.77.

Broadcasting Co-operative.¹¹⁴ Thus, anti-religious purpose was attributed to whole sectors of the ABC. There was an echo of the same theme, although from a different perspective, in 'Anatomy of a sell-out', an open letter from Rev. Alan Nicholls to James Peter accusing him of selling the church down the river, to use his phrase. Nicholls circulated his letter widely through the Anglican Press Service.¹¹⁵ Implementation of the Seminar's resolutions would, he foresaw, result in the appointment of 'several humanists' to the Department to ensure their views were adequately programmed; the job description of the Department's Director would then be re-written; in the interests of balance, a humanist would be appointed as the next Director, since the present incumbent was a Protestant clergyman; and then, broadcasts of worship services would be reduced. Burton speaking to Catholics, Rev. Fred Nile addressing supporters of the Festival of Light and Rev. Bernard Judd of the NSW Council of Churches all called for a campaign of letters of protest to the Commission.

That the Seminar had explicitly resolved and recommended against some of the things that were feared did nothing to allay those fears. The Seminar, itself, became the object of mistrust and more and more attempts to discredit it appeared in print. Even before the Seminar met, it had already incurred some displeasure: its composition had been queried by the NSW Council of Churches and some people who had applied for inclusion had not been invited. Now that it was over, Burton publicly questioned in the *Catholic Weekly* the competence of the participants. The 'Media release' of the Festival of Light cast aspersions on the faith of some of the Christians who attended and hinted at manipulation of the Seminar with its use of the word 'handpicked'. Alan Nicholls turned insinuation into declaration and stated as the firm opinion of the NSW Council of Churches that the majority of the participants 'were hand-picked in such a way as to guarantee the results that were desired'. He was reported by Alan Gill as having described those advising the Commission at that time as people who would 'choke rather than mention God'.¹¹⁶ The Festival of Light asserted that 'there were no representatives officially of the mainline denominations'. This was technically true; ABC appointments to its advisory bodies were personal, not representative, appointments. It was also misleading; there were committed members of all the 'mainline denominations' among the participants of the Seminar and some of them held high office in their religious communities.

¹¹⁴ *News Weekly*, Melbourne, 26.1.77.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Anglican Press Service 'Media release', Sydney, 1.3.77. Nicholls was Head of the Anglican Press Service and editor of the Sydney Anglican magazine, *Southern Cross*, which published the open letter in March 1977. A report of this letter appeared in *Grafton Daily Examiner*, NSW, 3.3.77.

¹¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28.2.79.

Peter rejected these criticisms of the composition of the Seminar in his submission to the Commission in March 1977:

My own judgment is that, in getting together a score or so of people of several viewpoints, from several walks of life and from several States, the Commission did quite well and it would have done better had all who were invited been able to attend. Each of the Christians present speaks for a significant section within the churches, as well as within the community at large [and the critics] are not as representative of opinion in the churches as they say.¹¹⁷

It was certainly true that many church leaders had not taken up arms against the Seminar and its recommendations. The *Australian Presbyterian Life* reported on an informal survey it had carried out among Presbyterian church leaders in all States, and concluded that there was general support for the changes proposed for the Religion Department and that the strongest opposition was coming from Sydney church circles, in particular, conservative evangelicals of the Anglican Church, the NSW Council of Churches and the Festival of Light.¹¹⁸ It should be noted, however, that in addition to these, at least sixteen Roman Catholic bishops from various States had written to the Commission objecting to the proposed changes, using the same arguments as Kevin Burton had consistently put.¹¹⁹

ABC policy statement on religious broadcasting, 1977

Peter's last submission on the matter to the Commission in March 1977 was decisive. Except for two items, the policy statement he proposed was formally approved and made public with great promptness. In the assessment he wrote to accompany his proposal, he made a number of points which would surely have swung the weight of opinion in the Commission and in management to his view:

Bearing in mind the amount of unease already generated at the prospect of significant change in the Religion Department, and the amount of energy required to allay this unease, would the achievement be worth the effort?¹²⁰

If the ABC accepts the contention that 'world views' are inadequately presented on air, then it will need to deploy additional facilities, staff, funds and air-time to meet the lack.

If the scope of the Religion Department is to be widened for this purpose without a lessening of its present production of religious programmes, these further resources will need to be directed to this Department.

A tentative estimate of additional requirements would be at least one Religious Broadcasts Assistant, one Television Producer with two assistants (these last three may be available from the NSW 'pool'), and a budget increase of \$1,500

¹¹⁷ J. Peter, 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes', Feb. 1977, ss. C2.4-2.5, AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R17/1/1. Note the date of this document which has the same title as one written a year earlier.

¹¹⁸ *Australian Presbyterian Life*, 16.2.77.

¹¹⁹ Peter, 'The treatment of religion', 1977, s. C2.5.

¹²⁰ Peter, 'The treatment of religion', 1977, s. C3.

and \$20,000 respectively for direct radio and television expenses for every five half-hour programmes.¹²¹

Archbishop Loane's warnings that, if the scope of its programmes were widened to include secular world views, groups like Weight Watchers would be eligible to take over some of the air-time allotted to the Religion Department were obvious exaggerations. It had been clear to everyone involved in the discussions that only philosophies of substantial human significance and influence were in mind. Even so, incorporating these philosophies into his sphere of responsibility raised troublesome questions for Peter about how to decide on the allocation of air-time to competing groups once the Department abandoned the old reliable ground of the census figures. The Department had claimed all along that, on this basis, its apportionment of time to people with views opposed to religious faith had been just.

Peter recommended that the Department continue with its responsibilities for programmes dealing with Christianity, other traditional religions and new religious movements, which would include different views and criticisms of them. He suggested that another way to do justice to those with other world views and philosophies would be to advise them to send their requests for broadcasts to the Controllers of Radio and Television, who had the power to determine what programmes would be produced and could then direct a department accordingly. He recommended replacing the FRAC with ad hoc consultations as required. Finally, he proposed a policy statement for adoption and publication by the Commission. For this, he returned to his draft of June 1975 and its accompanying notes, but he omitted entirely its definition of religion and included two small clarifying additions suggested by the Seminar.

When this paper went forward to the General Manager, Talbot Duckmanton, Keith Mackriell, the Assistant General Manager, attached a memorandum in support of it. Mackriell warned against a decision that could seriously damage relationships with Sydney church leaders. He noted that the Australian Religion Department, 'unlike its BBC counterpart', had a history of including critical views of religion in its programmes and had been commended unanimously by the Seminar for its already plural approach.¹²² He suggested that world views could be accommodated in

¹²¹ Peter, 'The treatment of religion', 1977, s. C4.

¹²² In the light of this comment it is relevant to note here that, in 1975, the UK Central Religious Advisory Committee (CRAC) submitted its recommendations to the 'Annan Inquiry' for a revised statement of aims for religious broadcasting. This statement, while worded differently, displayed a similar approach to that adopted by the ABC here. Cf. CRAC, 'The role of religious broadcasting in the BBC', Paper, 14.11.75, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

programmes produced by Special Projects and advised that providing extra resources to the Religion Department would be difficult. The General Manager agreed.¹²³

The statement the Commission adopted in March 1977 read as follows:

THE TREATMENT OF RELIGION IN ABC PROGRAMMES

The role of the ABC in the field of religion is to provide avenues of information about beliefs and activities, platforms from which representatives of different viewpoints may be heard, forums for the discussion of different viewpoints and opportunities for participation in worship, meditation and other religious activities.

This role is served predominantly by the Religion Department, which presents programmes dealing with Christianity, other traditional religions and new religious movements.

In selecting from the material available the ABC's officers apply the criteria appropriate to all programme building. The officer primarily responsible for seeing that there is a balanced presentation is the Director of Religious Programmes.

The 'criteria appropriate to all programme building' are such as: audience interest, audience need, availability of material, integrity of content and standard of production.

A 'balanced presentation' is not achieved by giving a turn to everyone professing an interest in every issue. Nor is it achieved by inserting in every programme, or even in every series, mention of every viewpoint. It is achieved when the whole output bears a reasonable relationship to the interests represented in the audience as a whole.

The Commission would like it known that any who wish to have presented in ABC programmes a philosophy or world view not of a religious nature should address their requests to the Controller of Radio Programmes or the Controller of Television Programmes.¹²⁴

Concluding evaluation

For the ABC, consultations, whether within permanent structures like Advisory Committees or occasional conferences, had always been means of seeking advice without an obligation to follow it, and this Seminar was a classic example of just such a consultation.

Of the Seminar's five resolutions, none can really be said to have been incorporated into Commission policy. The FRAC was abandoned, as recommended, but it was not replaced with ad hoc consultations, as the fifth resolution of the Seminar

¹²³ Exchange of memos of K.Mackriell and GM, 21.2.77 and 22.2.77, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

¹²⁴ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1. The two items in Peter's submission to the Commission omitted from this statement were: a commitment to seeking advice from time to time on religious policy; and reference to the role of the Head of Religion in relation to religious material in programmes of other departments. These two issues are discussed further in chs 9 and 10 respectively.

had suggested.¹²⁵ In any case, this was a relatively minor item on the Seminar's agenda. The Commission had demonstrated clearly that it did not really matter one way or the other what was resolved on this point, since both a FRAC and an ad hoc consultation could be equally insignificant in the scheme of things. It could be said that the omission of a definition of religion from the Commission's statement was the result of influence from the Seminar. However, the truth is that what did become enshrined in policy was, in fact, the minority position taken by one Seminar participant, Rev. Kevin Burton, reinforced by post-Seminar campaigning by a number of church leaders and organisations.

Archbishop Loane expressed himself gratified by the Commission's statement: 'I believe this to be a wise and helpful decision';¹²⁶ and he would have been voicing the sentiments of all who had taken up the cudgels to defend the status quo. Those who wanted change - and these included both committed Christians and those without religious belief - were acutely disappointed. John Munro thought it 'a lost opportunity'.¹²⁷ For Bridget Gilling, who had found the Seminar an inspiring experience of discovering unity in diversity, it was 'a most depressing document'. She concluded her letter to Peter in this way:

At a time when repression, deprivation and misery are visible on all sides, neglect of any opportunity for people of good will to unite in thought and action is a tragedy...Sadly,...¹²⁸

It must be said that the processes set up for discussion and consultation were not well served by the extreme and intolerant statements that came from both church and humanist quarters. Open-minded and open-hearted negotiation always gets badly jostled in such a contest, even forced out of the play altogether.

The effect of the Commission's decision was that secular world views and philosophies which, along with major religions, could seriously claim a place of significance in human affairs, were not included in a specific departmental structure in the ABC. This is not to say that secularists were excluded from access to the airwaves. There were a number of programmes covering all kinds of human concerns where they were heard. The broadcasting opportunity a number of humanists were seeking, however, was something more than commenting on a specific issue; it was to be able to communicate a way of life. James Peter had understood this. He was quoted thus by Alan Gill:

¹²⁵ No organised community consultation on religious broadcasting, regular or ad hoc, has occurred since 1976.

¹²⁶ Archbishop M. Loane, letter to Chairman, 24.3.77, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/6.

¹²⁷ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

¹²⁸ B. Gilling, letter to J. Peter, 29.3.77, File SRP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

If a humanist comes to me and says 'I want to talk about humanism as a way of life', it is not a religious programme. If I send him to another department, the interviewer will say, 'What do you think about uranium, or abortion?' He will not be asked about humanism. At present there is nowhere for the humanist to go.¹²⁹

The Commission's advice to apply to the Controllers of Radio and Television was a pragmatic response offering no structural resolution of this issue.

Taking into account all the influences at work in the final decision of the Commission, it seems improbable that it might have taken any position other than that which we find in its 1977 statement.

The personalities of James Peter and Talbot Duckmanton, the General Manager, are not unimportant here. Peter was a conventional man of steadfast Christian faith with a clear, robust mind and a talent for administration. He was intellectually and spiritually committed to the orderly processes of organised Christian ecumenism. As for those who espoused other than Christian religions or philosophies, his honest mind was receptive to their views and he was willing to concede what persuasive force he found in them, but ultimately resisted any sustained interaction with them. He could neither imagine nor implement radical structural change in his domain. He, finally, proposed to the Commission a future for the Department that was very little different from its past, and the General Manager agreed. Duckmanton had joined the ABC as a Cadet Announcer in 1939 at the age of eighteen. He, like Peter, had fought in the Second World War in the Royal Australian Air Force. The Duckmantons had been faithful Anglicans and young Talbot had pursued his secondary school studies at Newington College, one of the so-called 'great public schools' in Sydney conducted by the Methodist church.¹³⁰ From 1957, he was an ABC administrator, inheriting Charles Moses' job as General Manager in 1964 and retiring in 1982. K.S. Inglis described Duckmanton as a reticent man, 'calm, judicious',¹³¹ who, by 1977, had been thirteen years at the head of the broadcasting organisation and nearly forty years working within it and 'like many an ageing leader was concerned to prevent unnecessary change'.¹³² Peter, Duckmanton and many others of that generation in the ABC were returned servicemen from the Second World War. Peter himself made the point that they were products, at least to an extent, of their experience in the armed forces.¹³³ They had been trained to

¹²⁹ A. Gill, 'Sound, fury filled lively debate on broadcasting', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28.2.79. (Gill was prompted by a debate on religious broadcasting in Britain in 1979 to recall the 1977 Australian controversy.)

¹³⁰ Inglis, p. 73.

¹³¹ Inglis, p. 254.

¹³² Inglis, p. 417.

¹³³ Peter, interview, 3.8.92.

institutional loyalty, obedience to lawful authority and efficiency in a regulated environment with hierarchical structures of leadership.

The bureaucracy of the ABC, and the circumstances in which it was functioning at the time, were dominant factors influencing the decision of the Commission. Throughout the 1970s, all aspects of the Commission's extensive organisation were under close examination. In its *Annual Report 1982-3*, the Commission wrote:

The ABC has been subjected to scrutiny which, in one form or another, is virtually ceaseless....During the 1970s, thirty-two inquiries were held involving aspects of ABC operations.¹³⁴

These, combined with cuts in Government expenditure from 1975, created an atmosphere of insecurity in the ABC, in which every sector felt the need to look to its own interests. Pressed financially and wearied by the repeated investigations and appraisals, ABC management was not attracted to a course of action that called for providing extra resources and expending time and energy placating industrious and persistent critics. Even if the resources could be got from what was already existing in the organisation, diverting them from one sector to another would not be easy with all departments fighting to keep what they had. James Peter portrayed such a future in his submission and the ABC bureaucracy retreated from it. Bureaucracies characteristically defend themselves against harassment from without and disturbance within.

John Munro believed that the ABC bureaucracy was also discomforted by the prospect of a more inclusive Religion Department. This challenged established assumptions in the modern, secular mind about the place of religion in human affairs: religion was primarily a private choice of individuals; if social statistics showed that some 80% of people claimed a religious affiliation of some kind, then a place for religion in national, comprehensive broadcasting was justified, but its place was a small, minor department working within a limited, prescribed range and not significant in the broad sweep of human events, ideas and decisions in the modern world with which others dealt. A Religion Department that sought to extend its range of concerns and break out of its former confinement 'could be dangerous and bring unwanted change' to set patterns of thought, of relationships, of work and programming.¹³⁵

During the 1960s and 1970s, established religious institutions lost many active members, often the youngest and most energetic; the traditional attraction and authority

¹³⁴ ABC, *Annual Report, 1982-3*, p. 5. The three most far-reaching and significant of these produced the McKinsey, Green and Dix Reports in 1973, 1976 and 1981.

¹³⁵ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

the main churches had held for people diminished markedly.¹³⁶ The ABC provided the churches with a means of communicating with an audience wider than the congregations they assembled. With fewer people participating in church life and liturgy, this access to radio and television became all the more significant. Furthermore, anything that threatened the future of the Religion Department, and of the programmes it was accustomed to produce, was to be resisted as an attack on the expression of religious faith in the public realm, of which the churches were the principal defenders in Australian society. There was still a lot of social and political power available to the major churches once they set their hearts on wielding it. The status and influence of church leaders and church instrumentalities and the numbers of people involved in church activities were all able to be used effectively in a cause. Their interests and those of the ABC coincided in this conservative decision of the Commission.

The Religion Department was small in size and budget and, at the same time, convinced that it was dealing with matters of the greatest importance for individual human lives and for the whole of society.¹³⁷ It was both vulnerable and strongly committed to its own existence. At a time when many ideas were being aired about organisational changes affecting the identity of the Department - not only the questions on the agenda of the Seminar, but management proposals to amalgamate it with other departments - it was essential that the Department discern how best to protect itself and its work. It recognised its need for institutional support from the churches. The Federal Director, having set out to explore possibilities for a new identity for the Department, concluded that its security lay in staying as it was, allied with the main religious communities, while accommodating some shifts in emphasis.

The 1977 policy statement of the Commission on religious broadcasting represented the coincidence of these interests of the churches, the ABC and its Religion Department.

In this same year, 1977, James Peter moved into a general administrative position in the ABC, as Controller of Radio Programmes, where he remained until his retirement. Patrick Kirkwood, Peter's senior Assistant for television, became the new Director of the Department, which faced further challenges to its ethos and stability in the years that followed. These will be discussed in the course of the next two chapters.

¹³⁶ Cf. ch. 7, 'Religious plurality in Australia'.

¹³⁷ Kirkwood, in the midst of the controversy in 1975 referred in a memo to the 'massive budgets' available by comparison to Drama and Features, cf. Kirkwood, comment attached to draft reply for the Minister for Media, 25.7.75, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5.

PART IV

INSIDE THE ABC, 1941-91

CHAPTER 9 FIRM GROUND, SHIFTING SANDS

Introduction

The requirement by Act of Parliament in 1932 that the ABC provide an 'adequate and comprehensive' broadcasting service to the Australian people is the ground on which religious broadcasts stand and have stood for fifty years.¹ Considering the spread and strength of religious faith among Australians,² the national broadcaster would certainly not be fulfilling its legislative obligations without a serious commitment to religious broadcasting.³ The continuance of religious broadcasts by the ABC is assured, then, so long as the Corporation remains faithful to its mandate.

There is another way in which the legislation governing the ABC has given support to religious broadcasting. To meet its obligations to all Australians, the national broadcaster has developed several radio networks reaching the most remote settlements and catering to a wide range of interests and tastes.⁴ Thus, ABC religious broadcasters, to the extent that their programmes have had access to these networks and their audiences, have had the possibility of communicating with a large and diverse listening public.

However, such conditions favourable to religious broadcasting have co-existed with factors and situations that have inhibited it. This chapter will examine the extent to which religious broadcasters found that their work was helped, and hindered, by their location within the structures of the ABC.

The Federal Government and the ABC

The ABC, since 1948, has relied for its funding on allocations from Federal Budgets⁵ and it has always been the Federal Government of the day that has determined the appointments of Commissioners and, since 1983, most Board members.⁶ Despite all assertions of the national broadcaster's political independence,

¹ The 1983 Act re-affirmed that comprehensive broadcasting was required of the ABC.

² Cf. ch. 7, 'Religious plurality in Australia'.

³ 'The Religion Department's existence is a sign of the ABC's commitment to a democratic society. When religion is pushed to the margins a serious defect in the democratic process occurs. The religious experience in life has a right to be publicly known, analysed and understood'. F. Spurling, personal interview, 20.7.89.

⁴ Cf. ch. 2, fnn. 52-5.

⁵ Cf. ch. 2, fn. 26.

⁶ Cf. ch. 2, 'Commissioners and Directors'. Board members not directly determined by the Government are the elected ABC staff representative and the Managing Director who is an ex officio member of the Board.

the policies of Governments inevitably have had their impact on ABC programmes, including religious programmes.

We noted in an earlier chapter how the language policy of the ABC conformed to the assimilationist policies of the Australian Government and how distasteful it was to the Religion Department to have to refuse the Greek Orthodox church opportunities to broadcast their liturgies, which were in Greek. The Department's support for Australian Lutherans protesting against the Government ban on broadcasts of their church services during the Second World War has also been mentioned.⁷

The influential presence in the Government, or on the Commission or Board, of persons sympathetic to religious broadcasting has helped to sustain the Religion Department even though, at times, bringing some unwelcome interference. Richard Boyer, Chairman of the Commission, 1946-61, was Henderson's good friend who shared his religious convictions and gave him every support.⁸ Arthur Calwell, long-serving Labor Parliamentarian, kept a watchful eye on the ABC's fulfilment of its obligations to religious broadcasting. As chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Broadcasting, he informed the ABC in mid-1942 of the Committee's recommendation that two church services every Sunday be broadcast on both national and State relay.⁹ Calwell was quoted as saying that 'the Commission should accommodate itself to the churches on Sunday rather than that the churches should accommodate themselves to the Commission' - a view strongly rejected by the Commission's Chairman, W. J. Cleary, who insisted that the ABC could not surrender its authority in programming to 'other outside bodies'.¹⁰ Henderson did not welcome the Parliamentary Committee's proposal either, because, at that very time, he was negotiating with ABC management and church leaders to reduce the number of church services on air and to change one of them to a studio production ('Radio Service'), which would be more flexible in form and style and appeal to 'the very large...religious non-ecclesiastical public' who were not being adequately provided for.¹¹ Throughout the Department's history, Parliamentarians, writing on their own behalf or endorsing the views of constituents, have indicated their support

⁷ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 52.

⁸ Cf. ch. 5, fnn. 7-8.

⁹ K. Henderson, memo to AGM, 25.6.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

¹⁰ W. J. Cleary, letter to A. A. Calwell, 23.10.42, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

¹¹ Henderson, memo, 25.6.42. Anglican Bishop Francis Batty of Newcastle was a strong ally of Henderson's in this move. Cf. his letter to the AGM, 9.2.43, AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

for religious broadcasting, though not necessarily for a particular programme or decision of the Department.¹²

The opposite has also been true, as has been shown in the previous chapter. Secularists in the Ministry of the Labor Government, 1972-5, actively sought to have religious broadcasts removed or diminished.¹³ While there is no evidence to suggest that Dr Earle Hackett, Deputy Chairman of the Commission at the time, used his position to press for changes to the Department, his status in the ABC and his well-known espousal of secular humanism were, in themselves, encouragement to fellow humanists in their challenging of the Department and its programmes.

Another more subtle influence from Federal politics on ABC programming, which affected the Religion Department, was the introduction in February 1977 of the evening programme, 'Broadband', presented Mondays to Thursdays on Radio 2. The stated aim of 'Broadband' was to breach the barriers that divided the specialist departments from one another and bring together, in a coherent format, contributions from a number of them.¹⁴ The Directors of the three departments of Special Projects, Science and Religion co-operated in this venture - Allan Ashbolt, John Challis and Patrick Kirkwood.¹⁵ Kirkwood, Head of Religion, 1977-86, was, of all the directors the Department has had, the best attuned to, and informed about, the media in which he worked. He appreciated the intentions of 'Broadband' to encourage fresh approaches to radio broadcasting. He also perceived the opportunity it offered to reduce his Department's separation from the other sources of programmes in the ABC.¹⁶ Whatever departmental collaboration it fostered, 'Broadband' had, for Ashbolt, a strategic importance. Foreseeing the victory of the Liberal Government in the 1975 Federal elections, he doubted that 'Lateline', a programme of Special

¹² Cf. Senator Wilfred Kent Hughes, letter to GM, 30.1.68, affirming church services as 'a very great joy' to many, cf. AA (NSW); SP1423/1, file R17/1/1; Senator Gordon Davidson, letter to GM, 6.4.76, complaining at the removal from 2CY, Canberra, of 'Readings from the Bible', cf. AA (NSW):C2427/1, file R17/1/5.

¹³ Contrast the efforts of James McClelland and Arthur Calwell in relation to religious broadcasting, both Labor chairmen of Parliamentary standing committees on broadcasting at different times.

¹⁴ This programme of comment, discussion and analysis ran for 1 hr and 45 mins in its first year, then for 1 hr from Feb. 1978 until it ended in 1980. Cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1977-8*, p. 9, and *Annual Report 1980-1*, p. 47.

¹⁵ Dr John Challis had worked in the Religion Dept in 1965-6 before moving to Education and later becoming Head of Science, 1968-84. He maintained a close interest in the Dept and friendship with Kirkwood. J. Challis, personal interview, 27.4.89.

¹⁶ The structural separation of the departments was reinforced by the fact that, until the ABC Centre in Ultimo was opened on 22.6.1991, ABC Radio in Sydney was scattered through a number of different city buildings, making staff interaction across departmental boundaries difficult. At worst, it occupied more than 20 different locations in Sydney, some of which offered inadequate working conditions and telephone systems. Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89.

Projects that often called into question prevailing social values and institutions, would survive. He thought that 'Broadband', in which productions from his sector were combined with material from other departments might have a better chance of enduring.¹⁷ In fact, Ashbolt, in ill health, took leave in late 1977 and did not return to the ABC;¹⁸ 'Broadband', which was always a difficult experiment, ceased in 1980.¹⁹ The simple point here is that national politics may motivate ABC programmes and affect the functioning of various sectors of it even when most of those involved are unaware of its influence.

The Government's control of finances has exerted effective pressure on the ABC. When money has been plentiful, or restricted, the various sectors of the ABC have planned, or cancelled, projects accordingly.

The period of increased Government funding, 1973-5, was a chance for the realising of some dreams. One of these was a station especially oriented to young adults. When 2JJ began broadcasting on January 19, 1975, however, the Government's part in this had been considerably more than funding an ABC submission. There had been no submission. The Minister, Douglas McClelland, had requested the ABC to open a station for youth. Marius Webb, who, with Ronald Moss, established 2JJ and co-ordinated its activities from 1975 to 1983, was informed by senior management in 1974 that the Government wanted the station by Christmas. He, Moss and others had often discussed the failure of radio to take contemporary youth culture and its music seriously and were philosophically and professionally well prepared to launch the new project; and funds for it flowed.²⁰ There is no doubt that 2JJ, which has developed into an interstate network, Triple J-FM, has served a youthful audience in a unique way and has extended the ABC's range of listeners. This was achieved, however, by its acquiescing in the Government's intrusion into areas of policy and programme planning that were properly the domain of the Commission.

The Religion Department's share of resources has always been small, comparative to most other departments, and its use of them careful and frugal.²¹ Even

¹⁷ A. Ashbolt, personal interview, 11.12.92.

¹⁸ Ashbolt formally retired in October 1978. Cf. Ashbolt, interview, 11.12.92.

¹⁹ Long consultative meetings, basic differences of philosophy, abrasive personalities and unequal skills among those participating absorbed a lot of time and energy to achieve rather uneven results. Kirkwood, interview, 28.7.89.

²⁰ M. Webb, personal interview, 8.12.92.

²¹ ABC files contain many references to this situation throughout the Dept's history, e.g. K. Henderson, memo to C. Progs 2.10.53, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8; J. Peter, memo to C. Progs, 6.9.72, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/1/5. In late 1984, Patrick Kirkwood wrote in a paper concerning the ABC Corporate Plan that 'statistics ranked the Religion Department as one of the most time- and cost-efficient programme groups within

so, in 1976, as the Federal Government began to reduce funding for the ABC, the Department could not escape cancellations of a number of its programmes and of normal interstate travel.²² For several years after this, the Department was also unable to engage enough appropriately skilled and informed staff members and had to rely on relief staff drawn from other sectors of the organisation, often unsuitable for the specialised work required of them.²³ The small Department and its productions were inevitably weakened.

A major dispute about Government funding for the ABC flared in the years 1987-8, when David Hill, Managing Director, stirred and led a public campaign against reduced allocations in the Federal Budget.²⁴ Senator Gareth Evans, the Minister for Transport and Communications in 1987-8, decided to take a new, radical approach to the problems of funding national broadcasting, to be applied to both the ABC and SBS. He was critical of 'the almost complete lack of clarity [in existing legislation] as to the scope of the ABC's statutory obligations'²⁵ and argued that this needed to be remedied so that there could be a contractual basis for rational negotiations on funding.²⁶ This would necessitate the ABC's moving to 'programme

the ABC'. In direct programme expenses alone, there was a '7:1 ratio between the most expensive department and his Department, which was the least expensive by far'. He pointed to 'glaring discrepancies between departments' in the matter of fees for service paid to guest broadcasters. His Department was acutely embarrassed when performers pointed to 'similar assignments in other departments being paid 5-6 times as much' as was paid in the Religion Dept. This was 'under-financing on the one hand and ill-considered waste or largesse on the other'. Cf. Kirkwood, Paper, n.d., held by P. Kirkwood.

²² R. Connolly, A/C Progs (Radio), memo to Hd Rel., 18.2.76, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2.

²³ P. Kirkwood made these personal notes in 1979: 'There is a big turnover in staff. Consensus and consistency are difficult. The need to recruit specialist and support staff is obstructed by ceilings'. In June 1980, P. J. Wright reported on an Organisation and Methods investigation of the Dept: 'The staff are overworked. Since the departure of Mona Birrell, who gave a lot of unpaid overtime, a crisis has developed, exacerbated by the type of replacements obtained for this position. These officers tend to see the position as a stepping stone to other departments....Extra burdens have fallen on senior staff which has left them unable to fulfil their full range of duties. The crisis was acute by early 1979...The three senior officers are having to abdicate responsibilities which they are paid to discharge and take short cuts in order to cope with radio programming commitments'. Cf. P. J. Wright, Report, held by P. Kirkwood. Even when new specialist staff appointments were authorised, there were often long delays before the appointees began work: for Stephen Godley the delay was 12 months in 1982 and there was an 8-month gap between Patrick Kirkwood's resignation and David Millikan's arrival as Head in 1986. Cf. S. Godley, personal interview, 31.10.91; and D. Millikan, personal interview, 25.9.91.

²⁴ ABC services were restricted in order to draw attention to funding cuts. Friends of the ABC attracted large attendances at meetings around the nation, where they were addressed by Hill, other ABC personnel and prominent citizens. Cf. daily press reports, e.g. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25-29.2.88.

²⁵ Dept of Transport and Communications, *Review of National Broadcasting Policy*, Paper 1: 'The role of Australia's national broadcaster', Canberra, Feb. 1988, p. 28.

²⁶ Dept of Transport and Communications, 'The role', p. 24.

(i.e. activity) budgeting' and so being able to attribute a true cost to each particular activity.²⁷ Evans was genuinely sympathetic to the ABC and was seeking an arrangement whereby its future 'significance in the nation's cultural, intellectual, social, economic and political life' might be guaranteed.²⁸ His proposals, however, gravely threatened the future of religious broadcasting.

Evans and officials of his department examined the existing range of activities of the ABC and studied the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act, 1983. First, they drew up what they considered were the objectives of the ABC required by its Charter. Other objectives of the Corporation were classified 'peripheral':

ABC OBJECTIVES

CHARTER	PERIPHERAL
Authoritative information	Overseas broadcasting
Contribute to national identity	Orchestras
Cultural enrichment	Public concerts
Complement commercial programming	Parliamentary broadcasting
	Transmitting stations
High quality	Earth stations
Professionalism	
Maximise Australian origin	fn 29

The next step was to relate these objectives to programmes. Evans' department turned to the twelve programme categories which the ABT had identified for the purpose of its overviewing Australian television, particularly commercial television. These categories were applied to ABC radio and television programmes and grouped under two headings, 'Charter' and 'Non-Charter':

PROGRAMME PRIORITIES

CHARTER	NON-CHARTER
News	Light entertainment
Current Affairs	Sports
Drama	Family Activities
The Arts	Religious Matter
Children	
Educational	
Information	
Political Matter	fn 30

Evans proposed that responsibility for objectives considered 'peripheral' would be shifted to another authority and would receive no further funding from Government allocations to the ABC. The 'Charter' objectives and programmes would

²⁷ Dept of Transport and Communications, 'The role', p. 49.

²⁸ G. Evans, 'Guaranteeing the ABC's future', Address to ABC Friday Club, Sydney, 26.2.88, p. 20, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

²⁹ Dept of Transport and Communications, 'The role', table 4.

³⁰ Dept of Transport and Communications, 'The role', table 4.

be assured of consistent Federal funding according to 'multi-year plans'.³¹ The funding of those programmes classified as 'non-Charter' would depend on judgments made by the Government each year and, failing adequate financing, would need to rely on 'increased entrepreneurial activity, including advertisements and sponsorship, if the ABC wishes'.³²

The Minister's ideas were opposed from many quarters. There were those who rejected any intrusion of advertising and sponsorship into ABC programmes; those whose interests had been classified as 'non-Charter' or 'peripheral' and so would be less secured; those who rejected various assumptions underpinning the way objectives and programmes had been categorised in the scheme; those with deep misgivings about any Government funding policy that was tied to specific programme areas and so opened the way to greater Government control over ABC production.³³

The Minister was invited to address the ABC Friday Club on February 26, 1988. The audience of some two hundred were sceptical, not to say suspicious of the Government's motives, and his proposals met with heavy criticism: linking funding to programmes was 'opening the way to much greater Government control'; it was 'a recipe for censorship'.³⁴

In the case of religious programmes, the scheme was based on false premises. The programme category, 'Religious Matter', had been defined by the ABT as 'all programmes originated by recognised religious bodies'. Applicable to commercial broadcasting, this was a quite inaccurate description of religious broadcasting by the ABC.³⁵ The Minister and his departmental officials were obviously ignorant of forty years of policy and practice of a Religion Department which initiated and produced its own programmes. One can only wonder at the meanings Evans' department gave to 'cultural enrichment' and 'national identity' in the list of 'Charter objectives' that would justify the view that religious broadcasts were irrelevant to these. The 'Dix Report', 1981, which led to the new ABC Act, 1983, had used the word, 'cultural', in the limited sense of 'artistic'.³⁶ Evans seems to have done the same. So long as those with authority in and over the ABC understand 'culture' in this narrow sense, their vision of the ABC as a significant cultural agent in Australia will continue to be

31 Dept of Transport and Communications, *Review of National Broadcasting Policy*, Paper 2: 'Funding the Australian Broadcasting Corporation', Canberra, Feb. 1988, p. 70.

32 Dept of Transport and Communications, 'Funding', p. 70.

33 Cf. reports in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24-29.2.88.

34 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27.2.88, p. 5.

35 The different approaches to religious programmes taken by commercial broadcasters and the ABC have been discussed in ch. 2, 'Commercial broadcasters'.

36 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 11.69-70.

sadly deformed. Dr David Millikan, Head of Department, 1986-91, who was present at the Friday Club meeting, pointed out the incongruity of judging ABC religious programmes by the practice of commercial broadcasters and challenged the Minister to explain why the religious faiths of millions of Australians were of less significance in the ABC's Charter of responsibilities than, for example, the arts, or political commentary.³⁷ Evans acknowledged his errors in regard to religious broadcasts that same evening and undertook to correct them.³⁸

While ABC staff and management and the Friends of the ABC³⁹ were dubious about the political motives behind the new proposals and had little, or no, confidence in their outcomes, the Religion Department and religious communities in Australia were facing a dire threat to the very survival of religious broadcasting. Patricia Lovell, film producer and member of the Dix Committee of Review, was quoted as saying: 'I'm utterly appalled...Who's going to bloody well sponsor religious programmes? It's quite ruthless...'⁴⁰ The Department and supporters of its work were equally aghast at the prospect of relying on commercial underwriting of its programmes, having seen how religious broadcasting in the commercial sector had languished. Church leaders widely protested against any diminution of the status of religious broadcasting; and religious columns in the press added their opposition.⁴¹

Gareth Evans had stressed throughout his address to the Friday Club that his proposals were tentative and he hoped for open and detailed debate on them. Millikan was convinced that the Minister had not intended the demise of the Department and he informed church leaders accordingly.⁴² The Minister, acknowledging flaws in his scheme, did not press on with it. By September 1988, he had moved to another portfolio.⁴³

³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27.2.88, p. 2; and Millikan, interview, 25.9.91.

³⁸ Millikan, interview, 25.9.91.

³⁹ Cf. ch. 2, fn. 30.

⁴⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27.2.88, p. 5.

⁴¹ Bishop Peter Hollingworth addressed a public rally in the Melbourne Town Hall in which he noted how communication of religious ideas had been almost removed from the public arena in Australia and pointed to the ABC as the only public institution where one could hear a 'serious, balanced and informed presentation of religious affairs in a non-doctrinaire way...something of profound value.' Cf. ABC, 'Encounter', radio tape, 19.4.89. Cf. also J. Murray, 'Religious broadcasts being short-changed by charter', *Australian*, 1.3.88.

⁴² Millikan, interview, 25.9.91.

⁴³ At this same time, a UK Government White Paper was proposing changes to the current method of financing the BBC. 'Payment for programmes by subscription as an alternative or supplement to the licence fee' was suggested. A different proposal from the Australian one, it was considered equally disastrous for religious broadcasting. Cf. Winter, 'A fight for life on the air', p. 598.

All sectors of the ABC, including the Religion Department, have felt the impact of Government. At times a benign influence, it was more often at variance with the Department's values and aspirations.

Competitive broadcasting environment

According to Senator Evans, one of the ABC's objectives required by its Charter was to 'complement commercial programming'. He was careful to explain that this objective would be *additional* to the other Charter objectives of providing authoritative information and contributing to cultural enrichment and national identity. These would remain statutory responsibilities of the ABC regardless of what commercial broadcasters did.⁴⁴ This clarification was important because the ABC rejected any suggestion that its role in the Australian broadcasting system might be only to provide to the Australian people what the commercial broadcasters failed to offer. Its service was essentially 'comprehensive'.

The increasingly competitive environment in which the ABC has functioned in Australia has affected its Religion Department in a number of important ways. Not that the Department's producers have considered that the religious programmes on the commercial stations offered them any serious competition.⁴⁵ On the contrary, they were aware that they enjoyed more scope and freedom with more professional skills and resources for the making of their programmes; and they set their own independent course. The ABC as a whole, however, could not disregard the commercial networks with whom it competed for audiences.⁴⁶

While the size of an audience for a particular programme is a vital matter for the advertising revenues of commercial stations, of what importance is it to the ABC? Producers and managers have differed in their judgments about the significance of audience ratings for their programmes. The aim of all broadcasters is to communicate widely, so it is of great professional importance to the ABC that it attract the largest possible numbers of listeners to its programmes and that its staff members are able to measure themselves against their peers in other broadcasting organisations. However, free from the need to compete for advertising sponsorship of its programmes, the ABC does not have to aspire to majority audiences for every programme in every time slot. Indeed, a comprehensive national service will necessarily put to air a wide variety of programmes with particular appeal to different minority sectors of the

⁴⁴ Evans, 'Guaranteeing', p. 9. The emphasis on the word 'additional' was the Minister's.

⁴⁵ Cf. ch. 2, 'Commercial broadcasters'.

⁴⁶ By 1991, the ABC was offering 5 radio services (on more than 400 transmitters) in competition with 149 commercial services, 96 public radio services and SBS multi-lingual radio. Cf. Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia 1992*, AGPS, Canberra, 1992, pp. 608-9.

society - to farmers and graziers, to lovers of literature and new music, to scientists, and so on, and will be rightly censured if it does not.

There are two challenges to its programme policies which constantly present themselves to the ABC. First, unless it offers a service to the Australian people that is different from that of the commercial stations, irrespective of audience numbers, why have an ABC at all? On the other hand, how is a Government justified in funding from tax revenues a large enterprise like the ABC, if it serves only a minority of the population?

A reasonable strategy in the face of these two questions is to achieve a loyal following from the majority of Australians, resulting from the sum of the minorities satisfied by programmes directed to their special needs and interests. There is evidence that the ABC has been successful in this.⁴⁷ It is this strategy that has underpinned the specialist departments and units, which gradually developed within the ABC from 1937.⁴⁸ It is also implicit in more recent moves towards 'narrowcasting', that is, developing for each of the ABC networks a distinctive style and set of objectives aimed to appeal to a particular segment of the population.⁴⁹

The Religion Department has held its place in the structures of the ABC because specialist broadcasting has been important to the ABC's justifying its existence within the Australian broadcasting system. However, with the stronger differentiation of the networks since 1985, Religion, along with other specialist programme sectors (Drama, School and Continuing Education, Specialist Talks and Broadcast Music), has been structurally located within Radio National and most of its programmes have gone to air on the Radio National network.⁵⁰ This has restricted

⁴⁷ The audience and programme policy study conducted by ANOP Market Research for the Dix Committee of Review in 1980 revealed that in any given week '93% [of Australians over 15 years of age] turn to the ABC selectively for programmes they particularly want to watch or listen to'. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 1, s. 11, and vol. 3, s. 2.1.

⁴⁸ Cf. ch. 2, fnn. 63-4.

⁴⁹ The ABC's *Annual Report 1989-90* (p. 14) proudly announced its five networks, 'each with distinctive programming goals and listener appeal': Radio National; Metropolitan Radio; Triple J-FM which superseded 2JJ and began broadcasting to all State capitals, Newcastle and Canberra; FM-stereo, introduced in 1976; and Regional Radio. In January 1991, Radio National and FM-stereo began complementary networked programming and Radio National was further expanded into regional areas, such that 90% of Australians could receive both Regional and National services, cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1990-1*, p. 75. There had been some differentiation of Regional Radio from the metropolitan networks since the early 1960s, but the desired diversity of programming for rural Australia became a possibility only with the launching of a second Regional Radio Network in July 1987, intended to include 300 transmitters by 1997. Cf. Dept of Transport and Communications, *Review of National Broadcasting Policy*, Information Paper 2: 'The infrastructure of national broadcasting,' Canberra, Feb. 1988, Attachments D and E.

⁵⁰ Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports* for the years 1985-91, Radio Organisation Charts. FM-stereo began broadcasting 'For the God Who Sings' in 1985. In the years 1987-9, the number

audiences for most religious programmes to those who normally listen to Radio National. While this network has become very extensive, transmitting throughout Australia, from capital city to outback settlement, its programming has been generally less popular in orientation and style than that of the Metropolitan Radio network, and so has attracted fewer listeners.⁵¹ Both Metropolitan and Regional Radio have always carried some religious broadcasting; and religious programmes have found their way onto ABC-FM, but the youth to whom Triple J-FM appeals have, so far, been out of reach of the Department.⁵² Theoretically, none of the ABC networks is closed to religious programmes. However, their increased differentiation and structural separation from one another have made programme negotiations more complex. For a programme from the Department to be included in the schedule of a network other than Radio National, the management of that network must judge it to be suitable in content and style, a time-slot needs to be available and those responsible in both Radio National and the other network have to agree on who pays the costs of production.⁵³

Understandably, departments and producers within the ABC compete with one another for particular times on particular stations so that their achievements may be heard by the largest audiences.⁵⁴ Many factors influence decisions on programme schedules. There are those intrinsic to a programme, such as its content, length, style, format and quality. There are, also, matters of the programme's general timeliness and relevance for the listening public and its compatibility with the overall philosophy and 'sound' of the station and with what immediately precedes and follows it in the schedule. The decision-makers' responses to all these questions are affected by their

of programmes on Metropolitan Radio was reduced to one only, 'Sunday Night' ('Sunday Night Talk'). Cf. ABC Religion Dept, Programme publicity, published monthly, 1985-91, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

- 51 By 1990-1, there were 145 Radio National transmitters, cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1990-1*, p. 75. In Sydney, during the period Jan. 1988-Mar. 1989, 2BL's (Metropolitan Radio) share of audience averaged 14%, compared with 2FC's (Radio National) 3.2%. Melbourne figures were similar. In the period Sept.-Nov. 1980, a similar comparison in Canberra showed 2CN with an average weekly share of 24% and 2CY with 5.8%. Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R2/9/2. While the percentages may change somewhat in changing circumstances, the contrast between the two networks is clear from these sample figures.
- 52 The philosophy of 2JJ when it began in 1975 was vigorously secular and dismissive of the old ABC structures of management and programme making. This did not mean the total exclusion of a religious perspective from the station, e.g. Sean McDonough, priest and anthropologist from the Columban Missionary Society, was a guest broadcaster in 1988. However, there was no regular explicit religious content in 2JJ's programmes. Cf. Webb, interview, 8.12.92.
- 53 N. Swan, personal interview, 22.11.91. David Millikan was negotiating with the management of Triple J-FM about programme material suitable for that network's young adult audience when his contract expired at the end of 1991. Cf. Millikan, interview, 25.9.91.
- 54 Accounts of the Religion Dept's battles to win and keep strategic locations in the schedules can be found in chs 5, 8 and 10.

own personal values and priorities. Those in the ABC who measure success, as their commercial peers do, by the number of people listening at any time will appraise a programme schedule differently from those who are more interested in presenting what is innovative, thoughtful or significant, even though not broadly popular. The ABC can ignore neither of these approaches to programming. Some judicious mix of the two is needed, but tension between them is unavoidable and, as times and circumstances have changed, so one has assumed ascendancy over the other.⁵⁵

The contest for access to the largest audiences has both benefitted and injured an ABC production unit like the Religion Department. Without doubt, it has motivated producers to achieve, and maintain, high standards of quality and interest in their programmes.⁵⁶ It has also prompted station and network managers, judging religious programmes to be of marginal interest, to move to eliminate them, or relegate them to times of low appeal to listeners, no matter that they were commendable productions sustaining strong minority audiences.⁵⁷

Undoubtedly, the competitive broadcasting environment in Australia has significantly influenced the course of the ABC and the fortunes of its Religion Department.

BBC origins and influence

The broadcasting philosophy and practice of the BBC, which pre-dated the ABC by ten years, dominated the Australian national broadcasting service for the first four

⁵⁵ Clement Semmler, who was C. Progs in the early 1960s, claimed that he placed the emphasis on 'serious' radio to complement, rather than compete with, commercial stations, but, after 1965, the ABC set its sights more on audience ratings. Semmler quoted these words of the newly appointed General Manager, T. Duckmanton, printed in *Radio Active*, the ABC house journal, Dec.-Jan. 1965-6: 'We must always aim for the maximum audiences we can get for the types of programmes we are promoting'. He believed that Duckmanton was interpreted more literally than he intended and that this gave momentum to the pursuit of ratings, especially in television. Cf. Semmler, 'The ABC' pp. 54-5. In 1987, David Hill, MD, pursuing competitive audience ratings, proposed shifting Parliamentary broadcasts from the more popular Metropolitan Radio to Radio National, where the disruptions it caused to programmes would be of less importance because fewer people listened to this network. This sparked public debate once again on the question of sacrificing 'intellectual and cultural significance' to audience ratings. Cf. 'Has Radio National a future?', *Age Monthly Review*, Melbourne, Aug. 1987, pp. 11-14.

⁵⁶ Evidence of this abounds in Department files, e.g. memos circulated within Dept concerning particular programmes, reports of staff conferences.

⁵⁷ For example, in 1987 the Department was offered the time-slot, 5.30 -7.00 a.m.(EST) on Sunday morning. In the event, Stephen Watkins' skilful and dedicated work on 'Sunday Morning' lifted the audience ratings for this time-slot quite remarkably from 1000 listeners at 5.30 a.m. in Feb.-Mar. 1987 before the programme began to 11,000 at the same time in Aug.-Sept. 1988. Such a fine programme increasingly attracting more listeners could reasonably have expected an improved place in the schedule. Cf. Audience Research, memos, 28.11.88 and 14.4.89, and File Listeners' Correspondence, Religion Dept, South Australia. For further discussion of this point in relation to other programmes, see ch. 10.

decades of its life and have continued to be very influential, even though the broadcasting systems and social contexts of the United Kingdom and Australia have always been markedly different.⁵⁸

John Reith, a man of unremitting religious conviction and the BBC's first Director General, set high intellectual and moral standards for the British broadcasting authority: 'to bring to the greatest number of people as much as possible of contentment, of beauty and of wisdom (which comprehends knowledge and much more besides) - and this over every range of worthy human endeavour and achievement'.⁵⁹ Its role was to educate and uplift the nation. Having a broadcasting monopoly, Reith and the BBC could afford to put principled idealism before popular taste, having the time and opportunity to win the people's appreciation of their vision and the superior quality of their programmes.⁶⁰

Since commercial radio has always attracted a majority of Australian listeners,⁶¹ the ABC has never been able to communicate with the nation to the same extent as the BBC, yet it has not flinched from expressing its philosophy and purpose in Reithian terms: 'creating a more enlightened community', 'the first priority is to increase and develop...general knowledge and appreciation of the intellectual, ethical and artistic', and so on.⁶² Such goals of leadership in the community required specialist programme makers with knowledge and experience in the areas of human life with which the national broadcaster wished to concern itself. Just as religious broadcasting was considered an essential part of the BBC's mission to the nation, so its place was assured in the ABC, where it was expected that it would contribute to national morale and spirit and inform the growth of a just democracy. The compatibility of the goals of the ABC and those of Kenneth Henderson and the Department he founded has already been discussed in some detail.⁶³ Henderson saw no contradiction in the ABC's holding to a vision of national leadership while broadcasting to minority audiences, if those audiences were 'the fruitful minorities from whom all initiatives proceed'.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Cf. ch. 2, 'The BBC'.

⁵⁹ Blain, quoting from Reith's diaries, p. 13.

⁶⁰ Cf. ch.2, fn. 106.

⁶¹ Cf. McNair-Anderson survey (c.1950), ch. 5, fn. 143. In 1980, 63% of Australians were regular commercial listeners, compared with 35% ABC listeners, cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 3, s. 2.1. C. Semmler, writing in 1981, claimed that the audience ratio at that time was 85:15 in favour of the commercial stations, but did not indicate the source of this information, Semmler, 'The ABC', p. 18.

⁶² Cf. ch. 2, 'Philosophy and purposes'.

⁶³ Cf. ch. 5, 'Serving Australia'.

⁶⁴ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 144.

The fact that the Australian national broadcaster modelled itself on the BBC has been immeasurably significant for its Religion Department. The first men appointed to head the Department were Anglicans, both of whom had lived and studied in English universities and had close intellectual, spiritual and personal ties with the United Kingdom. These British, and liberal Anglican, origins of the Department were the source of its insistence, at least until the late 1960s, on broadcasting what might be called 'consensus Christianity' and keeping watchful control of exceptions to this. For the Department, this meant well-mannered presentations of those beliefs, pious practices and activities which were broadly acceptable to the 'mainstream' of Christianity and accessible to the uncommitted listener.⁶⁵ The sweep of social, cultural and religious changes in Australian society from the late 1960s disturbed this approach. In the churches and in society at large, such a plurality of views was released that consensus became much more elusive as Christians sought, and formed, new alliances within, and across, old boundaries.⁶⁶ Even so, since similar forces for change were at work also in Britain, the connections between ABC and BBC religious broadcasting remained strong as both shifted their focus and perspective. Like the other programme sectors of the ABC, the Religion Department has drawn on the BBC's transcription services for many programmes.⁶⁷ Further, many of its Australian productions over the years have been modelled on successful British programmes.⁶⁸ Reports of British public inquiries into broadcasting, Government White Papers on the subject, speeches and articles by BBC notables - all these have been of great interest and assistance.⁶⁹ The experiences and reflections of their British counterparts have been a source of stimulation and guidance for Australian religious broadcasters as they evaluated their own work.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Cf. chs 5-6.

⁶⁶ Cf. ch. 8.

⁶⁷ References to BBC transcriptions of talks, discussions, music and drama recur in the Dept's files through its entire history. 'The BBC has been a continuing source of material up to the present time.' Cf. R. Nicholls, personal interview, 24.2.89.

⁶⁸ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 140.

⁶⁹ Cf. ch. 2, fn. 105, on the frequency of public review and discussion of broadcasting in the UK.

⁷⁰ The ABC reference library holds a variety of reports from the BBC, particularly significant among them the 'Pilkington Report' (1962) and the 'Annan Report' (1977) along with related documentation, as well as texts of speeches, etc. Annotated copies of the sections on religious broadcasting in both the above reports, ss. 276-93 of the 'Pilkington Report' and ch. 20 of the 'Annan Report', were found in several Departmental files. Also in the Dept's files in every decade were materials produced by the UK Central Religious Advisory Committee and copies of speeches and articles on religious broadcasting by British broadcasters and commentators: Sir Charles Curran (a Director General of the BBC), former directors of BBC religious broadcasting, Edwin Robertson (an Executive Director of the WACB) and many others. In 1981, the Dept was receiving and consulting regularly 11 publications from the UK, the largest single source of

The ABC was so Anglophile in its first thirty years or so, that its announcers were even expected to reproduce the English formality and accented speech of BBC announcers. This adversely affected the Religion Department in two ways. First, because the Australian national broadcaster did not sound Australian, numbers of radio listeners preferred other stations with which they felt more at home. This reduced the available audience for all ABC programmes. When the style became more authentically Australian, the effects of the earlier policy were not, thereupon, dissipated; attitudes had been formed and lived on.⁷¹ Secondly, this policy set up a false basis for judgment of the accents and tones of broadcasters invited by the Department from the wider community to participate in programmes. Its strenuous and unceasing efforts to find clergy with an acceptable quality of voice and to train them in voice production for radio would have been necessary in any case, but the standard of English pronunciation in the ABC fostered unreasonable expectations. The programme, 'Community Hymn Singing', was excessively criticised on this score by some managers and staff, at least until well into the 1960s.⁷² Earlier mention was made of difficulties the Department had with regulations about the use of languages other than English on air.⁷³ The ABC's opposition to 'foreign languages' was not solely consequent on the Australian Government's assimilation policies; it had its source, also, in the 'Britishness' of the ABC itself.⁷⁴

ABC modernity

The ABC, as a modern secular institution, acknowledges religion to be an enduring, but by no means pivotal, fact of life.⁷⁵ As a sub-section of the ABC, the Religion Department, in consequence, has always been small and thinly resourced to match its status in the organisation. Its staff has had to work particularly hard and frugally, with high levels of commitment and competence, to produce programmes of such quality and variety as to compare favourably with those from departments better endowed.⁷⁶

overseas material, cf. 'List of religious publications received or consulted by the Dept, 1981', held by P. Kirkwood.

⁷¹ Semmler, 'The ABC', p. 18.

⁷² Cf. memos in AA (NSW):SP411/10, file 8.10.

⁷³ Cf. ch. 5, fnn. 45-9.

⁷⁴ This cultural bias was still very evident to the Dix Committee of Review in 1981. This, and the ABC's long neglect of the cultural diversity of Australian society, were matter for the Committee's comment and recommendations. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 1, ss. 21-7, vol. 2, ch. 12.

⁷⁵ Cf. ch. 1.

⁷⁶ Cf. ch. 10, 'Audiences and their responses'.

The structure of distinct, specialised departments has served religious broadcasting well in terms of securing it a place in national public broadcasting. However, as the ABC grew and the departmental system became entrenched, departments became more and more contained within their own domains and focussed on their own interests, each giving little heed to the productions of others.⁷⁷ Under pressure, they defended their territories and assets tenaciously. It was in Sydney, the hub of corporate and Federal power, that this segmentation was most apparent and became most intransigent.⁷⁸ The fact that, until its Centre in Ultimo was opened in June 1991, the various sectors of ABC Radio in Sydney were accommodated in numerous scattered locations, more than twenty at worst, exacerbated this situation.⁷⁹ The other State Branches were less populous, less complex and more compactly housed, enabling staff to interact across sectional boundaries with greater frequency and freedom.⁸⁰ The Religion Department was one of these distinctive, self-conscious units within the ABC connected by innumerable bureaucratic processes and procedures into a single, if cumbersome, enterprise. Structurally and systemically, it belonged in the whole, as other parts belonged. It fitted intellectually, also, insofar as its approach to religion was modern, placing a high value on the temporal world and on secular knowledge and experience. Yet, for all that they had in common professionally with the rest of the programme makers in this secular organisation, the members of staff of the Department were aware that the religious focus of their programmes made them significantly different from the others and, in difficult times, they felt a particular vulnerability.

The period from 1976 to 1985 was one of almost unrelenting pressure in the ABC both from without and within, and a time when the Religion Department felt itself to be under siege from forces inimical to it. The increased secularisation of Australian society from the late 1960s had already presented itself as a challenge to the Department, particularly in the efforts made by secularists outside the ABC to modify its functions or, more radically, to eliminate it.⁸¹ The Department was vulnerable also to secularism within the ABC, not in the form of open and forthright, public criticism but in proposals for organisational re-structuring and resource management, on which

⁷⁷ Webb, interview, 8.12.92; Challis, interview, 27.4.89; Ashbolt, interview, 11.12.92.

⁷⁸ Lawrence Macintosh from his vantage point in Melbourne observed 'a hardening of the bureaucratic arteries' in Sydney beginning from the late 1950s, coincident with the rapid expansion of the ABC into television. McIntosh, interview, 19.6.89.

⁷⁹ Cf. fn. 16 above.

⁸⁰ Kay McLennan (Melbourne), Stephen Watkins (Adelaide), Florence Spurling (Brisbane), all commented to this effect in personal interviews, 17.6.89, 22.5.89 and 20.7.89 respectively.

⁸¹ Cf. ch. 8.

the senior executive and sector directors spent much of their time and energy during this period.

Re-organising the ABC

In 1983, the ABC reported that it had been involved in thirty-two inquiries into various aspects of its operations during the 1970s.⁸² Two of these, the McKinsey and the Dix Reviews, 1973 and 1979-81 respectively, were probing investigations, the latter encompassing past and present practice, philosophy and purpose and future challenges and directions. Participation in all these inquiries consumed large amounts of time and resources not only of corporate management but of those responsible for programme production also.

Since 1956, when it took responsibility for national television as well as radio, the ABC had grown hugely into an unwieldy, ponderous enterprise.⁸³ The 'McKinsey Report' recommended re-organising activities and resources to free the ABC for more vigorous and flexible development, but, by the end of the decade, a number of its recommendations remained unrealised.

Consequent on the report and recommendations of the Dix Committee, new legislation governing the ABC was enacted in 1983; a new Board of Directors and Managing Director were appointed, in place of the former Commission and General Manager;⁸⁴ and the Corporation then launched into a labour of re-structuring and corporate planning which further consumed the energies and talents of its people.⁸⁵

Since 1975, the ABC had been struggling with financial constraints at the very time that its task within the Australian society had become more complex than ever before. In its *Annual Report 1985-6*, the Corporation summarised the background against which it was brought into being in 1983 in these words: 'huge cost increases, reductions in public expenditures, increased competition and continuing technical innovation'.⁸⁶ While management identified the problems of the Corporation in terms

⁸² Cf. ch. 8, fn. 134.

⁸³ Cf. ch. 2, fn. 54.

⁸⁴ All but two members of the Board, under the Chairmanship of Kenneth Myer, were appointed from July 1. Tom Molomby's election as staff representative on the Board was declared on Nov. 3; the Managing Director, Geoffrey Whitehead, was appointed in Oct. 1993, but did not begin work until Jan. 1984. Cf. Molomby, pp.160-8.

⁸⁵ Terry Lane estimated that in his 'first nine-year stint at the ABC' (approx. 1974-82) he spent 76.8% of his time in meetings, cf. T. Lane, 'The ABC - and beyond', *Australian Society*, Sept. 1987, p. 20. In Nov. 1985, Maureen McInerney in the Religion Dept (TV) sent a memo to the C. TV: 'It has been totally impossible for us to continue our ongoing work on programmes and complete all that was requested in the corporate plan'. File, held by M. McInerney.

⁸⁶ ABC, *Annual Report 1985-6*, p. 3.

of finance, technology and competition, thoughtful programme makers were concerned with the quality of the ABC's responses to the diverse social, cultural and religious needs of Australia in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸⁷ Such people carried a double burden through these years: the imperative they felt to pursue their quest for significance in the lives of the Australian people, together with the insistent demands from management to participate more and more in its drive towards the goals of corporate efficiency and success.

Audiences for the two major networks of the ABC, Radio 1 and Radio 2 (later re-named Metropolitan Radio and Radio National) declined markedly in the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s: a 20% decline for Radio 1 and a reduction of over 30% for Radio 2.⁸⁸ As we noted earlier in this chapter,⁸⁹ the constraints on staff in the same period, especially for an already very small Religion Department, drained programmes of strength and vitality.⁹⁰

Ideological and political movements in the wider society stirred and strained within the ABC, also. Business executives, programme philosophers and media innovators, each with his, or her, own set of values and priorities, offered discordant, and often incompatible, solutions to the problems of the ABC. There were conflicts between the Staff Association and senior management on industrial policies, on strategies for dealing with funding cuts and on staff participation in decision-making which climaxed in mass strikes in 1978 and continued through succeeding years.⁹¹

The Dix Committee, which began its review of the ABC a year after these strikes, discovered poor morale throughout the ABC and examined it in some detail:

Evidence we received suggested that poor morale was not confined to particular locations, particular kinds of jobs or particular divisions or departments. It was pervasive, leading inevitably to reduced efficiency, although the effects were offset to some extent by an equally pervasive dedication and sense of responsibility on the part of many staff.⁹²

⁸⁷ 'The emphasis is now on technique not content. This is reflected in the organisation structure of the ABC.' Cf. Religion Dept conference, Summary of Proceedings, Aug. 1985.

⁸⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1986-7*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Cf. fn. 23 above.

⁹⁰ 'Programmes are being squeezed through staff constraints.' Religion Dept conference, Aug. 1985.

⁹¹ Cf. Molomby, pp. 49-114; and J. Cleary, personal interview, 13.3.89. Cleary, a programme producer with the Dept since Feb. 1980, has had many years' experience of executive involvement in the Staff Association, as Federal Vice-President, President and Staff Union representative on the Board of Directors.

⁹² 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 22.4.

The causes were both external and internal: shortages of resources, but also lack of clear direction and communication from management, loss of staff confidence in the leadership of the organisation and dissatisfaction with working conditions.⁹³

The first Managing Director of the new Australian Broadcasting Corporation was Geoffrey Whitehead, an Englishman who came to Australia in early 1984 from New Zealand, where, since 1978, he had been a Director General in a re-structured public broadcasting corporation there. The two broadcasting organisations on either side of the Tasman Sea were markedly different, not only in size but also in underpinning philosophy and legislation. It is appropriate at this point to outline briefly the significant features of New Zealand public broadcasting that are relevant to our topic.

Public Broadcasting in New Zealand

Since the 1930s in New Zealand, public broadcasting had been funded from both commercial and non-commercial sources, that is, from advertising and licence fee receipts. Increasingly, however, the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) found both sources of revenue to be inadequate: the Post Office was not collecting licence fees efficiently and, by 1973, all prime advertising markets formerly available to the Corporation's commercial radio system had shifted to private commercial stations, which had greatly increased in number from the mid-1960s. In 1972, the Minister for Broadcasting, Roger Douglas, established a Committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Kenneth Adam from London, to advise on new arrangements for a publicly owned but competitive broadcasting system.⁹⁴ Legislation in 1973 established three separate Corporations - Radio New Zealand, TV-1 and TV-2 - all dependent on both commercial and non-commercial sources of funds. The Chairmen of these three corporations and three other appointees formed a Broadcasting Council of New Zealand (BCNZ) to oversee the enterprises. By 1977, the three separate corporations with Council had been replaced by one Corporation, the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand,⁹⁵ which was then required to fund not only its own operations but its capital expenditure as well. Television advertising was increased and national networking of night programmes on commercial radio was extended, as one of a number of cost reducing measures. In 1988, further legislation set up a Broadcasting Commission, now called New Zealand on Air, to collect and distribute licence fee revenues according to guidelines in the Act. New legislation also

⁹³ 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 22.6.

⁹⁴ Committee on Broadcasting, *The Broadcasting Future of New Zealand*, ('Adam Report'), Report presented to Parliament 31.7.73, Government Printer, Wellington, 1973.

⁹⁵ The initials BCNZ remained.

changed BCNZ into two State Owned Enterprises for radio and television, of which Radio New Zealand Limited was one. State Owned Enterprises were expected to return profits to the monopoly shareholder.⁹⁶ New Zealand Public Radio, as a division of Radio New Zealand, now includes three national networks, of which National Radio, dedicated to spoken word programmes, is one. It is within National Radio that religious broadcasting has been located, its producers no longer in a distinct specialist unit, as they were from 1972 to 1988,⁹⁷ but in a pool of programme makers under one Production Director.

The New Zealand national broadcaster has never taken full responsibility for its religious broadcasting in the way the ABC has done. Before 1972, religious programmes went to air at the initiative of the Manager of the Programme Department. Nine 'mainstream' Christian denominations were allocated time to present programmes of worship and devotion. The small Religion Department of four to five persons, set up in late 1972, made some programmes but continued to pay religious groups for those which they had prepared. However, as a specialist unit of professional broadcasters, they set and monitored standards for these and extended the range of programmes according to their perceptions of the religious needs and interests of New Zealanders. In the same year, a Religious Broadcasts Advisory Committee, with representatives from a wide range of religious bodies, was established to meet with Corporation staff at least three times a year and, as well, an Anglican priest, Charles Harrison, pioneer of religious broadcasting in New Zealand, was appointed Religious Consultant to the Corporation as a whole, responsible directly to the Chief Executive. 1988 saw an end to all these particular structures for religion. The Religious Advisory Committee's role in organising and making programmes ceased with the demise of the Department; Charles Harrison died in 1988 and was not replaced.⁹⁸

The combining of all programme departments into one general production unit had the effect of bringing religious broadcasting, structurally at least, into the heart of the station's production activities. Religion was no longer a thing apart from the concerns and interests with which other producers dealt. Religious programmes continued to be produced as before.

⁹⁶ Sources for the above information on New Zealand broadcasting: 'Adam Report', pp. 1-103; BCNZ, *Annual Reports* for the years 1976-8, 1983; and G. McGinley, Production Director National Radio, personal interview 9.5.91.

⁹⁷ Files, Radio New Zealand, Wellington.

⁹⁸ Sources for the above information on religious broadcasting: Religious Broadcasting Advisory Committee, Minutes of meeting, 1972-3, 1986-7-8; David England (former Supervisor, Religion Dept), Radio New Zealand, Auckland; Errol Pyke (former Supervisor, Religion Dept), Mgr National Radio, Wellington; and G. McGinley, personal interviews 5.5.91, 9.5.91 and 9.5.91 respectively.

However, it was fortuitous that the two men appointed to the key positions of Manager of National Radio and its Production Director, Errol Pyke and Gavin McGinley, were committed Christians resolved to maintain religious programmes. Errol Pyke had formerly been Head of the Religion Department.⁹⁹ Both men acknowledged that there were other staff members who, had they had the power to do so, would have erased religious programmes from the schedule altogether. In other words, religious broadcasts had simply been lucky in these two appointments. It was Pyke's belief that whatever political influence in society the former Religious Broadcasts Advisory Committee had had its members still retained and this could be utilised in defence of religious broadcasting should it be threatened by future staffing decisions.¹⁰⁰ Since 1988, then, religious broadcasting on National Radio has been dependent on an external source of support with an unknown capacity to reverse unfavourable decisions of management, and on good luck.

The ABC has not travelled down the path of increased commercialisation which Radio New Zealand has trod. Its Religion Department, whatever its difficulties, has enjoyed considerably more professional freedom and opportunity to make a distinctive contribution to society than has its New Zealand counterpart. Religious broadcasting in the ABC in the 1980s did not suffer the same fate as in New Zealand National Radio but it might have, as we shall see.

Re-structuring and the Religion Department

The range of Whitehead's achievements and failures in the ABC during the three years of his management of it do not concern us here,¹⁰¹ only what the Religion Department experienced during that time of structural upheaval. The instability of those years affected all members of the Department in all States, but the account that follows is told mainly from the perspective of the Sydney offices of the Corporation, where corporate and federal authorities were located and where the consultation and planning processes involving the entire ABC were initiated and co-ordinated.

The Federal Director of the Religion Department, 1977-85, was Patrick Kirkwood, who was notably different from his predecessors in several ways. Like them, he was a man of deep religious faith, married with a family. He was not an ordained clergyman, however, but a Roman Catholic layman, who, at the time of his appointment, had already had sixteen years' broadcasting experience with the ABC in

⁹⁹ Pyke joined the Dept as a producer in 1974, became Executive Producer in 1976 and replaced John Booth as Head 1978-80. E. Pyke, personal interview 9.5.91.

¹⁰⁰ E. Pyke and G. McGinley, personal interviews 9.5.91.

¹⁰¹ Having taken up his appointment in Jan. 1984, Whitehead resigned in Oct. 1986. Two books which deal with events during his regime are G. Whitehead, *Inside the ABC*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1988 and Molomby, *Is There a Moderate on the Roof?*

both radio and television, all but six months of this in the Religion Department.¹⁰² Artistic and imaginative, with a competent grasp of the potentialities of the media in which he worked, Kirkwood was a creative programme maker. When his promotion was publicly announced, the many letters of congratulations he received repeatedly expressed expectations of a new, imaginative, sensitive approach to religious broadcasting. It was obvious, too, that his personal relationships with 'mainstream' church people were wide and strong.¹⁰³ Kirkwood was aware that his academic record did not match that of Henderson, or Munro, or Peter, but he had studied philosophy, Scripture and theology for seven years in a seminary in Melbourne with professors who were receptive to the insights of contemporary modern studies in these areas. John Munro's intellectual toughness and Kenneth Henderson's stress on the social implications of the Gospel had particularly attracted and challenged him.¹⁰⁴

Kirkwood was not a skilful administrator as James Peter was. He understood the structures of the ABC and had become well accustomed to its processes and procedures, but his talents were oriented to the craft of programme making, to philosophical reflection on religious broadcasting and to the practical applications of media theory and technology. Authoritative in these areas, he was a diffident director and a reluctant bureaucrat. Administrative arrangements and routines which Peter had set in place were maintained but with less assurance, and so loosened over time. Some staff members bemoaned the reduction in rigour;¹⁰⁵ others, keen for more creative freedom, were glad of the opportunity to initiate new projects and achieve some changes in the Department.¹⁰⁶

Few among the staff were naturally inclined to combativeness, the Director and his Federal Assistant in Radio, Ronald Nichols, among the least. Yet for several years, as a result of the intense focus in the ABC on internal structures and relationships, with associated confrontations and power struggles, the Department was engaged in constant contention, repelling what it judged to be persistent attacks on its integrity. More and more of the Director's time and energy was consumed in its defence; its programme makers were distracted from concentrating fully on their

¹⁰² Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89.

¹⁰³ Cf. File Correspondence, Dec. 1977, held by P. Kirkwood.

¹⁰⁴ Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89.

¹⁰⁵ 'After 1977 there was less overview and criticism of one's work; it was the people you worked with rather than those you worked for, who gave you the most response.' Cf. former staff member, Adelaide, personal interview 18.5.89. 'Schedules were not prepared far enough in advance.' Cf. former administrative assistant, Sydney, personal interview, 22.3.90.

¹⁰⁶ D. Strauss in Melbourne felt freer in Kirkwood's time to try her hand at new productions, cf. Strauss, interview, 23.12.91. Cf. ch. 10, fn. 33.

creative tasks. Such a situation exacted a heavy personal toll of those most affected, often demanding from them talents they did not have and frustrating talents they did possess. The Department's morale was seriously weakened.¹⁰⁷ Staff members, in the BAPH States particularly, felt a diminishment of communication and encouragement from their senior colleagues in Sydney, who, in turn, were being exhausted by unrelieved stress and anxiety about the very survival of religious broadcasting, as re-structuring proposals which reduced the status of the Department and its Head, circulated through the Corporation.

The ABC's long-established system of filling temporary vacancies with 'acting' appointments also contributed to the Department's problems at this time.¹⁰⁸ The movement of one staff member to 'act' temporarily in another position itself created a vacancy in which another staff member 'acted' temporarily. A series of temporary staff movements, lasting for weeks or months, could be generated in this way. While 'acting' elsewhere, people retained their rights to their former positions and went back to them when the permanent occupant of the first position returned to work. These movements were not confined within departments or sections; staff could, and often did, move out of their departments to 'act' in another function in the organisation. While it was an arrangement that could broaden the experience of staff in a beneficial way, it could also cause frustration when such movements occurred frequently. Department staffing and staff relationships in Melbourne were seriously destabilised over several years from the late 1970s by repeated movements of staff members 'acting' in and out of the Department.¹⁰⁹

The McKinsey Report had recommended, in 1973, separate structures of management for television and radio as regards their 'direct creative and resource requirements', while maintaining the unity of the ABC at the highest levels of authority and in a number of administrative and service areas. The Report had also suggested ways in which the many distinct programme departments might be incorporated into multi-purpose production collectivities in two separate media divisions. While some re-organisation had occurred, these proposals had not been implemented as suggested when the Dix Committee, in 1979-81, drew attention again to the drawbacks it saw in the existing arrangement of eighteen programme

¹⁰⁷ While morale was low throughout the ABC, for the Religion Dept especially 'the environment was very insecure. With every attempt at re-structuring, Religion had to fight a rearguard action'. Cf. Cleary, interview, 13.3.89.

¹⁰⁸ This practice was common procedure in public service institutions.

¹⁰⁹ N. Gill and K. McLennan, personal interviews 22.6.89 and 17.6.89 respectively. Cf. also fn. 23 above.

departments, some working to both media, others located only in radio or television.¹¹⁰

In 1982, Kirkwood sought John Munro's views on the prospects for religious broadcasting if the Department were to become part of a production sector under a Head who was a 'generalist' rather than a 'specialist'. Kirkwood respected Munro's incisive and flexible mind and the perceptions he had gained from his experience both in the Department and in management¹¹¹ and frequently consulted him for a dispassionate opinion on issues about which he, himself, was feeling strongly.¹¹² Munro voiced what Kirkwood and his colleagues in the Department were thinking: so long as the Department retained its separate identity, the ABC had to recognise its existence and fund it and the Head could bargain directly for programme resources. Once it merged into a larger general production sector, religious broadcasting, which was low on the ABC's list of priorities, would be in a very weak negotiating position.¹¹³

The 'media split' also presented the Department with serious difficulties.¹¹⁴ To maintain a national perspective in both radio and television, the Department needed all States to contribute programmes. Since, however, there was only one producer in each of the BAPH States, it was necessary for these to work to both media. In the event of a 'media split', the Department could not provide a genuinely national service without additional staff.¹¹⁵ Kirkwood was well aware that the two media required quite different approaches and policies. For one thing, ABC radio had to confront a much more complex and intense competitive environment than ABC television and 'careful research, planning and control of the ABC's position in Australian radio [was]

¹¹⁰ Submissions to the Committee spoke of inter-departmental rivalries which could result in 'wasteful friction', structural rigidity within and between departments and slowness to respond to change. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 26.34. The Committee described the Religion Dept as 'a very specialised field' and stated that it had 'no comment to make on the organisation of this relatively small department'. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 11.149.

¹¹¹ Munro had become Federal Director of General Programmes after his 8 years with the Religion Dept. Cf. ch. 6, fn. 1.

¹¹² Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89.

¹¹³ P. Kirkwood and J. Munro, interviews, 9.5.89 and 21.7.89 respectively.

¹¹⁴ 'Media split' describes the division of the Dept along media lines, one section in radio and one in television, cf. ch. 8, fn. 39.

¹¹⁵ P. Kirkwood, memo to C. Progs (Radio) and Director Radio, 16.4.85. Directly related to this point was the advice of the industrial relations consultants to the Dix Committee that 'there would be diseconomies in pursuing a media split too far in smaller areas and locations where versatility and multi-skilling of staff may be essential in achieving an effective outcome at low cost. Special structures need to be worked out in these areas, integrated with developments in the devolution of power and control over resources and activities'. Cf. 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 26.28.

crucial'.¹¹⁶ He believed that radio could respond better to the challenges it faced, if funds were directly channelled to it, 'not only to network and station managers but to specialist programme directors to give them a guaranteed level of activity'.¹¹⁷ As a 'media man' he understood the benefits of separate media management, but, as a religious broadcaster in the ABC, he could not sanguinely accept the consequences of a 'media split' implemented without due regard for its deleterious effects on the significant contribution the Religion Department made in Australian broadcasting.

The Department decided that it must oppose both proposals as destructive to the future of religious broadcasting.

On January 20, 1983, James Murray, religious journalist for the *Australian*, wrote an article alerting his readers to the 'gradual erosion of religious affairs in the ABC..[and] moves afoot to secularise it further by gradually eradicating the Religion Department, until it is swallowed up in the Talks Department and conflated into an amorphous companion to such departments as science and public affairs'.¹¹⁸

Church leaders, many of them quoting Murray, voiced their alarm to the Chairman of the Commission, Dr Leonie Kramer,¹¹⁹ seeking assurances that religious broadcasting would remain in a separate department and quoting with approval the conviction of the Dix Committee that 'religious broadcasting [had] a special role to play in filling the new and diverse spiritual needs' flowing from changes in the nature and composition of Australian society.¹²⁰ They urged that the Department be not weakened in any way but 'developed to enable it to fulfil its role with even greater effectiveness'.¹²¹ A number of them forwarded copies of their letters to the Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, and his Minister for Communications, Neil Brown.

Professor Kramer set out to 'lay to rest the concern' of church leaders.¹²² She explained that the proposals for change which had prompted Murray's article had, as

116 The great difficulty for ABC television was having only one channel with which to meet the comprehensive requirements of the Charter.

117 P. Kirkwood, 'Re-organisation of radio division', Paper, n.d. (c.mid-1984), held by P. Kirkwood.

118 J. Murray, *Australian*, 20.1.83.

119 Dr Kramer was Professor of Australian Literature, Sydney University.

120 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 11.152.

121 Cardinal James Freeman, Sydney, letter to Chairman, 28.1.83, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5, pt 4.

122 L. Kramer, letter to Cardinal Freeman, 14.1.83, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5, pt 4.

yet, no more status than the report of a Working Party¹²³ and were still being considered by management; she promised that the Department's valuable services to the Australian community would not be placed in jeopardy; and she foreshadowed the imminent re-establishment of the FRAC which the 'Dix Report' had strongly recommended.¹²⁴ These assurances were too imprecise to allay anyone's fears, but, in May, a further letter from the Chairman was quite definite: within the week, the General Manager, Keith Jennings, would be making a statement on re-structuring the Programme Division and 'the Religion Department [would] be maintained as a separate entity, because of the importance so many Australians attach to it'. She added that progress was being made in re-establishing the FRAC.¹²⁵

It seemed that the Department's future as a distinct specialist programme production unit was now confirmed.

However, in the following year, under a new Managing Director and a new Board, a plan for re-structuring ABC Radio was circulated, showing the existing departments of Religion, Science and Special Projects joined under a single Head of Features; and with the change of management, there was no further reference to the FRAC.¹²⁶

Once more the Department rallied to reject the proposal. Kirkwood argued the Department's stance reasonably, even putting forward for the management's consideration a full alternative plan for re-structuring ABC radio - an instance of how much of his time and talent was diverted into such matters during these years.¹²⁷ At the same time, from all over Australia came letters from religious leaders re-asserting in strong terms their objections to what was described as a 'seriously deficient proposal'.¹²⁸ The letter of the General Secretary of the Australian Council of Churches, Jean Skuse, addressed all the issues:

A skilled staff has built up a body of expertise, research and programming procedure unequalled in this country...The current approach which is careful, sensitive and aware would be seriously threatened...Placing financial and

¹²³ This Working Party on Media Management was one of a number of working parties set up after the publication of the 'Dix Report'. P. Kirkwood, letter to N. Bradley, 28.1.83, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5, pt 4.

¹²⁴ 'Dix Report', vol. 2, s. 11.154-5.

¹²⁵ L. Kramer, letter to Rev. J. S. Petrie, 24.5.83, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5, pt 4.

¹²⁶ G. Whitehead, Federal Radio Structure Proposal, 27.3.84, held by P. Kirkwood. Kay McLennan was involved in discussions of a scheme to 'pilot' this merging of Religion into Features in Victoria in 1984. The meeting was chaired by the MD and included the Mgr Vic., the Mgr Network Services and Department Supervisors. The opposition from the Religion Dept prevented its implementation. Cf. McLennan, interview, 17.6.89.

¹²⁷ P. Kirkwood, Paper, 1984, n.d., held by P. Kirkwood.

¹²⁸ Theology staff, Melbourne University Colleges, letter to MD, 11.4.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

editorial authority in the Head of Features would be disastrous...Media coverage of religion requires a particular expertise, not a generalist approach.¹²⁹

The theologians teaching in the Melbourne University Colleges protested: 'Are you proposing to negate the effectiveness [of your religious broadcasters] by making them accountable to someone whose theological understanding may be minimal, or nil?'¹³⁰

The letters sent were based on material derived from a common source, the Religion Department itself, which had called on its allies outside the ABC for their help. Dr Norman Swan, a senior ABC radio executive, asserted, in 1991, that management viewed with considerable disfavour public campaigns of protest organised by departments and were disinclined to be responsive to them.¹³¹ Yet, when a sector of the Corporation believes management to be in serious error, threatening a significant loss to the ABC and to Australian society, why should it not publicise the danger and seek support from people with a particular concern in the matter? It was not, in the Department's view, only a question of its own self-preservation.

Specialist departments were the life-blood of the ABC. They ensured that content was considered before format and were essential to the ABC's public relations and to its comprehension of important and controversial areas of human life.¹³²

A Department that perceived itself vulnerable to secularism within the power structures of the Corporation could not but mistrust management decisions which weakened it further and which it had no power to reverse unless it succeeded in arousing strong public disapproval of them.

Certainly, Whitehead was impressed by the strength of the churches' dissent from his proposal of March 1984. He was said to have commented that he was astonished at the number of bishops there seemed to be in Australia. The proposal was modified and, on May 4, Whitehead announced a 'new structure for the ABC agreed to by the Board on April 2', which showed Religion and Science both

¹²⁹ J. Skuse, letter to MD, 11.4.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹³⁰ Theology staff, Melbourne University Colleges, letter to MD, 11.4.84.

¹³¹ The immediate context of this assertion by Swan was two management decisions concerning the Religion Dept made in 1990-1. The first was the decision to locate religious programmes in the production sector, Spoken Word. The second was Swan's decision, as Director of Spoken Word, to eliminate 'Sacred Readings' from morning radio. This attracted what his secretary described as moderate opposition from listeners. Swan was a secular Jew, a medical practitioner, who had joined the ABC as a science journalist. As presenter of the 'Breakfast Show' in 1984, he had ridiculed 'Readings from the Bible' over several days in a series of 10-minute parodies to point out 'how bizarre the programme was'. Members of the Dept had sought support from outside the ABC to oppose both of these decisions. N. Swan, personal interview, 22.11.91.

¹³² P. Kirkwood, Paper, 14.3.84, held by P. Kirkwood; and interview, 28.7.89.

compartmentalised into separate units for radio and television - the television units being incorporated into Features (Television) - but their specialist Heads of Department maintaining overall authority.¹³³ Just how the Heads of Religion and Science were to exercise their responsibilities in relation to the Head of Features (Television), was not clear. In fact, from this time, the Head of Religion became increasingly disconnected from television.¹³⁴ Radio had always been the stronger medium for religious programmes and this structural change in television had the effect of increasing the focus of the Department on radio.

The Managing Director was asked to explain his proposal precisely.¹³⁵ The answer came back that Federal Specialist Heads had:

- 'full responsibility for content, style, editorial approach and Federal co-ordination' for programmes that were broadcast over a network;
- 'advisory responsibilities regarding content and style and ultimate editorial responsibility' for local programmes;
- participation in appointment and promotion of staff; and
- responsibility 'for staff training and career development' for specialist staff.¹³⁶

At the end of August, 'Science and Technology' was added to the Duty Statement of the Head of Features (Radio), matching the arrangement in television, and the position of Head of Science was abolished.¹³⁷ The incumbent, John Challis, who was at the time in Darwin as Acting Manager in the Northern Territory, advised his friend, Kirkwood, to 'keep on [his] guard'. Challis recounted how he had made inquiries from Peter Wright in the administrative sector, Organisations and Methods, and had been 'told that with Media Manager NSW and Head Features in the picture there was no room for Head of Science and Technology to have a role - "something had to go"!' ¹³⁸

Challis shared Kirkwood's view that the depreciation of specialist departments meant the running down of the intellectual resources of the ABC. He believed that the effects on programmes would not be immediate if the existing team of specialist producers remained to work in the new structure, but eventually 'programme judgment' would weaken. However, to go on resisting the structural changes that others had undergone could lead to increased isolation within the organisation.¹³⁹ For

¹³³ MD, 'ABC re-organisation', memo to all staff, 4.5.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹³⁴ J. Cleary, interview, 13.3.89.

¹³⁵ M. Long, A/C. Radio 2, memo to MD, 8.6.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹³⁶ G. Whitehead, memo to all Mgrs and Hds, 29.10.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹³⁷ G. Whitehead, letter to J. Challis, Federal Hd Science (1968-84), who at this time was A/Mgr, Northern Territory, 31.8.84, held by P. Kirkwood.

¹³⁸ J. Challis, letter to P. Kirkwood, 12.9.84, held by P. Kirkwood.

¹³⁹ Challis, interview, 27.4.89.

things to be otherwise would require corporate management to be imaginative and flexible enough to negotiate for diversity and variety in its structures. Management of this kind was not prevalent.

In April 1985, for the third year in succession, documents about new structures were circulated through the Corporation. The staff of the Religion Department were to be transferred to Features (Radio) and Features (Television). The position of Head of Religion was to be retained. There was, however, no indication of what the Head's relationship to staff would be. After discussion, the Department, once again, argued against the proposed arrangements in a submission, which reminded management of an assurance the Department had received from the Managing Director the previous year that 'a distinct and enhanced Religious Programmes Department would be maintained'.¹⁴⁰ Four months later on August 1, the Director of Radio, Malcolm Long, announced the Board's approval of a number of changes to radio structures which had been recommended to it by management, appending to his memorandum a diagram of the Federal Radio Structure soon to take effect, with no explicit reference to Religion in it at all.¹⁴¹

Little wonder that at a Department conference called later in August, the issues of highest priority were those of 'workload and stress'.¹⁴² Even so, the conference faced the future with remarkable spirit. It appraised the context in which the Department worked, not merely the ABC and the broadcasting industry but most importantly the society it served; it clarified a vision for the future; it evaluated the Department's own work, structures and relationships; and it formulated a plan of action which addressed workloads and redefined roles.¹⁴³

Kirkwood, however, had become deeply disillusioned with the prevailing ethos and style of Corporation management. The alternatives for John Challis, when his job as Head of Science was abolished, had been either to apply for another position in the Corporation or to negotiate his departure from the ABC.¹⁴⁴ Once the Religion staff were shifted into a general production grouping in radio,¹⁴⁵ as

¹⁴⁰ P. Kirkwood, memo to C. Progs (Radio) and Director Radio, Report from Religion Dept on documents produced by Implementation Working Party, 16.4.85, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁴¹ M. Long, memo and attached Appendix A, 1.8.85, held at Religion Dept, Sydney..

¹⁴² Religion Programmes Producers' Conference, 'Towards a corporate plan 1986-7', Summary of Proceedings, Aug. 1985, held by P. Kirkwood.

¹⁴³ The Dept continued to produce many valuable programmes of good quality throughout this period, which are discussed in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁴ Whitehead, letter to Challis, 31.8.84.

¹⁴⁵ By this time, no longer called 'Features'; the earlier title 'Talks' was re-instated, cf. McLennan, interview, 17.6.89.

management was obviously determined to see done, Kirkwood might expect that his job as Head of Religion would be declared redundant, just as that of Head of Science had been. He had worked for nearly twenty-four years in the Religion Department; making religious programmes was his love; he had no interest in another position in the Corporation; he was now profoundly fatigued. He decided that he should resign, but that first it was essential that he seek an assurance that the position of Head of Religion would be retained in the structures and not lapse on his departure. On receipt of this written assurance from management, he left the ABC in January 1986.¹⁴⁶

Despite the rhetoric of the Corporation's Statement of Purpose 1984, which stated that the central objective of the ABC was 'to extend the range of ideas and experiences available to Australians and contribute to the development of values within the community',¹⁴⁷ the re-structuring project begun under Whitehead was driven primarily by considerations of 'effective and efficient management' and only secondarily by 'philosophies and programme objectives'.¹⁴⁸ Kirkwood had argued, instead, for the primacy of content over format, for philosophy to precede structure. There was a deep-rooted opposition between these two approaches.

A submission by Robert Peach, Acting Director for Programmes (NSW) in 1984, which did not find acceptance from management, is useful for elaborating this point.¹⁴⁹ Peach began by quoting Sir Charles Curran, who, as Director General of the BBC, had described the goals of good programming in these words: 'to display what the world is like and to present what might be.' Peach urged that the structuring of the ABC begin with the world and with the audiences to be served. He was bluntly critical of programme departments set up according to programme categories, or programme styles, such as 'Talks and Documentaries' or 'Drama and Features':

It is foolish to give a department a title that gives no indication of what the programme makers should really be doing and dealing with.

Instead, he recommended that programme departments be formed around five areas of human knowledge and activity: Religion and Philosophy, Sport, Political and Social Affairs, Fine Arts and Music, Science and Technology. A sixth programme sector, News and Current Affairs, would 'traverse all these areas'. Clearly, in Peach's view, ABC structures were the servants of the content and intent of programmes. He made other proposals, too, but they do not concern us here. This

¹⁴⁶ P. Kirkwood, interview, 9.8.93.

¹⁴⁷ ABC Board, 'Statement of purpose', 25.7.84, published in Annual Reports after this date.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. G. Whitehead, memo to Tony Barrell, Radio Talks and Documentaries, 31.8.84.

¹⁴⁹ R. Peach, 'Suggested method for obtaining an appropriate structure for ABC Radio', submission to Curtis Berry, Broadcast House, 20.3.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

part of his submission has been summarised to show how others, as well as Kirkwood and the Religion Department, opposed the priorities and methodology in management strategies at this time.

The eight months between Kirkwood's departure and David Millikan's arrival as fifth Head of Religion was a sombre, ambiguous period for the staff. They continued broadcasting their programmes - in radio, under the Head of Talks, Kirsten Garrett - and canvassed prospects for a new appointee to direct the future of religious broadcasting. Millikan took up his appointment in September 1986, but became seriously ill and effectively began work only in December.

Millikan, like Kirkwood, was a Christian layman with an intense interest in symbol and metaphor. Millikan's religious tradition was Evangelical Protestant, but he rejected confining interpretations of that tradition and explored with vigour the relationship of theology to culture and society. With a first degree in Philosophy and English from Monash University and a Bachelor of Divinity with Honours in Systematic Theology from the United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne, he had gone to the United States to explore connections between theology and aesthetics with Professor John Hospers at the University of Southern California. Having completed a PhD thesis on 'Patterns in the Christian Response to Art and Beauty', he had returned to Australia to take a post directing the Zadok Centre for Christian Study and Resource in Canberra. In six years there, he had set up a facility where people in positions of leadership could reflect on major social and cultural questions. Millikan was an adventurer. At twenty-one years of age, between his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity, he had spent two solitary years in Sarawak, where he had trekked and climbed;¹⁵⁰ he had left Zadok to make documentary films in Australia and Africa.¹⁵¹ He relished the intellectual and spiritual quest on which he had embarked.

His was a strong, assured personality attuned to the modern world. His image was of a man who combined Christian conviction with intellectual substance relevant to contemporary urban Australia. This, and his background in aesthetics and film, commended him to the ABC and he negotiated a contract which gave him the possibility of involvement, as Federal Head of Department, in religious broadcasting across both media.¹⁵² Millikan's confidence and assertive advocacy of religious broadcasting rallied and energised the Department and encouraged new endeavours.

¹⁵⁰ Millikan claims to have been the first European to climb the highest mountain in Sarawak, Mount Murud.

¹⁵¹ It was during this time that he wrote and presented a much-discussed ABC television production called 'The Sunburnt Soul', which sought the spiritual qualities of Australian culture. This was screened 22.11.81-20.12.81, cf File, 'The Sunburnt Soul' held by M. McInerney.

¹⁵² Millikan and M. Long, personal interviews, 25.9.91 and 22.1.92, respectively.

He was not, however, adept in political or diplomatic skills.¹⁵³ Intolerant of bureaucracy, he annoyed managers with his disregard for conventions and procedures. Nonetheless, under Millikan, the Department felt that religious broadcasting was winning a more secure place in the ethos, as well as the programme structures, of the ABC than it had enjoyed for some years, despite secularist antipathy still evident here and there. This could be attributable to a growing interest among Australians, including those in the ABC, in the spiritual dimensions of life and in the obvious capacity of religious faith to motivate political and social change in many parts of the globe. It could also be due to the Department's wider exploration of contemporary religious movements and spiritual trends in more diverse programmes of good quality.¹⁵⁴

Millikan's contract was due to expire, or be renewed, at the end of 1991. In 1990, religious broadcasting was included in the general oversight of the Director of Spoken Word in Radio National, but for the term of his contract Millikan's authority as Federal Head had to be maintained.¹⁵⁵ In July 1991, radio management notified him and the Department of its intention to implement a change in the status of the person at the head of the Department from the conclusion of his current contract. Millikan, or whoever took his place in religious broadcasting as senior officer, would have no role in relation to television, and would be employed at a lower salary level with the status of Specialist Editor of a radio unit located within the wider production sector of Spoken Word.¹⁵⁶ Millikan decided not to continue and Dr Paul Collins, Roman Catholic priest and academic historian, whom Millikan had recruited to the Department in 1988, accepted the new position.¹⁵⁷

Were all the Department's best efforts, over nearly ten years, to retain its identity and ensure a secure place in ABC structures at last defeated in 1991? Was further diminishment now inevitable? Some members of staff, who had worked through the stressful years and been buoyed by the seeming reversal in fortune since the appointment of David Millikan as Head, certainly thought so. They alerted religious journalists in the daily press, church leaders and church media and these, in turn, published articles and wrote letters to the ABC, stressing the increasing

¹⁵³ Millikan, interview, 25.9.91.

¹⁵⁴ This appraisal of the Dept was shared by both N. Swan and M. Long, interviews, 22.11.91 and 22.1.92, respectively.

¹⁵⁵ When protests against this move were voiced, Long wrote a public letter denying any intended or real damage to religious broadcasting, cf. M. Long, letter to *Australian*, 4.5.90.

¹⁵⁶ The ABC Board confirmed this arrangement at its meeting on 31.10.91, cf. notification held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. conversations with Millikan, Collins and Cleary, Sept.-Oct. 1991.

significance of religion and spirituality in contemporary Australian life, of which ABC managers seemed to be unaware.¹⁵⁸ Protests were met by a denial from management of any intention to disband the specialist unit of religious broadcasters or reduce its role in ABC programmes.¹⁵⁹

'We are nothing without our specialist departments', declared Long, the Director of Radio. He insisted that the changes proposed indicated no animus against religion. Managers had made a professional judgment that neither radio nor television was well served when the senior officer of the Religion Department was not consistently focussed on one medium, but was only partially attentive to both. The primary consideration in broadcasting had to be, not the specialist department, but the station and its need for 'on-air coherence' and an 'esprit de corps across specialisations'. He was convinced that it was in the best interests of ABC Radio that the production unit for religious programmes be unambiguously inserted into radio structures, where it was assured a firm and enduring place.¹⁶⁰

The impact on religious broadcasting of this re-structuring of the Department cannot yet be appraised.¹⁶¹ There are, however, some further comments to be made here on the grounds religious programmers might have for their fears and on the stated intentions of management.

First, some ABC managers were, and are, secularists who have disparaged religious views of life and the world.¹⁶² The Department was justified, and wise, to be on guard against the influence of secularism in management decisions. In the assessment of a number of the staff of the Department, secularism has been discredited and has waned in society in recent years, but is not without power still in the ABC.

Secondly, in decisions about the allocation of financial resources, a Federal Head of Department had more budgetary influence than a Specialist Editor.¹⁶³ John Munro's advice to Patrick Kirkwood was well founded.¹⁶⁴ There is no doubt that 'media management' has increased its control over specialist programme units.¹⁶⁵ The relative power of management and the Religion Department has been

¹⁵⁸ Cf. various conversation with Dept staff, Oct.-Nov. 1991. Cf. also A. Gill, 'Hellfire hits the ABC', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11.11.91, pp. 9, 11.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. N. Swan, letter to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6.8.91.

¹⁶⁰ Long, interview, 22.1.92.

¹⁶¹ Cf. John Challis' comments, fn. 139 above.

¹⁶² The Managing Director, David Hill, has openly done so, cf. Millikan, interview 25.9.91.

¹⁶³ Swan and Cleary, interviews, 22.11.91 and 31.10.91, respectively.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. fn. 113 above.

¹⁶⁵ 'Media management' refers to those executives in the radio and television divisions of the ABC concerned with overall operational management.

demonstrated: the Department succeeded for a time in delaying plans it judged to be harmful to its purposes but could not ultimately prevent them. It was reasonable to assume that relegation to a reduced status in the structures would entail a reduced capacity to press views that conflicted with the priorities of management.

However, although the Department was incorporated into Spoken Word in 1990-1, it remained an identifiable, cohesive unit with its own goals and internal organisation. It was not dissolved into a general production pool in the same way as had happened to religious broadcasting in New Zealand in 1988. It may be that the ethos of the ABC has, indeed, become more accommodating to the religion unit and its work than it was a few years previously. If this is so, then the Department's fending off change during the 1980s may well have been an achievement of vital importance. Australians' heightened interest in religious interpretations of reality,¹⁶⁶ and their growing realisation of the significant role religious values can play in current affairs, may provide an encouraging environment for the Department's work in the future.

Concluding comments

We have been examining how the fact of being located within the ABC has helped, or hindered, religious broadcasters and their programmes. Three points that have emerged warrant these final comments.

For much of its history, the Religion Department, its Head and its programmes enjoyed a largely unquestioned place in the ABC and its broadcasting schedules. Religious programmes were at times roundly criticised and the resources available to the Department were spare, but the staff and their work were respected. The Department was, however, a small and confined subdivision, thought by many in the ABC, when they thought of it at all, to be of relatively minor importance in the enterprise. The disdain of particular ABC staff members for religious broadcasting was of little moment to the Department in those years, but, from the late 1970s, it became increasingly aware of its vulnerability to stronger antipathetic forces in the ABC. When, repeatedly, proposals were put forward which the Department judged to be damaging to its future work, when assurances it had received were not honoured, its staff lost trust in some sectors of the management, anticipating a future of constant vigilance against their unfriendly intentions. Newcomers to the Department and to the ABC from the second half of the 1980s, brought some fresh optimism and confidence, but suspicions accumulated over years remained.

Whereas the Religion Department had held a secure place in the philosophy and structures of the ABC for nearly forty years, it found itself, in the 1980s,

¹⁶⁶ Cf. ch. 7.

profoundly at odds with proposals from Corporation executives driven by theories of business management. There may, or may not, have been a conscious wish to diminish religious broadcasting in the plans for structural change put forward at this time. There is no doubt, however, that these plans were expressions of priorities which the Department, with good reason, considered ultimately incompatible with its own. It sought to protect itself not only from any deliberate intention there might have been to take its programmes off the air but also from the indifference of management executives to the impact on the Department's purposes of their undeviating pursuit of secular business goals.

The crises for the Department of 1973-7¹⁶⁷ and 1988 had their origins in forces outside the ABC. The debates were public and all who were interested could inform themselves of the issues and seek to influence outcomes. However, when the source of the Department's difficulties was the ABC itself, as in 1982-5 and 1990-1, the interested public could have no access to the facts and their implications, unless these were made public by one or other of the parties concerned. As has been remarked earlier,¹⁶⁸ the Department was characterised by smallness and vulnerability, combined with an unshakeable conviction in the importance of its task in Australian society. It was determined to survive to make its contribution but, alone, it could not hope to prevail. In every major crisis, it has needed outspoken representation on its behalf from allied institutions in the society powerful enough to be heard and heeded. It seems never to have stayed silent under pressure, but to have formed alliances within and outside the ABC to protect its place and purposes in public broadcasting. In 1990-1, changes were made to the status of the Department and its Head despite objections. This failure to avert moves which had been successfully resisted previously might be explained by two factors present at this time. The incorporation of religious broadcasts into the structures of Spoken Word was a step long-delayed in a re-organisation which had been in process since the 'McKinsey Report' of 1973. The logic of the process, management's sustained commitment to it and the passing of time might have been enough finally to effect this shift. There was, however, the added fact that the staff of the Department were not in total agreement in their appraisal of the changes proposed by management, so that objections from within and without the ABC were not voiced with the same concerted vigour as previously and lacked their earlier effectiveness. Despite the claim that ABC management has become more 'cynical about organised lobbying',¹⁶⁹ the weight of evidence to date suggests that, in

¹⁶⁷ Cf. ch. 8.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. ch. 8, 'Conclusion'.

¹⁶⁹ Swan, interview, 22.11.91.

a serious crisis, the united efforts of the Religion Unit and supportive institutions in the society could ensure the security of religious broadcasting within the ABC.

PART V

FIFTY YEARS OF PROGRAMMES

CHAPTER 10

'RELIGION IN LIFE'

The title of this chapter is the name given by Kenneth Henderson, in 1954, to a programme which he persevered for twelve years to get scheduled on Wednesday evening rather than on Sunday,¹ because he wanted the timing of the programme, as well as its content, to proclaim the relevance of religious faith to the day-to-day lives of adult Australians. Soon after this programme ceased, a fifteen-minute programme for children, broadcast in the mid-morning every Wednesday in term time, was named 'Religion and Life'. The similarity of the two titles suggests, perhaps, some failure in imagination but emphasises the conviction of the ABC's religious broadcasters that religion was of comprehensive importance in human life, whether in childhood or adulthood, both in the private world of individual persons and in the public social realm.

The concern of this chapter is to undertake an historical review of the forty main programmes produced by the Department in the years 1941-91 to discover how, and how well, it realised this comprehensive goal of providing Australians with a religious broadcasting service that would address the many facets of their lives and present religious faith as a vital component of society.² With changing circumstances, emphases shifted. There were times when the range of programmes was extended, only to contract at other times. There were periods when expansion and reduction were the two sides of one coin: as Australian society became more diverse and the Department's programme options multiplied, it became inevitable that the inclusion of new themes and subjects into the limited air-time available would displace some of the previously familiar presentations. These emphases will be examined in some detail.

In Chapter 1, reference was made to Ninian Smart's identification of six 'dimensions' of religion - doctrinal, mythological, ethical, ritual, experiential and social - and to Moore and Habel's modification of these into eight 'components' - beliefs, experiences, texts, stories, ritual, social structure, ethics and symbols.³ These form a convenient framework for an introductory analysis of our forty programmes. Were all the dimensions of religion presented and explored through these

¹ The programme, conceived in 1942 went to air in 1954 and ran for approximately twenty years, withdrawn some time between 1972 and 1974. Cf. AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3 and ST3051/1, file R17/1/4. Cf. also ch. 5, 'Range of programmes'.

² The main programmes established by Henderson and Munro, have been reviewed in chs 5 and 6. They will be included in this wider survey with as little repetition of information as possible.

³ Cf. ch. 1, fnn. 10-11.

programmes? And how were the programmes related to the personal and social life of those who listened to them?

Dimensions and relevance of programmes

A single programme like 'Divine Service', broadcast continuously on ABC radio from 1932 to 1986⁴ was informed by a number of these dimensions of religion, most often by all six. It presented a community of believers gathered to participate in the ritual of worship, in which were enshrined the deepest mysteries of their faith. The sacred texts were read and listened to with reverence and preachers exhorted the people to apply the lessons of faith to their daily ethical conduct and relationships. In addition to these weekly Christian services, Jewish celebrations of the Day of Atonement, Passover and New Year were also broadcast.⁵ The intention of all these programmes was to reflect the communal worship and prayer of Australians as it occurred,⁶ for the sake of faithful adherents of these communities prevented from physically participating themselves - shift workers and people confined to their homes or sick beds - and, also, for those not interested in attending but receptive to what such a programme was able to communicate.⁷ Even in the more highly produced programme, 'Radio Service', these same dimensions were often present.⁸

Anglican 'Evensong' was another form of communal ritual prayer, broadcast direct from the Melbourne Cathedral each week from 1940 to the late 1960s.⁹

'Community Hymn Singing', 'A Minute of Prayer', 'Epilogue' and 'Evening Meditation', even though designed especially for radio, were forms of the ritual of prayer, whether communal or individual. For nearly forty years (1947-85), congregations and their pastors gathered in church or chapel to broadcast 'Community Hymn Singing' 'especially for non-church goers...for whom familiar hymns have the magic of youthful association'.¹⁰ In 1941, as a response to Australia's involvement in war, the ABC introduced 'A Minute of Prayer' into its schedule just before noon from Monday to Saturday, intended 'for those who may not attend church services but are

⁴ Until 1943, capital city dwellers could hear three worship services on radio each Sunday, two in the morning and one in the evening. Cf. AA (NSW): SP341/1, file 8.4.

⁵ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/3/3.

⁶ J. Munro, memo to GM, draft reply to Fiji Broadcasting Commission, 28.2.57, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/5.

⁷ K. Henderson, 'On church broadcasting', letter to clergy, n.d. (c.1955), AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.

⁸ Once a month, 'Radio Service' (1943-64) took the form of a documentary, which developed into a weekly programme, 'Encounter', replacing 'Radio Service' from 1965. P. Kirkwood, personal interview, 9.5.89.

⁹ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 97.

¹⁰ K. Henderson, memo to Mgr Western Australia, 6.2.51, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

anxious to see a healthy revival of spiritual life'.¹¹ 'Evening Meditation' and 'Epilogue' invited listeners to a few quiet minutes of meditation at the end of each day before the station closed down for the night. Both of these programmes were broadcast from Henderson's time into the 1980s.

Sacred texts and stories could be heard frequently in many of the religious programmes: read verbatim from the sacred books; at times paraphrased or re-told in prose, poetry and drama; frequently used as stimulus, or re-enforcement, for ideas expressed in talks and discussions; set to music in motets, cantatas, hymns and songs. 'Daily Devotional' and 'Pause a Moment', both long-running commitments of the Department, combined all these elements in short reflective broadcasts each weekday morning.¹² The brief for both of these programmes specified a tightly focussed presentation of one clear insight relevant to the lives of listeners, in a format comprising music, a reading, a story or very short talk, and a prayer.

Readings of sacred texts with a few short comments were a feature of breakfast-time broadcasting from 1948 to 1991. Up to 1984, these were 'Readings from the Bible' only, but then the Department changed the programme's name to 'Sacred Readings' and drew more widely on the sacred texts of other religions, and from secular writings.¹³ The target audience for the readings was the broad spectrum of adult Australians habitually tuned in to the ABC to catch the morning news bulletin. The ritual cycle of Sunday readings in the Christian Lectionary provided the structure for another studio-based programme, 'Sunday Morning', in which music, old and new, and brief comments of the presenter enlightened and embellished the readings, at the same time stimulating the imagination of 'believers and those interested in music'.¹⁴ Music inspired by sacred texts and stories has been a constant component of ABC religious broadcasts. 'Community Hymn Singing' and 'Sunday Morning' have already been mentioned. Other programmes were: 'Sacred Music', 'Epilogue', 'Prelude', 'In Quires and Places', 'For The God Who Sings', 'With Heart and Voice', 'Sing to the Lord', 'Image' and 'Sounds Like Sunday'. The first five of these appealed to lovers of fine instrumental and choral music drawn from the heritage of the past and from contemporary sources. The other four programmes catered to more

¹¹ Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1941-42*, p. 15 and *1942-43*, p. 11.

¹² 'Daily Devotional', 1936-1971, was replaced by 'By The Way', cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1935-36*, p. 27 and *1970-71*, p. 39. 'Pause a Moment' was on the State network 1955-80, cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/2/2.

¹³ Cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1983-4*, p. 32.

¹⁴ 'Sunday Morning' was broadcast 5.30-6.55 a.m.(EST) on Radio National, 1987-91, when it became 'Prelude', 6-7 a.m. (reviving the name of the earlier programme 1949-63). Cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1987-8*, p.40; and ABC, *Your Guide to ABC Religious Radio 1991*.

popular tastes with traditional hymns and the latest in Christian country and western, Gospel, blues and rock music.¹⁵

The tenets of religious faith were both explicit and implicit in broadcast worship, prayer, sacred readings and music. They were also affirmed, probed and argued in other kinds of programmes: in prepared talks by single speakers; in panel discussions and interviews; in 'problem-answer' and 'talk-back' sessions where listeners could raise questions and converse with acknowledged experts in different matters; and in documentaries where the actions and projects of individuals and groups and the convictions underpinning them were presented. Doctrine was not the direct focus of most programmes; rather, experiences of life with their ambiguities, challenges and dilemmas. Even so, what speakers said about these inevitably contained something of what they held to be true, or what they accepted as wise precepts to live by. Thus, in most of these programmes, personal experiences, society and culture, doctrine and ethics were intricately connected. 'Encounter', which replaced 'Radio Service' in 1965 and still goes to air weekly on Sunday mornings, has been a particularly strong illustration of this. Documentary techniques have been utilised to great effect. As its name suggests, its primary concern has been that, week after week, its wide, diverse audience would be confronted with the rich interplay of life, values and religious faith.

'Plain Christianity', 'Religion in Life' and 'By The Way' were all scripted talks by single speakers. 'By The Way' was a short day-time reflection on human

¹⁵ A programme called 'Sacred Music' has been part of the ABC's Sunday schedule 1932-91. A morning programme for many years it has been broadcast more recently in the early evening. Cf. Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'; ABC, *Annual Report 1942-3*, p.11; ABC, *Religious Programs 1988*.

'Prelude', a choral introduction to 'Plain Christianity' on Sunday nights 1949-63 was replaced by 'In Quires and Places', at first scheduled on Sunday mornings, then on Friday evenings. In 1985, this programme gave way to 'For the God who Sings'. Cf. AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/10; and ABC, *Annual Reports 1972-3*, p. 47; and *1984-5*, p.32.

'For the God Who Sings' was the Dept's first FM programme of fine sacred music, consisting initially of occasional series of Australian performances broadcast when available. Since 1989, it has included other recorded material and gone to air weekly early on Sunday mornings. Cf. ABC, *Religious Programs 1989*, and K. McLennan, programme producer, personal interview, 7.4.93.

'With Heart and Voice' and 'Sing to the Lord' which replaced it held their place in the Sunday morning schedule in Victoria 1967-1989. The time-slot varied over the years but was around 7 a.m.(EST). From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s these programmes could be heard in all States. AA (NSW): ST3051/1, file R17/1/4, pt 6.

'Image', 1982-5, began as a 7-minute programme, mid-morning Mon.-Fri. on the regional network, but was then extended to a 15-minute broadcast at mid-day on Sundays. It was dedicated to popular contemporary Christian music. Cf. M. Bills, producer 'Image', personal interview 16.5.89. 'Image' ceased when 'Sounds Like Sunday' was introduced on the national network with a similar contemporary focus, 1985-7. ABC, *Annual Reports 1985-6*, p. 36; and *1986-7*, p.40.

experience, looking at life through the lens of faith.¹⁶ The other two were substantial, thirty-minute expositions on evening radio. For 'Plain Christianity', renowned scholars and orators from all over the English-speaking world were recorded for broadcasting. 'Religion in Life' aimed to approach similar religious and philosophical questions in a style and context more apposite to the day-to-day concerns of ordinary Australians. It was said, in 1967, that 'Plain Christianity' was, at times, 'not very "plain" at all'¹⁷ and, two years later, it was withdrawn in favour of 'Crossways', which continued to pursue the same purposes as its predecessor, but with more varied forms of presentation.¹⁸

The Department was very clear that these programmes were to cater particularly for those ABC listeners who were religiously uncommitted. 'Religion Speaks' aimed at the same kind of audience but took a different approach, bringing a panel of speakers together to argue a chosen topic from different points of view without requiring conclusive agreement.¹⁹

Programmes like 'In Between', 'Saturday Saints' and 'Insight' included, in their different styles and formats, interviews with people about their faith, their lives, their achievements, their theology. 'In Between' aimed for 'the common touch' with teenagers and included a good deal of contemporary folk music and 'up tempo' hymns.²⁰ 'Saturday Saints', which replaced it, also set out to communicate with younger listeners, seeking to introduce them to people they could admire, but, in fact, its audience was more broadly adult.²¹ When it was taken off air, a country listener complained bitterly: '...farm dwellers like us have few opportunities for hearing famous people in person and 'Saturday Saints' was one compensation'.²² The

¹⁶ 'By the Way' (1971-84) replaced 'Daily Devotional' but was reduced to 10 minutes in 1974. Cf. ABC, *Annual Report 1970-1*, p. 36; and *Supplementary Information on ABC Activities 1974-5*, p. 49.

¹⁷ Victorian Advisory Committee, Minutes of meeting, 19.5.67, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.5, pt 3.

¹⁸ 'Crossways' replaced 'Plain Christianity' in October 1969 on Sundays at 10.15 p.m.(EST). In 1973, it was shifted to Friday evenings and was withdrawn in favour of 'Forum' in 1981. ABC, *Annual Reports 1969-70*, p. 34; and *1980-1*, p. 47.

¹⁹ From 1958, 'Religion Speaks' (1953-65) was given over once a month to international news and comment. This material was then produced weekly and 'Frontier' entirely replaced 'Religion Speaks'. Cf. AA (NSW): SP463/1, file 8.3; and ST3051/1, file R17/1/2.

²⁰ Methodist minister, Rev. Roger Bush, presented this 15-minute programme on Saturday 10 a.m.(EST), 1964-8. Cf. J. Peter, memo to State Mgrs, 10.12.63, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/5; and ABC, *Annual Report 1968-9*, p. 33.

²¹ After 'Saturday Saints' (1968-80) came 'Priorities' (1981-2) at 9.45 a.m.(EST), and then, 'Insight' (1983-4), not to be confused with 'Insights'. Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1968-9*, p. 33; *1980-1*, p. 47; *1981-2*, p. 34; *1983-4*, p. 19.

²² Rona Young, letter to R. Nichols, programme producer, 3.11.80, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5.

audience for 'Insight' was also a general adult one, listeners with an interest in questions of morality and faith in the real lives of people.²³

'Search for Meaning', a programme essentially concerned with personal experience recounted in stories, has utilised the interview format in a quite exceptional way. Caroline Jones has been at pains to allow her guest to communicate as directly as possible with listeners, inserting her questions and comments delicately, guiding and later editing the conversations only to ensure that the account of her guest's life and quest was presented in a skilfully constructed programme. Intensely personal, these interviews have, nonetheless, taken their audiences through the subjective narrative into broader realms of belief, ethics, inner spirituality and social commitment. A number of guests of the programme have confessed no clear religious belief or motivation in their lives but all have spoken of what most deeply moved them. Australians far and wide responded to their stories, aspects of which often mirrored their own.²⁴

'Facing the Week', 'Saturday Afternoon Talks' and 'Sunday Night Talk', catered for Australians with broad religious, philosophical and ethical interests and depended on listeners' participation for their vitality.²⁵ Problems raised in listeners' letters helped to shape the content of 'Facing the Week' and 'Saturday Afternoon Talks'. A programme of the 1940s, 'Spirit of Man', and 'Priorities', which began at the time that 'Facing the Week' ended, focussed on ethical questions and moral decision-making.²⁶ 'Sunday Night Talk' has taken advantage of more recently advanced technology to facilitate telephone conversations between speakers in the studio and listeners in most of the States of Australia. On the nights when a panel of speakers has been invited to participate in a programme, it has combined the elements of vigorous studio discussion and audience interaction in a way unique in the Department's history and rarely matched by other ABC programmes.

Another distinct type of programme which became part of the Department's repertoire from 1958 concerned itself with religion as news. Religion in all its

²³ ABC, *Annual Report 1982-3*, p. 17.

²⁴ 'Search for Meaning' was suggested by listeners as a title for this programme which began in March 1987 as a limited series of interviews entitled 'Caroline Jones: Talking with Prominent Australians' but was then extended to include interviews with hundreds of Australians previously quite unknown to the public and has continued ever since. Cf. C. Jones, personal interview, 6.9.89.

²⁵ 'Facing the Week' (1945-80) early Monday morning, and 'Saturday Afternoon Talks' (1948-c.1959) were short scripted programmes. 'Sunday Night Talk', currently on the Metropolitan network, 10-midnight, began in 1988 as 'Sunday Night' and developed into a listener participation programme in 1989. Cf. ABC, *Religious Programs 1988-91*.

²⁶ 'Spirit of Man' was a Sunday afternoon programme, 1944-7, cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1943-4*, p. 13; and *1946-7*, p. 15.

dimensions was treated, but from the standpoint of a critical journalist, albeit a courteous one, appraising the functioning of religion in the conduct of individuals and groups, in religious and secular institutions and in contemporary events of local, national and global significance. 'Frontier', the religious components of 'Broadband', 'Journal of Religion', 'Insights', 'Forum' and 'Kronos' are names of programmes all of which have, either entirely or in part, taken this approach to religious broadcasting.²⁷ With the exception of 'Journal of Religion', which took the form of 'a scripted talk reflecting on events in the world of religion',²⁸ these were magazine programmes of news and theology, combining reports, analyses, comments, features and reviews in varying proportions. All included local, national and international material. 'Forum' and 'Kronos' inclined towards a number of short segments, up to seven items in thirty minutes, with an emphasis on the news of the moment.²⁹ 'Journal of Religion' and 'Insights' continued in the tradition of 'Plain Christianity' and 'Crossways', though different from them in format, thoughtfully exploring theological and religious themes in contemporary contexts.

There is ample evidence that living, and lived, religion in all its dimensions has found a place in ABC radio broadcasts. The Department tried to connect its broadcasts with people's lives by various means: it affirmed religious communities in Australia and drew attention to the strength and persistence of worship and prayer in the life of the nation; it addressed both the personal spirituality and morality of individuals and the spirit and ethics of society; it helped to maintain the religious heritage of Australia through succeeding generations; it told stories of human lives and endeavours; it documented and appraised public events and affairs; it sought, and clung to, time

²⁷ Having replaced 'Religion Speaks' in 1965, 'Frontier' was moved in 1973 to 7.15 p.m. Wednesday and was absorbed into 'Broadband', 1977-80. Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1972-3*, p. 47; and *1975-6*, p. 27; and AA (NSW): ST3051/1, file R17/1/2.

The Religion Dept retained its Wednesday night time-slot when 'Broadband' ceased and renamed the programme 'Journal of Religion', 1980-5. Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1980-1*, p. 47; and *1985-6*, p. 36.

'Insights' replaced 'Journal of Religion' in 1986 and has continued to go to air weekly. A 45-minute programme, it initially went to air at 10.15 p.m. on Wednesday and was then shifted to Sunday, where it has been broadcast between 5 and 6 p.m. ever since. Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1985-6*, p. 36; and *1986-7*, p. 40; and ABC, *Your Guide to ABC Religious Radio, 1988-91*.

A monthly 'Forum' on topical issues was introduced into 'Crossways' in 1976. 'Broadband' was thought to obviate the need for 'Forum' in the years 1977-80, but it was reinstated in 'Crossways' in 1980 and replaced it entirely in 1981. At times shifted in the schedule, 'Forum', however, remained until 1988, when it gave way to 'Kronos', 1988-91, initially broadcast at 5.30 p.m. on Friday, then at 8.30 a.m. Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1975-6*, p. 27; *1980-81*, p. 47; and *1986-7*, p. 39; AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2; and J. Cleary, producer 'Forum' and 'Kronos', personal interview 13.3.89.

²⁸ P. Kirkwood, memo to Religion staff, 18.2.81, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2.

²⁹ J. Cleary, memo to Religion staff, 2.12.85, File Forum, ABC Document Archives; and Cleary, interview 13.3.89.

allocations in the broadcasting schedule which offered the best opportunities for bringing religious views of reality to the largest number of listeners.

Programming in changing circumstances

After that broad, general survey of fifty years of programmes, we will now examine the impact on the Department's programmes of changing conditions in its social and broadcasting environments during those years. As Australian society and its religious life changed, religious broadcasting was challenged to respond appropriately. The aim in what follows is to highlight the key areas of change and show how these affected what the Department produced. The discussion is organised under eight headings:

- role of Department Head
- programme schedules
- audiences and their responses
- religious content in other ABC programmes
- programmes for young people
- worship and 'devotion'
- responsibilities of staff
- religious diversity.

Role of Department Head

Kenneth Henderson and John Munro, the first two Heads, dominated the Religion Department of their day because they were working with so few specialist staff who were in Sydney and Melbourne only. From 1962, this situation began to change. Staff numbers grew gradually as the ABC's responsibilities in television as well as radio increased and, in 1962, specialist producers for religious programmes were appointed to the Talks Department in the BAPH States, charged with devoting two-thirds of their time to religious programmes. In 1971, these appointments were replaced by full-time appointments in the Religion Department.

After Alan Robson's retirement in 1974, James Peter, Department Head 1961-77, delegated responsibility for the oversight of programme production to two of his staff in Sydney. Ronald Nichols and Patrick Kirkwood became Federal Assistants to Peter in radio and television, respectively. However, while staff were free to propose fresh programme ideas, Peter kept basic policy matters entirely in his own hands.³⁰

During Kirkwood's time as Federal Director, the Department's producers in all States acquired more responsibility in programme production and also became more involved in broad policy. Several factors were involved in this change. The pressures

³⁰ Cf. ch. 8.

on the Department and its Head, described in the previous chapter, demanded this increased engagement of staff in guarding and guiding the Department's fortunes.³¹ It was, also, a time in the society at large, in institutions and in the broadcasting industry, when the personality and autonomy of the individual were more emphasised.³² In this climate, a number of staff in the Department pressed for changes to the entrenched, centrally organised roster system for programme production. They wanted their personal capacities and experience to be better acknowledged in the allocation of responsibilities, and Kirkwood supported them.³³ David Millikan went further and encouraged his producers to put their personal stamp on their programmes and to infuse them with the passion and commitment they themselves felt for their subject.

Despite the staff's greater participation in shaping policies and programmes under Kirkwood and Millikan than under their predecessors, the Head of Department still retained primary responsibility for explicating the Department's philosophy of broadcasting and clarifying its goals. Every Head left his personal mark on the Department.

Programme schedules

Kenneth Henderson's insistence that some religious broadcasts be scheduled at times in the working week when they could be widely heard was maintained by all succeeding Heads of the Department. Henderson's memorandum to the Assistant General Manager in 1942³⁴ pressing this point was echoed by one that David Millikan wrote forty-five years later: 'It is essential to the balance of religious broadcasting on the ABC that we are not put into the ghetto of Sunday for all our programmes'.³⁵

However, programme schedules reveal that, as the years went by, a larger proportion of the Department's programmes were confined to Sundays. Whether one counts the number of regular broadcasts each week, or the total number of hours given over to religious broadcasting each week, the conclusion is the same, although the proportion changes.

³¹ Cf. ch. 9.

³² Cf. ch.7; also, Kirkwood and Cleary, interviews, 29.5.89 and 13.3.89 respectively.

³³ Creative women appointed to the Dept in the 1970s and 1980s were significant in effecting these changes, e.g. Dagmar Strauss, Florence Spurling, Kay McLennan and Heather Formaini. Cf. personal interviews with a number of Dept staff: Kirkwood, 29.5.89; D. Strauss, 23.12.91; F. Spurling, 20.7.89; K. McLennan, 17.6.89.

³⁴ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 66.

³⁵ D. Millikan, memo in response to 'Update of Radio National plan', 24.9.87, on file at Religion Dept, Sydney.

In the period up to the end of the 1970s, the number of broadcasts heard regularly each week was considerably greater than in the years that followed, but more than half of these broadcasts were quite short, lasting ten minutes or less. The religious programmes of the late 1980s were fewer in number but longer: only 'Sacred Readings' was short; the other programmes ranged in length from thirty minutes to an hour and fifty minutes.³⁶

Examining the time taken up in the schedules by the forty programmes identified above, the following facts emerge. Up to the end of the 1970s, 44%-49% of the time allocated to religious broadcasts was on Sundays. In the 1980s and into the 1990s, the proportion of broadcast time on Sundays shifted to range between 55% and 70%. From this one perspective, the position of religious broadcasts in the networks' schedules could be said to have deteriorated, but there are a number of other aspects of scheduling to be considered.

During the 1980s all the short programmes which had gone to air daily during the working week were gradually dropped, except 'Readings from the Bible' (or 'Sacred Readings'). As has already been said, the programmes that remained, and the additions to the Department's repertoire from 1986, were of substantial length. As a result, religious programmes since 1988 have actually occupied a total air-time per week greater than that enjoyed at any other time in the Department's history.³⁷

Most of the weekday programmes to the end of the 1960s were broadcast during the morning and afternoon, when Australians in the work force were unavailable as audience. This was one of the reasons for Henderson's persisting in his effort to win a mid-week evening time-slot. While the proportion of air-time for religious broadcasts outside Sundays steadily decreased over the years, programmes in the weekday schedule were given improved time-slots from the 1970s. Programmes such as 'Crossways', 'Forum', 'Frontier', 'Broadband', 'Journal of Religion', 'Kronos' and 'Search for Meaning' all went to air during the working week outside normal working hours to reach a more widely ranging audience than had been available to those earlier weekday programmes.

³⁶ From the mid-1950s through the 1970s, 32 religious broadcasts for adults went to air regularly on the national and State networks each week. In 1982, there were 24. In 1989, the Dept was putting 15 broadcasts to air (3 of which were repeats of programmes already broadcast at other times in the week). By 1991, there were 8 broadcasts a week, 4 of which were repeats.

³⁷ Calculations based on programme information show that broadcast hours per week for religious programmes in 1988 were 12 hrs, 35 mins; in 1991, 10 hrs, 45 mins. These compare with 7.5 hrs from 1955 to the end of the 1970s, declining through the first half of the 1980s to 5 hrs by 1986.

However, the size of the audience that a religious programme could reach was controlled by the reach of the network on which it was broadcast and the State network (also called Radio 1 or Metropolitan Radio) was the most popular in style and content and so attracted the largest number of ABC listeners. Over the years, most religious programmes have been carried on the national network; a few like 'Divine Service', 'Pause a Moment', 'Community Hymn Singing', 'With Heart and Voice', 'Sing to the Lord', 'Encounter' and 'Sunday Night Talk' found a place on the more popular stations. 'Divine Service' was removed from Radio 1 in 1974³⁸ and then, like the next four programmes mentioned above, eventually ceased to be broadcast altogether. 'Encounter' was shifted to Radio National in 1987 with a consequent substantial loss of audience.³⁹ Only the one religious programme, 'Sunday Night Talk', has kept its place on Metropolitan Radio.

One final point concerns the relative longevity of programmes in the schedules over the years. The set of programmes Henderson established endured for a remarkably long time. The average duration of fifteen programmes he had established by the end of the 1940s was 29.4 years. Six new programmes introduced from the mid-1960s lasted for an average of 13.5 years and, by the 1980s, the turnover in programmes had become comparatively very rapid. Thirteen new programme strands were introduced through the 1980s, fewer than half of which have survived beyond 1991. The average duration of seven programmes that began and ended in the 1980s was 3.5 years. The time-slots of programmes were also changed more often in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁰

These contrasts have a number of explanations. Australian society pursued a relatively stable course through the 1950s and 1960s, but has since experienced considerable cultural change and continuing diversification. The national broadcaster, as a participant in the society, reflected this. From the mid-1970s, ABC management was explicitly advocating in its Annual Reports the need for experiment and the taking of calculated risks in programming.⁴¹ The 1980s were extremely restless years for every sector of the ABC, as described in the previous chapter. The particular changeableness of religious programmes in the 1980s was influenced, also, by the thorough review and recasting of programme formats embarked upon by Patrick Kirkwood, the increased role of individual producers in the shaping of programmes

³⁸ ABC, *Annual Report 1974-5*, p. 23.

³⁹ ABC, *Annual Report 1987-8*, p. 40; AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2, R17/1/5; Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89.

⁴⁰ 'Divine Service', 'With Heart and Voice', 'Crossways', 'Frontier', 'Forum', 'Insights' and 'Search for Meaning' were all shifted around in the schedule, the first and the last of these losing many of their keen listeners as a result.

⁴¹ Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports 1973-4*, p. 6; *1974-5*, p. 11; and *1975-6*, p. 11.

and policy shifts consequent on new leadership in the Department in the second half of that decade.

It is evident that the place of religious programmes in ABC schedules is a story of mixed fortunes, with benefits and disadvantages to be found in each period of the Department's history.

Audiences and their responses

In the broad survey of programmes above, the target audience for each programme was indicated. Here we are concerned with summarising how the Department's perceptions of its total audience differed significantly at different times and how its programmes were received and appraised by their real audiences.

1. The Department's view of its audience

The national broadcaster's commitment to the Australian people as a whole underlay the Religion Department's perceptions of its audience. In 1957, John Munro wrote: 'We maintain the principle that every broadcast is for everyone'.⁴² He was not claiming that the Department's programmes lacked particular orientation and purpose, but was asserting that they should be as accessible as possible to all. Thirty years later, David Millikan expressed his desire to serve the whole society, thus: 'My passion is to make religion accessible to all Australians',⁴³ 'to see religion become part of the Australian agenda'.⁴⁴

Within the whole Australian community there were, however, discernible groupings. The Department, while maintaining some consistency of perspective, delineated these in different ways at different times as Australian society itself changed.

Kenneth Henderson spoke of 'two audiences', describing them in terms of committed church participants, who accounted for some 10% - 15% of the population, and the multitude of 'wayfarers', ranging from Christians dissatisfied in one way or another with organised Christianity to 'spiritually minded agnostics' and the 'average sensual man [sic] with a dash of wonder'.⁴⁵ Although there is no denying Henderson's concern to communicate effectively with the 'wayfarers', the fact that he placed such a heterogeneous mix in one category shows how dominant 'mainstream' Christianity was in religious broadcasting at this time.

⁴² J. Munro, draft reply to Fiji Broadcasting Commission.

⁴³ D. Millikan, personal interview, 25.9.91.

⁴⁴ P. Christopher and S. Lee, 'Religion ABC-style', interview with D. Millikan, *On Being*, May 1987, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Henderson, *Broadcasting*, pp. 10-11.

The concept of two audiences has endured in the Department through fifty years, although expressed in different terms, such as 'religious communities and the wider world'⁴⁶ or 'religiously committed people and the wider society'.⁴⁷ Henderson's first audience consisted of active participants of the Christian churches, but, as religious communities other than Christian grew in Australia, the Department's concept of the first audience expanded to include them and, further, to encompass those who espoused religious faith from the periphery, or quite outside, established structures of religion.

Patrick Kirkwood found David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination* helpful in formulating his perception of three audiences for religious broadcasts. Tracy had related theology to the 'church', the 'academy' and the 'wider society'.⁴⁸ Kirkwood held that the Department's programmes were part of public theological discourse, mediating between religion and culture. Applying Tracy's terms to his own work, he maintained that religious broadcasts needed to address those in 'voluntary associations of commitment' (church), those with an interest in the insights of theology and religion studies (academy) and all who lived and worked in the society and daily confronted questions of values, trust and purpose (wider society).⁴⁹ This way of thinking provided Kirkwood with a frame of reference for appraising the range and type of programmes offered by the Department.

It was from about 1970 that the Department increasingly took account of the growth in Australian society of religious communities that were not Christian and members of staff began to refer to them specifically when describing their audience. The FRAC, meeting in 1969, spoke of 'Christians, members of other religions and people of no religion'.⁵⁰ By 1977, the category of 'members of other religions' had been separated into 'traditional religions' and 'new religious movements'.⁵¹ In the second half of the 1980s, 'non-institutional religion' was identified as a developing feature of Australian spirituality and was a term applied to 'individuals operating more autonomously within institutions' as well as to people engaged in their own spiritual explorations quite separate from organised religion.⁵² Each new identification of the

⁴⁶ D. Millikan, radio interview, 'The God-Botherers', ABC radio tape, 19.4.89.

⁴⁷ Cleary, interview 13.3.89.

⁴⁸ D. Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*, SCM, London, 1981, pt 1: 'Publicness in systematic theology'.

⁴⁹ P. Kirkwood, Paper prepared for Commission meeting, Oct. 1982, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R 17/1/1.

⁵⁰ FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 7-8.8.69, File FRAC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁵¹ ABC, 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes', Policy statement of Commission, Sydney, March 1977, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

⁵² Spurling, interview 20.7.89.

Department's audience was matched by an increase of programmes directed to the interests of the newly defined group.

2. Quantitative and qualitative analysis

By 1954, the ABC had a Research and Statistics Department which interpreted the surveys of McNair-Anderson and did some research itself.⁵³ Progress in research, both in its techniques and in the resources needed for its development, was slow and gradual. Kirkwood observed that, in the early 1960s when he joined the Department, there was still little clear perception of who was listening to what.⁵⁴ Producers were guided by their own judgment, letters from individual listeners, comments from ABC colleagues, the members of the Commission and its Advisory Committees and opinions expressed by institutions in the society with particular knowledge of the matter of the programme. Statistical research, in any case, offered limited insight into one's audience. For one thing, the data came from the capital cities and a few of the largest provincial cities and so excluded rural audiences. A further limitation was the focus on quantitative analysis: it could indicate how many were listening at a given time and some of their distinguishing characteristics, such as age and gender, but could tell nothing of the quality of their listening or their appreciation.

The records of the 1940s and 1950s offer us these insights into how religious broadcasts were received and appraised.⁵⁵

In 1948, 'Community Hymn Singing' brought an immediate response in letters from listeners, which, even fifteen years later, were still exceeding the amount of correspondence attracted by any other ABC programme.⁵⁶ Henderson reported to management that this programme's listeners belonged 'for the most part to an "outside" audience',⁵⁷ by which he meant an audience which the ABC had not drawn before. In the same year, it was reported that 300,000-400,000 people were listening⁵⁸ and, in 1951, 70% of the total number of ABC stations were carrying the programme.⁵⁹ In 1952, Alan Robson compared the 20% of radio sets tuned in to 'Community Hymn Singing' with 12% for the 'Clive Amadio Quintet' and 4%-5% for 'Sunday Concert'. This intriguing comparison was prompted by Robson's annoyance when the Emitape he had booked in advance to record a programme of 'Community

⁵³ Inglis, p. 181.

⁵⁴ Kirkwood, interview 9.5.89.

⁵⁵ Cf. also ch. 5, 'Range of programmes'.

⁵⁶ AA (NSW): SP587/1, file 8.8.

⁵⁷ K. Henderson, memo to GM, February 1948, AA (NSW): SP 587/1, file 8.0.

⁵⁸ B.H. Molesworth, Hd Talks, memo to all States, 8.10.48, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

⁵⁹ ABC, *Annual Report 1951-2*, p. 3.

Hymn Singing' was sent, instead, to the Sydney Town Hall to record these other programmes.⁶⁰ We noted earlier Henderson's observation in 1954 that this session drew four times the audience of a Town Hall concert or a race description.⁶¹

'Plain Christianity' ran second to 'Community Hymn Singing' in the number of listeners' letters received by the Department and, in 1955, was appealing to as many listeners as was serious music. The Department itself valued it very highly.⁶² 'Prelude', which preceded it, attracted 2% of the total sets in use, according to a 1950 survey.⁶³ Despite criticisms that it was 'too highbrow', even a deterrent to prospective listeners to 'Plain Christianity',⁶⁴ Henderson insisted that a programme of high quality religious music on Sunday evening was necessary for the sake of 'relations with the churches and the religious public'⁶⁵ and the programme continued to go to air for another ten years.

When 'Facing the Week' was called into question in 1955 because of very small audiences in Melbourne, Henderson defended it on the basis of letters received from country people and city workers on early morning shifts.⁶⁶ The programme went on and was discontinued only at the end of 1980.

After forming the FRAC in 1953, Henderson asked a Western Australian member, Rev. Sidney Price, to design what came to be called the 'Listener's Schedule', which he then sent to selected listeners to test their reactions to such programmes as 'Daily Devotional'. It was an evaluation sheet with questions on the speaker's opening and closing of his or her talk, the speaker-audience relationship that was developed, the interest of the theme, the aim, the subject matter, voice and delivery, mannerisms and the speaker's personal attitude to life. Listeners invited to voice their opinions in this way were also instructed in detail on positive listening and constructive criticism.⁶⁷ The intention of the Schedule was not to provide the

⁶⁰ A. Robson, memo to C. Progs, 8.8.52, AA (NSW): SP411/1, file 8.10.

⁶¹ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 108. In 1991, the Dept was still pointing out to management the statistical fact that more Australians were interested in religion than in sport, yet sport occupied twice as many broadcast hours on ABC networks. Cf. memo to management, October 1991, held at Religion Dept, Sydney. Meanwhile, David Winter, Hd BBC Radio Religious Programmes, was making similar comparisons in relation to church services in the UK: 10% of the population (5.5 million) attended church weekly. This 'beats 400,000 at league soccer on Saturday. Church-going is one of the most popular "out-of-the-home" activities. According to one survey, only going for a drink in the local actually beats it!'. Cf. excerpt of article, n.d.(c. 1985), held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁶² Cf. ch. 5, fnn. 130-1.

⁶³ K. Henderson, memo to C. Semmler, 5.10.50, AA (NSW): SP1687/1, file R17/2/10.

⁶⁴ Cf. ch. 5, fnn. 99-100.

⁶⁵ Henderson, memo, 5.10.50.

⁶⁶ Cf. ch. 5, fn. 116.

⁶⁷ S. Price, letter and copy of Schedule to P. Kirkwood, 9.12.77, held by P. Kirkwood.

Department with information about its audience. It was an attempt at qualitative analysis of the communication skills of individual speakers and was used as an aid to their improvement.

These few examples illustrate the range of sources of critical appraisal available to the Department during this period and their influence on the Department's decisions about its programmes.

Professional research agencies provided more statistical information about audiences in the following years and, as more radio stations competed for listeners and ABC managers became more concerned with ratings, the results of audience surveys assumed increasing importance, despite their limitations. James Peter, Head of the Department through most of the 1960s and 1970s, was diligent in developing a steady working relationship with the ABC's Research and Statistics section, later re-named Audience Research, which provided more data on religious broadcasts from this time.⁶⁸ However, the other criteria of success - praise from the listening public, the approval of one's peers, commendation from ABC management and associated bodies and support from relevant institutions in the society - continued to be very significant influences on decisions about programmes.

In 1964, Research and Statistics surveyed members of the ABC Voluntary Listener Panels in NSW, Victoria and Queensland for their opinions on religious broadcasts and reported in May of that year that 66% of the respondents had listened to a religious programme on the Sunday immediately preceding the survey. Further questioning had revealed that 26% had not deliberately chosen to do so but had listened as part of their general listening to the radio that day. Most comments were favourable. The respondents were categorised in the report in four groupings: Protestants (73%), Roman Catholics (12%), Non-believers (12%) and Others including Jews (3%). The proportions of Roman Catholics and non-believers among the respondents to this survey were very different from those recorded in the 1961 census, where Roman Catholics accounted for 24.9% of the population and those with 'no religion' 0.4%. These discrepancies needed to be accounted for. The researchers offered these possible explanations: that most of those who did not answer the census question on religion were, in fact, non-religious; or that ABC Listener Panels were not representative of the religious and non-religious affiliations of the Australian people, even if they were representative of ABC listeners.⁶⁹ There was no certainty that the Panels were representative even of ABC listeners.

⁶⁸ P. Kirkwood, personal interview 28.7.89.

⁶⁹ ABC Research and Statistics, 'Sunday programmes', May 1964, pp. 2,3,6, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

The survey, despite its inadequacies, had at least suggestive value for the Department. It may also have been the basis for two assertions made to the Department in the 1970s when its role in relation to secular philosophies was being debated. The first of these appeared in the Minutes of the South Australian State Advisory Committee in 1971: '...the number of agnostics and humanists listening to religious programmes is very high'.⁷⁰ The second was made by the humanist, Beatrice Faust, in a letter to James Peter in 1976: 'The surveys of religious affiliation and church attendance are of little value in determining how to plan programmes. It may be that more non-religious people use the ABC than religious'.⁷¹

Neither of these comments was well grounded in objective data and what truth there might have been in them would, in any case, have been applicable to only a certain type of religious programme. In 1967, ABC research had discovered that audiences for 'Encounter' and 'Community Hymn Singing' 'were mutually exclusive'.⁷² It had been suggested that similar differences might be found if the audiences of other religious programmes were also compared and that it would be wrong to generalise about audiences for religious broadcasts.

In terms of the quantitative measurement of audiences in the principal cities of Australia, many religious programmes have been successful. Scattered through the records of the past, in addition to what has already been indicated above, are such statements as these:

In Sydney, listeners to 'Sacred Music' outnumber those for any other Sunday morning broadcast (1967).⁷³ 'Sacred Music' with an audience of 25,000 is the most popular Sunday programme on the national network, in terms of people deliberately choosing to tune in to it (1976).⁷⁴ 'Sacred Music' outrates the station's average (1988).⁷⁵

Almost twice as many people listen to 'With Heart and Voice' as to the light music programme that precedes it. It attracts a bigger audience than 2FC, 2JJ, 2UW, 2KY and 2GB at the same time (1976).⁷⁶

'Frontier' on Wednesday night had the highest audience for that time of all ABC stations and more than 2GB and 2KY (1976).⁷⁷

⁷⁰ SA State Advisory Committee, Minutes of meeting, 16.8.71, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R2/9/2.

⁷¹ B. Faust, letter to J. Peter, 17.8.76, File POL/PPP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁷² FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 3-4.8.67, File FRAC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁷³ D. Miley (Director Radio Progs), memo to J. Peter, 1.9.67, AA (NSW): ST3051/1, file R17/1/2.

⁷⁴ ABC Audience Research, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁷⁵ S. Williamson, 'Battle for ABC yet to be won', *Church Scene*, 18.3.88.

⁷⁶ J. Peter, memo to C. Progs, quoting Audience Research report, 10.12.76, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2.

⁷⁷ ABC Audience Research, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

The listener demand for 'Forum' warrants its shift onto the metropolitan and regional networks (1984).⁷⁸

'Journal of Religion' often attracts the largest audience for the 7.15 p.m. time-slot (1984).⁷⁹

'Insights' and 'Kronos' have succeeded against the prevailing trend for the station during this year (1991).⁸⁰

In eighteen months, 'Sunday Morning', despite being scheduled at a most unappealing time, has increased the audience rating for the 5.30 a.m. time-slot from 1,000 to 11,000 and, for the 6.45 a.m. time-slot, from 18,000 to 32,000 (1988).⁸¹

'Sunday Night Talk' outrates the preceding programme, 'Could-a-been Champions', as well as programmes in the same time-slot on other evenings, and has steadily built audiences (1989-91).⁸²

Letters and telephone calls from listeners and the comments of colleagues can give some insight into the number and composition of audiences for programmes but have been, rather, the principal sources of qualitative evaluation for the Department. Other indicators of the quality of communication achieved by programmes have been the extent to which they have been re-produced in print and the public demand for audio-tapes.⁸³ We have already mentioned the large correspondence generated by 'Community Hymn Singing' and 'Plain Christianity' and the insights into the Department's rural audiences that letters to 'Facing the Week' and 'Saturday Saints' provided. 'Sacred Music' received a steady flow of compliments on the 'fine selection' of music from widely ranging traditions and periods and on the depth of understanding and sensitivity of the commentary (1977).⁸⁴ 'Journal of Religion' won a high rate of re-prints in magazines (1984).⁸⁵ Print journalists admired 'Forum' and its successor, 'Kronos', for being 'gutsy and informative',⁸⁶ 'fast moving, tough, making sense in this world' (1988).⁸⁷ 'Insights' was praised for respecting its listeners sufficiently to offer them serious analysis⁸⁸ and the requests the Department received for copies of scripts revealed that its attentive audience included a number of

78 Religion Dept staff conference, Report 14.9.84, held by P. Kirkwood.

79 Dept conference, Report, 14.9.84.

80 Religion Dept, memo to management, October 1991.

81 ABC Audience Research, Reports, 28.11.88 and 14.4.89, ABC, Sydney.

82 Religion Dept, memo to management, October 1991.

83 The Dept did commission some qualitative audience research into television programmes from Hugh Mackay, a communications psychologist, in 1974. Cf. H. Mackay, 'ABC TV religious programme concepts', March 1974, held by P. Kirkwood.

84 Listeners' Correspondence, 16.9.77, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5.

85 Dept conference, Report, 14.9.84.

86 J. Murray, 'Religious broadcasts being short-changed by charter', *Australian*, 1.3.88.

87 G. Lord, 'The Critic', *Listener*, 12-18.11.88.

88 Murray, 'Religious broadcasts', 1.3.88.

significant leaders in the Australian community (1990-1).⁸⁹ 'Sunday Morning' prompted a steady stream of letters, which spoke of its 'eclectic and discriminating' selection of music, its 'superb freshness and vitality', its 'pure excellence and delight' and expressed wonder that it could not be put to air when more would hear it.⁹⁰ The Radio Tape Service reported that, for the nine months ended April 1991, the Religion Department's programmes accounted for over 35% of its national sales revenue.⁹¹ In the years 1988-91, the Department won seven national and international awards for programmes: in Australia, it took the United Nations Association Media Peace Award four times and the Human Rights Award in 1990 and, in New York, two International Radio Festival Awards - a Bronze Medal in 1990 and a Gold Medal in 1991.⁹²

Of all the religious programmes, four in particular achieved outstanding success in both quantitative and qualitative terms: 'Community Hymn Singing', 'Readings from the Bible', 'Encounter' and 'Search for Meaning'.

The first twenty years of 'Community Hymn Singing' were its strongest.⁹³ The capacity of the Department to keep producing fresh, vigorous congregational singing and the enthusiasm of audiences for the programme gradually waned, although in 1976, it was, nonetheless, attracting a larger audience than 'Sporting Round-up'.⁹⁴ However, McNair-Anderson statistics, comparing 1979 with 1984, showed that the programme's audiences in Sydney and Adelaide had risen again over that period.⁹⁵ The Department abandoned the format of 'Community Hymn Singing' in late 1984, but not hymn singing itself, devising new productions for its listeners.

'Readings from the Bible', broadcast on the national network, had a particularly high number of listeners. In 1976, it was averaging 46,000 listeners, 25,000 more than for the quarter-hour immediately preceding it.⁹⁶ This was attributed to its location in the schedule immediately before a breakfast-time news bulletin.

⁸⁹ P. Collins, producer 'Insights', personal interview, 26.10.91.

⁹⁰ File Listeners' correspondence 'Sunday Morning' 1988, Religion Dept, Adelaide.

⁹¹ J. Parker, Radio Business Manager, Report, April 1991, held at Religion Dept, Sydney..

⁹² File Awards, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹³ Suggestions of decline in audiences in some places and the need for the programme to be given a new look began to be voiced in the latter half of the 1960s. Cf. FRAC, Minutes of meeting, 1-2.6.65, File FRAC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹⁴ The proportions of men and women in the audiences for these two programmes were exactly the reverse of each other: 'Sporting Round-up' attracted two men to one woman, 'Community Hymn Singing', two women to one man. Cf. ABC Audience Research, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney. The Dept took every opportunity to compare the relative attractions of religion and sport in Australian society, cf. ch. 5, fn. 108 and fn. 61 above.

⁹⁵ McNair-Anderson, Religious programmes, Sydney and Adelaide, 2.79 and 2.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

⁹⁶ ABC Audience Research, File POL/DBC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

However, when the programme was shifted to an earlier time slot,⁹⁷ or called into question by secularists,⁹⁸ or dropped from the schedule,⁹⁹ the protests the ABC received attested to a substantial, committed core of listeners who attended to the morning reading very closely and wove it into the strands of their day. They succeeded in keeping the programme on air in its original time-slot for several decades, until it was dropped in Canberra in 1976 and ceased altogether in 1991. This programme was, for its supporters and opponents, an insistent symbol of a transcendent reality in human affairs that claimed acknowledgment; it was a voice in the hurly-burly of modern life that refused secularism. Hence, the protests of the NSW Humanist Society in 1982 when the ABC's news reader, James Dibble, read from the Bible in this programme. The Society objected strongly to Dibble's participation in the Bible readings, which, in their view, had 'amalgamated church and state in a misleading and dangerous way'.¹⁰⁰ For listeners who welcomed the programme, the proximity of the readings to the news broadcast was an appropriate juxtaposition which helped to renew people's spirits. One listener voiced the thoughts of many when she wrote that the programme's 'words of timeless wisdom before they faced the news of the day gave hope to people despairing over the frightening things that are happening in our world'.¹⁰¹

'Encounter' succeeded 'Radio Service', already a highly commended programme,¹⁰² in 1965 and, within a year, had an estimated total audience of 500,000.¹⁰³ It was well placed on the State network between two Sunday morning news broadcasts. In 1976, it was reported to have attracted a bigger audience than 2FC, 2JJ, 2KY and 2GB at the same time and more listeners than any other ABC Sunday programme.¹⁰⁴ In 1982, a comparison was made between 'Encounter' and some other ABC documentary programmes. Over a period of twenty-one months in 1981-2, its combined Sydney-Melbourne audience ranged between 100,000 and 140,000. This represented, on average, some 60% more than the number of listeners

⁹⁷ S. Watkins, programme co-ordinator, memo to Religion staff, 23.6.86, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

⁹⁸ Cf. ch. 8.

⁹⁹ Exchange of correspondence between Senator Gordon Davidson and GM, concerning removal of programme from 2CY, Canberra, April 1976, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5, pt 2.

¹⁰⁰ NSW Humanist Society, letter to Chairman, January 1982, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5, pt 4.

¹⁰¹ L. Hughes, letter to Mgr Radio 3.8.86, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁰² GM, memo to J. Peter, conveying a Commission compliment, 29.7.63, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/2/3.

¹⁰³ ABC, *Annual Report 1966-7*, p. 26.

¹⁰⁴ Peter, memo, 10.12.76.

in the two cities for the 'Science Show', and nearly four times the audiences of 'Background Briefing' and 'Practicalities'.¹⁰⁵ In 1987, David Millikan was still drawing attention to its higher audience rating compared with other ABC documentary programmes.¹⁰⁶ However, the other programmes with which it was being compared were broadcast on the national network, which automatically restricted the size of their audiences. When 'Encounter' was moved from Metropolitan Radio to Radio National in 1987, it lost its audience advantage. Rivalry between the departments responsible for these documentaries is not the point at issue here, but, rather, the inference to be drawn that there are many Australians habitually tuned in to ABC Metropolitan Radio who would appreciate all four of these intelligent and well-produced programmes if they were broadcast on this network. Why ABC management thinks these programmes are unsuitable for listeners to the more popular network is beyond the comprehension of this writer.

'Encounter' stimulated a high level of audience response and commendation in the form of letters and requests for broadcast repeats and copies of the programme. The Victorian State Advisory Committee thought it consistently excellent in 1967 and unfortunately scheduled too early in the morning. 'Many religious sessions are broadcast at odd times', the Committee commented.¹⁰⁷ Humanists at the 1976 Seminar on religious broadcasting praised it.¹⁰⁸ The Department, itself, was proud of it.¹⁰⁹

One 'Encounter' programme in 1978, 'Australia and the Esau Principle', stirred a particularly strong response - more letters of support than any other 'Encounter' programme in that year but also heavy opprobrium.¹¹⁰ The intention of the programme, according to its creator, Rev. Peter Ferguson, was to challenge apathetic Australians, especially Christians, to concern themselves with issues of justice involved in the acquisition and control of land by transnational companies. A representative of Peko Wallsend was outraged and called the programme 'an exercise in extreme viciousness', while many hundreds of listeners asked for a repeat broadcast and for scripts and cassettes. Members of Parliament from both sides of the House, workers' unions and church leaders entered into a heated discussion of the

¹⁰⁵ ABC, Audience Research, Paper, September 1982, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2.

¹⁰⁶ D. Millikan, memo to management, 24.9.87, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁰⁷ Vic. State Advisory Committee, Minutes of meeting, 19.5.67, AA (NSW): SP1299/1, file R17/1/1.

¹⁰⁸ J. Peter, memo to C. Progs, 10.12.76, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/2.

¹⁰⁹ Kirkwood, interview, 29.5.89.

¹¹⁰ Produced in Western Australia, it went to air on December 10. The controversy was so substantial that this one programme warranted its own separate file in AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/2/6.

appropriateness of the subject to a religious programme. The Chairman of the Commission, J. D. Norgard, believed it was entirely inappropriate and that it had not been a religious programme at all.¹¹¹ The Assistant General Manager for Radio, Keith Mackriell, disagreed and he and the Programme Controllers supported the Department. The pressure for a repeat broadcast built over three months until the ABC announced that a second programme, which would follow up but not repeat the first, would be presented. On April 4, 1979, Vaughan Hinton produced 'The Transnationals and the Common Good' based on material from the Carnegie Centre for Transnational Studies. Listeners' expectations were not satisfied by it, but it brought this episode to a close. 'Australia and the Esau Principle' was not the only controversial 'Encounter' programme on questions of justice to go to air. Indeed, the 1970s was a time when, in response to contemporary trends in church and society, such issues were frequently taken up in religious broadcasts, exciting both praise and denunciation.¹¹²

While 'Encounter' has continued to confront listeners with questions of justice, Florence Spurling, who became the co-ordinator of the programme in 1985, reported in the following year that the sales of radio tapes in 1986 showed that 'the strongest interest was attracted by charismatic individuals who addressed issues of psycho-spiritual interest', that 'programmes directed at personal or "inner" issues' were most popular. Tough, journalistic treatments of large social issues still had their appeal but the audience response to these usually came 'from more official or professional sources in our community'. Despite this shift of emphasis from the 1970s to the 1980s, the brief for the programme remained substantially the same: to apply 'the journalistic intelligence' to all subject matter including 'even devotional aspects of religious life' and 'to deal with so-called secular issues in a theologically evaluative way'.¹¹³

The Department responded to the burgeoning interest in individual spirituality in the 1980s not only by including more material relevant to this in existing programmes but by launching a new programme in 1987, which came to be called 'Search for Meaning'. David Millikan originally conceived it as a limited series of interviews with well-known Australian men and women, in which they would be encouraged to speak of what most deeply inspired and sustained them in their public

¹¹¹ Norgard had formerly been a senior authority in Broken Hill Pty and the Australian Pipeline Authority. Cf. A. Ashbolt, 'The ABC in civil society', *Communications and the Media in Australia*, eds T. Wheelwright and K. Buckley, Allen and Unwin, Sydney 1987, p. 102.

¹¹² Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, files R17/1/5, R17/1/1.

¹¹³ F. Spurling, co-ordinator 'Encounter', Report to D. Millikan, 7.10.86, File Encounter, ABC Document Archives.

and private lives. The woman Millikan persuaded to create and present the programmes was a broadcaster of national repute. She had achieved her fame in the hard world of investigative journalism and now returned to the airwaves after a considerable absence from the mass media to communicate with people in a programme and style unlike anything they had heard before. The programme evoked such an extraordinary response that it became a continuing weekly feature, which explored the inner life of 'ordinary Australians' in all manner of situations and walks of life.

Despite its location on the less popular Radio National, 'Search for Meaning' was the highest rating night-time programme of the ABC in 1988.¹¹⁴ Between March 1987 and January 1988 alone, it received 2,500 letters¹¹⁵ and 1,465 tapes of interviews conducted on the programme were sold. Indeed, only the tapes of David Suzuki, the world famous ecologist, outsold those of 'Search for Meaning' during 1988.¹¹⁶ About the response of listeners, Jones herself was quoted as saying: 'I've been in broadcasting twenty-five years and I've never seen anything like it'.¹¹⁷

Up until October 1988, the programme filled four hours of broadcast time each week - 9-10 p.m.(EST) on Tuesday and Thursday, repeated in four half-hourly sessions at 9 a.m., Monday to Thursday. It was then reduced by half to an hour on Saturday night repeated in two segments on Thursday and Friday at 9.30 a.m.¹¹⁸ With this shift to Saturday night the number of listeners declined and tape sales dropped 26%.¹¹⁹ Millikan and the network management justified these moves on the grounds that re-organisation of schedules had become essential after Parliament was removed from the national network¹²⁰ and that 'a lot of people who loved the programme at first were beginning to react strongly against it'.¹²¹ Jones, on the other hand, reported 'a mountain of letters deploring the change'.¹²²

114 S. Williamson, 'Battle for the ABC'.

115 B. Hill, 'Too much sugar on the spiritual pill', *Green Guide*, *Age*, 7.1.88.

116 R. Bencivenga, ABC Radio Tapes, June 1989, File 'Search for Meaning', Religion Dept, Sydney.

117 Moral Re-armament, *For a Change*, London, Oct. 1988, p. 8.

118 C. Jones, 'The ABC and the politics of meaning', *Inside Media*, 19.10.88.

119 Bencivenga, June 1989.

120 M. Dunn, AGM Corporate Relations, letter to Prof. J. Haskell, 23.11.88, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

121 L. Nicklin, quoting D. Millikan, 'Moving the message', *Bulletin*, 17.1.89. A comparison of audience surveys in Sydney and Melbourne in two periods, Oct.-Nov.1987 and May-June 1988, showed that the number of listeners in both cities was very much lower in the later period. Cf. Audience Research, ABC, Sydney.

122 Nicklin, quoting C. Jones, 'Moving the message'.

'Search for Meaning' did, indeed, attract both of these opposing responses. Critics of the programme, including people initially fascinated by it, were unsatisfied by the stream of individual self-portrayals allowed to pass, in their view, inadequately probed and challenged.¹²³ Its enduring audience has comprised those Australians in cities and rural areas who have found in Jones' interviews, whether in the questions or the answers, echoes of their own self-explorations and have felt heartened by this evidence of a previously unacknowledged spiritual current flowing within Australian society.¹²⁴ The ABC continues to sell substantial numbers of tapes of the programme; it has published volumes of selected interviews and six interviews were televised.¹²⁵

Assessing the Department's success in connecting religion and life in ways appropriate to its Australian listeners has required us to be attentive not only to its policies, goals and productions but also to those who actually listened and reacted to its programmes. It is clear, from this information about the Department's audiences and their responses, that ABC religious broadcasts have indeed touched, and entered into, the lives of millions of Australians in significant ways.

Religious content in other ABC programmes

The observation has been made earlier that a modern institution like the ABC could be expected to categorise religious broadcasting as one specialisation, of relatively minor importance, among many others. We know that, in the days of Kenneth Henderson and John Munro, ABC management largely left them to do as they thought best in their own domain.¹²⁶ The administration and staff, in general, were not competent, nor even much interested, in addressing the religious life of Australians. When, in 1976, the Seminar on religious broadcasting advised the ABC to enlarge the scope and resources of the Religion Department to enable it to deal with significant philosophies and ideologies as well as religions, the Commission and senior management rejected the recommendation, preferring to keep the role and status of the Department within its traditional limits, with which they were comfortable.¹²⁷ Even so the Department has fulfilled a broader function in the ABC than just producing its own programmes. The Commission has relied on its Religion staff to establish good relationships of mutual understanding and respect with the major religious institutions in the society. In their

¹²³ Cf. B. Hill, 'Communication breakdown', *Green Guide*, *Age* 8.6.89; S. Spears, interview with C. Jones, *Good Weekend*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22.10.88; and *For a Change*.

¹²⁴ Excerpts from listeners' letters, File 'Search for Meaning'.

¹²⁵ The first volume was published in Sydney, 1989. The television series was presented in 1991-2.

¹²⁶ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

¹²⁷ Cf. ch. 8.

communication with religious leaders, Commission members and management have benefitted considerably from the advice of the Department;¹²⁸ also, in moral questions as they have arisen to trouble the ABC from time to time.¹²⁹ More than this, the Department throughout its history has considered that the treatment of religion in all ABC programmes, and not only its own specialist productions, was matter for its concern.

In the relatively homogeneous ABC of their day, Henderson and Munro were acknowledged as authorities in religious matters whose advice was sought and respected. They did not find it necessary, as James Peter and Patrick Kirkwood did later, to press for explicit statements of policy from management on the role of the Head of the Religion Department in relation to other departments' treatment of religious material.

Peter was moved to make the point several times that matters with religious implications or relevance would be more adequately and coherently presented if he functioned not only as Head of his own Department but as a consultant on religious matters for all programme makers. In 1970, at a time of increasing religious diversity and individuality in Australia, a memorandum from Federal management was circulated to all departments specifying nine Christian and two Jewish religious bodies from whom religious comment might be sought at any time and instructing staff that 'others are not to be canvassed for religious opinions without reference to the Head of Department who will confer with the Head of Religion'.¹³⁰ This circular was based on a document prepared by Peter.¹³¹ He and the FRAC continued to be concerned, however, about 'balanced presentation' by the ABC of religious matters.¹³² He repeatedly included a statement about the Head of Religion's responsibility in respect of other departments' programmes in documents he wrote during the policy debates of the 1970s.¹³³ Although the Seminar at the end of 1976 supported his view and recommended it to the Commission, reference to this matter was omitted from the

¹²⁸ Copies of memos abound in the Dept's files in which the Commission and managers sought advice from the Hd Rel., who frequently drafted letters of reply for them.

¹²⁹ Munro, interview, 21.7.89.

¹³⁰ C. Semmler, AGM, 'The inclusion of religious material in ABC programmes', memo to all Depts 21.4.70, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R2/7/21. The 11 approved churches and organisations were: Church of England, Roman Catholic Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church Baptist Union, Lutheran Church, Conference of Churches of Christ, Congregational Union, Salvation Army, Federation of Orthodox Synagogues, Australian and New Zealand Union for Progressive Judaism.

¹³¹ J. Peter, 'Policy in religious broadcasting', n.d., AA (NSW): C2327/1, file 19/1/7, pt 1B.

¹³² FRAC, Minutes of meeting 7-8.5.74, File FRAC, Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹³³ Cf. 'The treatment of religion', s. 2.5, Feb. 1976, and Submission to Commission meeting 4.3.77, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

Commission's policy statement, 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes', released to the press in May 1977.¹³⁴ This may have been because it was considered a matter of internal procedures rather than because the Commission found it unacceptable, but, in any case, problems Peter had seen and tried to address continued to worry his successor.

Kirkwood was often dismayed by the shallowness of treatment of moral and religious issues by other broadcasters and at times was 'appalled by their ignorance'.¹³⁵ In 1980, his disquiet was conveyed to senior management in a report by an investigator from the Organisation and Methods section, who had been invited by Kirkwood to make an examination of the Department:

The Director of Religion is concerned that some religious-type programmes planned in other units, e.g., 2JJ, FM and Radio Australia, have contravened ABC religious policy through incorrect presentation of basic religious concepts or through unintentional denominational bias. These problems have been resolved by the intervention of the Director of Religion, but there is a serious lack of formal communication links between the Religion Department and these other units which would allow necessary monitoring. The Director does not want editorial control, but a monitoring role and the possibility of consultation, because religious programmes deal with material of a sensitive nature. This problem is not confined to Religion; other Federal Specialist Departments have similar experiences.¹³⁶

Four years later, Kirkwood was still troubled by a tendency for 'the living complexities of religion' to be ignored in programmes and by his apprehension of unsympathetic, or over-zealous, focussing on aberrant and sensational aspects of religious practices. He proposed that the new Corporation adopt formal procedures for ensuring a satisfactory treatment of religion in the ABC as a whole, and suggested a specific role for the Head of Religion in consultation with the other directors.¹³⁷

The lack of clear resolution of these issues demonstrates reluctance on the part of management, at least since the mid-1970s, to insist on, and formalise, a general consultative role in religious matters for the Head of the Religion Department. It is apparent that separate programme sectors of the ABC either neglected, or resisted, co-operative arrangements and reference to the authoritative opinions of others across sectional boundaries.¹³⁸ There were exceptions, of course. Personal friendships and

134 AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

135 Kirkwood, interview 28.7.89.

136 P.J. Wright, 'Report on investigation of Religion Dept', June 1980, p. 2, held at Religion Dept, Sydney..

137 P. Kirkwood, Points for discussion of corporate planning, 14.3.84, held by P. Kirkwood.

138 A senior member of the Dept recalled the exasperation he and other staff had felt when another production unit screened a television programme on the belief of some Christians in a literal interpretation of the account of creation in the Bible and then asked the Religion Dept to answer all the letters it provoked. The Head had responded with

mutual esteem among staff fostered some interaction. The Religion Department had a history of collaboration with the Music and Talks Departments reaching back to its beginnings, as well as good working relationships at different times with the Rural and Drama Departments.¹³⁹ Reference was made earlier to the collective effort of Special Projects, Science and Religion in producing the programme, 'Broadband'.¹⁴⁰

From the early 1970s, the shaking up of the entrenched departmental system was being advocated in a number of quarters for the sake of liberating fresh creativity and improving effectiveness and efficiency.¹⁴¹ Moves in this direction coincided with other trends in broadcasting. With the aim of capturing and then holding its own particular sector of Australia's radio audience, each network or station sought to develop an identifiable style. New formats were introduced to achieve a coherent flow in the sequence of programmes and so further encourage sustained listening. A common device for creating at least the illusion if not the reality of smooth continuity in programming was the use of a single presenter over some hours of broadcasting, whose familiar voice, personality and linking commentary might help to keep listeners tuned in, carrying them forward to the next item and the next programme.¹⁴²

These changes in broadcasting styles and formats over the last fifteen years or so have presented specialist broadcasters with more complex demands than their predecessors faced. In former times, once the regular schedule of broadcasts was set, the Religion Department's work consisted in the orderly production of its annual quota of these, with some additional special programmes on important occasions. More recently, the challenge to the Department has been to combine a commitment to its own quota of self-contained programmes and occasional special broadcasts with the flexibility and skills needed to produce contributions suitable to 'flow format' broadcasting and to the distinctive styles of different stations and networks.¹⁴³ Sustained success in this new approach calls for staff who are alert to programme

annoyance that since they had made the programme without the Dept's advice, it was for them to deal with the consequences. R. Nichols, personal interview 3.3.89.

¹³⁹ The Rural Dept took over responsibility for 'Pause a Moment' and kept it on regional radio long after it had been withdrawn from the metropolitan network. The Religion Dept had a skilled drama producer in staff member, Herbert Davies, 1971-9, but for many years also called on and received help from producers in the Drama Dept.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. ch. 9, fnn. 14-15.

¹⁴¹ M. Webb, personal interview, 8.12.92. Cf. papers of Radio Action Movement (RAM), an informal group of ABC staff interested in new perspectives for broadcasting media and also recommendations of 'McKinsey Report' 1973.

¹⁴² For example, on 2BL, Andrew Olle (8.30 - 10 a.m.), Margaret Throsby (10 a.m. to noon), John Doyle (2 - 4 p.m.), Frank Crook (4 - 6 p.m.); on Radio National, Richard Ackland anchoring the breakfast programme, 'Daybreak'.

¹⁴³ Cf. J. Fleming and J. Cleary, memos to Religion staff on contributions to 'Breakfast Time', 14.12.84 and 12.2.85 respectively, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

opportunities, that is, interesting subjects and appropriate locations for them in the stations' schedules; who are sensitive to the particular requirements of each network at different periods of each day and versatile enough to produce material to suit them; who are able to create and nurture collaborative relationships with colleagues involved in production and management outside the Department. 'Daybreak', Radio National's weekday breakfast session, and Philip Adams' 'Late Night Live' were both listed in 1991 in the monthly *Guide to ABC Religious Radio*, indicating that these two programmes particularly were regarded as vehicles for the Department's religious material. Other programmes, too, on both the national and State networks, have welcomed contributions at times when religion was in the news. During the Gulf War with Iraq, Australians' need to understand Islam better became urgent; people could not comprehend the public, legal wrangling in the Anglican Church about women's ordination to the priesthood without some informed explanation of the underlying issues; Department staff could enlighten listeners about new religious movements when controversy about them hit the headlines; popular television programmes, such as 'Brides of Christ', which depicted crises of change in a Roman Catholic convent after the Second Vatican Council, stimulated comment and discussion on radio and television in which the Department was prominent.

Such multiple demands are burdensome, but, if the Department can meet them satisfactorily, religious broadcasting might stand to gain. Contributing to networks where it is not normally heard and in predominantly non-religious programmes extends the audience reach of the Department and might partly compensate for the location of most of its programmes on stations and in time-slots with very restricted access to listeners. It is also an opportunity for the Department to point to the religious implications in material with which other sectors of the ABC are dealing, or to provide accurate information that would otherwise be lacking.

However, religious broadcasting can be, and has been, seriously handicapped in two ways by the practice of 'flow format' and 'personality radio' on the ABC. First of all, it has not been allocated a regular segment in 'Daybreak', for example, even though many contributors to this and other 'flow format' programmes have enjoyed such an arrangement.¹⁴⁴ Secondly, and, perhaps less obviously, the reliance on 'personalities' to sustain extended periods of broadcasting has given rise to sessions inevitably dominated by the limited perspectives and insights of a single presenter. On 'Late Night Live', for example, Philip Adams has frequently taken up

¹⁴⁴ In 'Daybreak' itself, commentators on current affairs and comedians; in other sessions, news and sports commentators, film critics, cooks with recipes, psychologists, experts on the environment and consumer protection, and more.

religious themes but his atheism and ignorance of religion has acted as a constant filter, not to say obstruction, between the subject matter and the listeners.

Setting priorities for the application of its slim resources has always been a testing task for the Department; never more so than in this broadcasting environment of the last ten years. Despite the difficulties, the Department has gone on interpreting its responsibility in national broadcasting as requiring both the production of its own religious programmes and concern for the quality of the religious content of other ABC programmes. It has judged both to be necessary to its fulfilling its declared purposes: to be 'a consistent point of reflection and analysis of that dimension of human culture that concerns itself with belief, values and faith'¹⁴⁵ and 'to take the discussion of religion into the mainstream of Australian culture'.¹⁴⁶

Programmes for young people

From the late 1930s to 1986, the ABC broadcast religious programmes especially designed for children. These lie outside the scope of this study and so will not be examined in detail, but they are briefly described here to distinguish them clearly from the other programmes dealt with in this section.

Not consistently, but for most of the years between 1938 and 1951, a fifteen minute religious programme for young children was broadcast on Sunday afternoons, a kind of radio Sunday School, consisting of a short play about Jesus or a Christian saint, a prayer and a hymn. In 1946-7, forty school choirs were broadcast in a programme series called 'Youth Sings'.¹⁴⁷

From 1951 to 1974, the 'Daily Devotional' programme on Wednesday mornings in term time was replaced with 'School Service' for children between ten and fifteen years of age. It, too, comprised dramatisations, prayers and hymns, inspired by a very successful BBC series for schools. In fact, the first set of sixty plays about Jesus, collectively titled 'Story Without End', was a BBC transcription, but then Kenneth Henderson commissioned Australian writers for similar drama series on other Biblical themes. After many requests for them, notes for lessons to follow up the BBC series were produced by the Department with the help of Kay Kinnane, Federal Scripts Editor and Producer, and, by 1965, the Department had decided to print workbooks to accompany the 'School Service' programme each year. Some 30,000 of these were sold in 1966.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ D. Millikan, 'Religious policy', Paper, 1988, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁴⁶ D. Millikan, ABC radio publicity, 24.2.87, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁴⁷ Hyde, 'Files of the fifties'.

¹⁴⁸ AA (NSW): SP 1687/1, file R17/2/8.

'School Service' was re-named 'Religion and Life' in 1974 and its format changed a little so as to juxtapose two related short dramatisations in each session - a modern situation followed by a Bible story, then a prayer and hymn. The Department continued to devise its own independent programmes and produce accompanying printed material until, in 1982, it decided to co-operate with the Joint Board of Religious Education and link its broadcasts with the Board's course for Level Six.¹⁴⁹ So it continued until the Department withdrew from school education at the end of 1986.¹⁵⁰

In the mid-1960s, the Department made some short-lived attempts to devise programmes specifically to satisfy the tastes and interests of older teenagers and young adults, in particular 'In Between' (1964-8) and 'Saturday Saints' which replaced it, both occupying fifteen minutes on Saturday morning.

With 'In Between', Patrick Kirkwood tried to appeal to the popular taste of young people in a session of interviews, comment and contemporary folk songs and hymns.¹⁵¹ Roger Bush, an ordained Methodist minister with a colloquial, evangelical style, was invited to present it. Kirkwood and then Ross Saunders were its producers.¹⁵² Saunders believed in the programme and claimed it had support from numbers of religious young people.¹⁵³ The Victorian State Advisory Committee, on the other hand, complained that it was making no impact on teenagers and that the presenter and its time-slot were unsuitable.¹⁵⁴ ABC supervisors of the programme were also frequently and severely critical of Bush.¹⁵⁵ In 1968, the programme was withdrawn and replaced by 'Saturday Saints'. Kirkwood and Saunders began this with the same aim of appealing to Australian youth, this time with conversations with people who were well-known and admirable. An initial series of eight interviews

¹⁴⁹ Cf. ABC, *Annual Reports and their Supplements 1975-6* and the years, 1981 to 1984.

¹⁵⁰ File Religion in life, 1986, ABC Document Archives. Note the change of name of the programme on this file. This title appeared in publicity leaflets of the Dept in 1986. It may have been an error of the new administration rather than a deliberate appropriating to this programme the name of the earlier adult programme broadcast in the years, 1954-c.72.

¹⁵¹ J. Peter, memo to State Mgrs, 10.12.63, AA (NSW): SP 1687/1, file R17/2/5.

¹⁵² Saunders was a Sydney Anglican who worked in the Dept 1965-70. He had previously worked with the Christian Broadcasting Association in Sydney on commercial radio and moved to religious broadcasting on 2CH from the ABC. Cf. R. Saunders, personal interview, 10.9.92.

¹⁵³ Saunders, interview, 10.9.92.

¹⁵⁴ Vic. State Advisory Committee, Minutes of meeting, 19.5.67, AA (NSW): SP 1299/1, file R17/1/1, pt 3.

¹⁵⁵ Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89. Complaints were that he often mispronounced words and his style was 'rough' and 'commercial', AA (NSW): ST 3051/1, file R17/1/2.

were so successful that the Department decided to keep the programme running.¹⁵⁶ It was withdrawn from air only in 1980, but its initial attentiveness to young people had lasted only a short time. For most of its history, 'Saturday Saints' was directed to a general adult audience.¹⁵⁷

The inability of the Department to win, and sustain, an acceptable level of response from young people to these programmes could not be blamed entirely on faults in the programmes and their presenters. Portable radio and the move to 'narrowcasting' to specific tastes and interests radically changed radio listening: it became an individual activity and each person began to listen habitually to only one or two stations which specialised in what they most wanted to hear. In these circumstances, ABC religious broadcasts on stations young people did not particularly favour could not hope to reach them. ABC radio as a whole was catering very little to post-school youth and had few young listeners. Indeed, the concern to communicate with young adults shown by the Religion Department was rare in the ABC at that time.¹⁵⁸ It was in 1975, with the launching of 2JJ, that the ABC dedicated resources to programmes for young people under the age of twenty-five. 2JJ was well endowed with funds and staff and freedom to innovate and yet, after eight years, still reported having great difficulty working with this age group.¹⁵⁹

It should not be assumed that the ABC's adult religious programmes have not reached young Australians. In their statistical reports on the audiences for particular programmes, McNair-Anderson divide the total audience into four categories: men, women, children and teenagers, and housewives. Their reports show that children and teenagers have listened to some of the adult religious programmes over the years, although always in relatively small numbers.¹⁶⁰ As well, teachers in secondary schools have used some of the Department's adult programmes for class discussions, although neither the real extent of this practice nor its impact on young listeners has been assessed.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Saunders, interview, 10.9.92.

¹⁵⁷ ABC, *Annual Reports 1968-9*, p. 33; and *1980-1*, p. 47. In 1974, a short series of 6 sessions for teenagers and young adults on 'Relationships' (with fellow human beings, with things, with the 'supernatural') was presented, cf. AA (NSW): SP 1687/1, file R17/2/8.

¹⁵⁸ According to Marius Webb, there was only one regular ABC programme in Sydney for adult youth in 1974: 'Room to Move' on 2BL which attracted young 'music aficionados'. Webb, interview 8.12.92.

¹⁵⁹ Mark Aarons, Comment on the ABC Radio conference, June 1984, *Twenty-Four Hours*, ABC, August 1984.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R2/9/2.

¹⁶¹ 'Search for Meaning' was one such programme, cf. File 'Search for Meaning'.

In general it must be concluded that, except in its programmes for school children, the Department has not been particularly successful in connecting religion with the lives of many young Australians.

Worship and 'devotion'

1. Worship

In 1943, Kenneth Henderson replaced one of the two Sunday morning 'Divine Services' with the more flexible programme, 'Radio Service', and, four years later, withdrew the programme of evening worship in favour of 'Plain Christianity'.¹⁶² These changes represented a major shift away from what had been a heavy commitment to services in churches.

Henderson's intentions in taking this action were clear. He wanted to broaden the scope of religious broadcasting in Australia in every possible way: to explore religious life and practice in all its dimensions, to communicate widely with Australians who were not church-goers, to bring variety into programmes and stimulate creativity in the churches themselves.

'Radio Service' offered the possibility for more creative, more experimental and ecumenical services. It was, in other words, removed to a degree from what was actually happening in the worship of church congregations each Sunday. The Department had no wish, however, to create an 'ABC church' with its own idiosyncratic forms of worship and prayer.¹⁶³ The services in this programme were the result of close collaboration with ordained ministers and priests in good standing in their communities, with the single aim of presenting Christian worship on radio as effectively as possible.

It was never intended that 'Radio Service' would entirely replace 'Divine Service', only complement it. Henderson thought it essential that communal worship, of central importance in Christian faith, be part of the Department's regular schedule of broadcasts. His successors, John Munro, James Peter and Patrick Kirkwood all shared this view. Indeed, every week for over forty years, energy and time, along with technical, editorial and diplomatic skills were devoted to this.¹⁶⁴ In 1980, 'Divine Service' was re-named 'Sunday Service' and was shifted, against the

¹⁶² ABC, *Annual Report 1946-7*, p. 15.

¹⁶³ 'The ABC has always broadcast a service from the community of faith. We don't attempt to create a religious environment that doesn't belong within an established religious community.' R. Nichols, personal interview 24.2.89.

¹⁶⁴ In the late 1950s, the Dept began to televise church services, also, and these became a weekly commitment of ABC television in 1965. McIntosh, interview, 19.6.89 and AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/2/2/.

Department's wishes, from morning to early evening.¹⁶⁵ A greater variety of formats was then introduced into the programme, which was re-named 'Pilgrims' in 1985.¹⁶⁶ A year later, it dropped out of radio altogether with the approval of the Head of Department, David Millikan.¹⁶⁷ When these Christian services ceased to be broadcast, the celebrations of major Jewish festivals also went off the air. Only occasional liturgies and services celebrating important events have been broadcast since.

What were the issues involved in the changes that were made over the years to this programme?

The broadcasting of worship as it actually occurred in a church presented the Department with particular problems. There were many technical and organisational difficulties associated with achieving a programme of high standard. 'Excellence of preaching, excellence of music and warmth of community' were the chief qualities the Department sought from the church,¹⁶⁸ but, as well, the acoustics of the building, the placement of microphones, the timing and movement of the ritual all needed careful planning. Staff were required to work every Sunday. In the BAPH States, before religious specialists were appointed in 1971, 'Divine Service' was in the hands of staff in the Talks Department who might, or might not, have the knowledge, competence and interest needed for the task. Even after 1971, it was a particularly demanding commitment for the one specialist for religion in each of these States. Once the Department introduced some pre-recording of services, the burden in all States eased a little. James Peter approved pre-recording in 1964 providing that what was recorded was broadcast on the same day.¹⁶⁹ In 1966, he permitted national and State relays of pre-recorded services so long as they were appropriate to the day of broadcasting.¹⁷⁰ These measures relieved the staff, especially in the smaller States, and helped towards improving the quality of production, but it is evident from listeners' complaints that the standards Peter set were not always maintained and that some recorded services, at least in 1967, were 'out-of-date' when they were put to air.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ It was broadcast 5.30 - 6.15 p.m. Kirkwood, interview, 9.5.89.

¹⁶⁶ ABC, *Annual Report 1985-6*, p. 36.

¹⁶⁷ D. Millikan, personal interview, 14.4.90.

¹⁶⁸ Nichols, interview, 24.2.89.

¹⁶⁹ J. Peter, memo to all States, 18.6.64, AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R17/2/2

¹⁷⁰ J. Peter, memo to all States, 26.9.66, AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R17/2/2.

¹⁷¹ E. J. Greenan, letter to GM, complaining that the broadcast readings were those prescribed in the Lectionary for an earlier Sunday, 21.12.67, AA (NSW): C 2427/1, file R17/2/2.

The fact that radio was a medium only of sound imposed limitations on a programme of worship, but had some advantages. The visual aspects of a gathering of the faithful joining in a ritual of worship and communion were difficult to present on radio; they could only be described verbally. Radio was more suited, therefore, to Protestant services with their emphasis on the word, spoken and sung, than to Catholic or Orthodox liturgies. Television, on the other hand, could carry memorable programmes when liturgy, rich in movement, colour and symbol was celebrated in a fine church that offered pleasing images and perspectives, but was quite inappropriate for services and buildings that had little or nothing to interest and please the eye. Researching Australians' use of radio in 1982, Hugh Mackay found that radio programmes engendered in listeners a greater sense of participation than did television programmes in viewers. Radio was the more intimate medium that created more of a sense of personal connection between programme and listener.¹⁷² On these grounds, it has been argued that radio was the more suitable medium for broadcasting community worship. Television, by letting viewers see the exact location, the congregation gathered and the ritual taking place there, actually made them more conscious of being separated from what was occurring than of being included in it.¹⁷³

In 1981, soon after changing the time, and name, of the worship programme, the Department discussed how they might enable listeners to feel a stronger sense of personal involvement in the ritual celebration being broadcast. It was suggested that 'Sunday Service' be produced in a way which perceived the listeners to be the congregation.¹⁷⁴ In December 1980, the BBC had introduced a new series of worship programmes on television, called 'This is the Day', with this same intention of drawing the audience more directly into the service.¹⁷⁵ It roused theological objections that eucharistic worship produced in this way was inauthentic. Transmitting acts of worship on radio and television, however, necessarily involved compromises. Broadcasters were doing no more than persevering in their search for a quality of communication over distance that was significant in people's lives. There was no denying, however, that worship presented religious broadcasters with problems of meaning and purpose which, try as they might, they could only partially solve.

¹⁷² H. Mackay, *The Mackay Report: Radio*, Centre for Communications Studies, Bathurst, March 1982. Mackay was not discovering something new but re-affirming in the 1980s what had long been known, cf. Henderson, *Broadcasting*, pp. 7, 8, 13, quoted in ch. 5, fn. 26.

¹⁷³ Cf. Angela Tilby, BBC television producer, 'Developing a television liturgy', *Times*, London, 2.10.82.

¹⁷⁴ Religion Dept conference, Agenda of meeting, 2-6.2.81, held by P. Kirkwood.

¹⁷⁵ Tilby, 'Developing a television liturgy'.

By 1984, the Department was discussing again the need for creative change to 'Sunday Service'. Audiences for the programme were too low and the Department sought the reasons for this.¹⁷⁶ Certainly changing the time of the programme in 1980 from morning to 5.30 p.m. had caused a spate of objections from listeners for whom the new time was unsuitable.¹⁷⁷ Since the 1970s, fewer Australians were attending services regularly in the 'mainstream' Christian churches. Community attitudes to worship had changed. In a much more diversified society, there were many more varied forms of worship which were not being presented in the programme. The Department wondered what criteria, other than the census statistics, might guide its selection of these for broadcasting. Dropping the programme was not considered. Indeed, in a more secularised society, the challenge for the Department was to make a more persuasive case for the meaning and importance of worship in life.¹⁷⁸

Two years later, David Millikan contemplated the same data that Kirkwood and the Department had considered in 1984: the decline in 'mainstream' church attendances, the small audiences for worship programmes, the much increased religious plurality of the society and the growth in numbers of those who claimed no affiliation with a religious grouping. He concluded that regular programmes of worship should cease. Station and network managers, keen to replace the programme with something with broader appeal, agreed.

Millikan's decisions about programmes were driven by his perception of the contemporary context in which the Department was functioning rather than by prior judgments on other considerations about what programmes should contain. Kirkwood had been well aware of the social, cultural and professional contexts in which he worked but, over many years in the Department, he had formulated a theory and laid out a framework for religious broadcasting which he would willingly adapt, but not discard. The different dimensions, or components, of religion were part of this framework. The Department's ties to the major religious institutions in the society were another element. For Millikan, the Department's essential task was to use the opportunities offered it by the national broadcaster to address, from a religious perspective, the modern complexities and ambiguities of Australian society and culture. It was his view that those most served by broadcast worship were would-be church-goers prevented from attending by age, or illness, or other physical constraint. He challenged the churches to consider how they might provide for the needs of these

¹⁷⁶ In the mid-1980s, the audience in Sydney and Melbourne combined was 9,000, that is, 0.8% share of the available audience. Cf. AA C2427/1, file R2/9/2.

¹⁷⁷ Listeners' Correspondence, Jan.-Feb. 1981, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/5.

¹⁷⁸ Dept conference, Report, 14.9.84.

members,¹⁷⁹ while the Department became a more 'critical vehicle for perspectives of faith and belief...on the large issues of the day'.¹⁸⁰ He was less concerned that programmes gave expression to all the dimensions of religion than that they contributed to the discussion among Australians of human questions of meaning and values and commitment.

There was a real difference in the way Millikan ordered the Department's priorities, but, lest it be overstated, it is important to acknowledge that, in fact, there never was a time when the Department had not brought a critical religious view to cultural and social questions, nor did its programmes under Millikan's leadership entirely exclude any of the dimensions of religion identified by Ninian Smart.

2. 'Devotion'

Programmes which carried a direct spiritual message to sustain listeners in their faith, or search for faith, were categorised in the ABC as 'devotional' programmes. They comprised, in various combinations and in differing proportions, the elements of reflective reading or an account of an experience, prayer, meditation, exhortation, counsel and religious music. We have noted already that the earliest religious programmes and the longest-lasting were of this type. Worship services were a special form of devotional programme. The Department's music programmes more or less fit into this category. 'Community Hymn Singing', for example, had a strong devotional intention whereas 'Sacred Music' aimed to appeal as much to the musical sensibilities of its listeners as to their susceptibility to the faith that inspired the music. For the sake of clarity, the religious music programmes are excluded from the discussion that follows.

All devotional programmes have now been dropped from the schedules. They were terminated in the years 1980-6, with the exception of 'Sacred Readings', which was the last to go in early 1991.¹⁸¹ In that year, Malcolm Long, Director of Radio, is reported to have told the Department that it was management's view that there was no longer a place for devotional programmes in the ABC.¹⁸²

Two of the most enduring of them make interesting case studies: 'Evening Meditation' and 'Readings from the Bible', which became 'Sacred Readings'.

¹⁷⁹ Millikan, interview 25.9.91.

¹⁸⁰ Millikan, 'Religious policy'.

¹⁸¹ There had been no diminishment of the Dept's devotional programming with the withdrawal of 'Daily Devotional' in 1971, because it was immediately replaced by 'By The Way'.

¹⁸² J. Cleary, personal interview, 25.9.91. This view contrasts with the BBC's acknowledgment of a continuing obligation in this regard. Cf. Tilby, 'Developing a television liturgy'.

Kirkwood recognised that the formats of the short, day-time, devotional programmes were 'tired'; he also supported the moves by management to achieve more fluency and coherence in the schedules. It was evident that, in general, ABC presenters were not at ease with the content of these programmes, so he let them go, preferring others offering a range of discussions, documentaries and journalistic comment and more favourably scheduled.¹⁸³ He was keen, however, not only to keep the evening meditations and the morning readings on air but to develop them with fresh purpose and material from new sources. Millikan, following Kirkwood, introduced more change to the morning readings.

The evening meditations had been appreciated deeply by a relatively small number of listeners over several decades. By the mid-1960s, critics in the ABC were asserting that, if there were to be a bedtime programme to bring the day to a quiet close, a secular, rather than a religious, focus would be the more appropriate.¹⁸⁴ Kirkwood, however, was noting the growing interest in Australia, as in other Western societies, in meditation, particularly practices based in Asian religion and philosophy. This, he believed, justified a renewed commitment to 'Evening Meditation'. In 1977, the year he became Head of Department, he proposed that it become a programme which was itself an experience of guided meditation for listeners. He wanted not only to respond to the current enthusiasm for Eastern meditation but to re-awaken, in a Western society with Christian roots, interest in the rich mystical and contemplative traditions of Christianity. The programme went ahead on this basis for a further eight years utilising prose, poetry and music and including instructions in methods of prayer and meditation. The new multicultural approach was generally applauded.¹⁸⁵ Sydney's Lebanese Moslems expressed their appreciation in a letter:

...Many people have contacted us to convey their enjoyment of the series and we believe you have performed a valuable service to the Islamic community and to Australians of other faiths.¹⁸⁶

Despite Kirkwood's best efforts, the evening meditations ceased to be broadcast in 1984-5. A 'tired format' was not the cause of their withdrawal. It was evident that the programme was reaching and pleasing a broader cross-section of the society - Australians of different cultures and faiths - than it ever had before. Secularist opinion in the ABC, the programme's relatively small audience numbers

¹⁸³ Kirkwood, interview, 28.7.89.

¹⁸⁴ A. Dibley, Director Radio Networks 2/3, memo to J. Peter, 12.8.68. Dibley advocated a suggestion made in 1965 that the programme be replaced by 'A Book at Bedtime'. Cf. AA (NSW): ST3051/1, file R 17/1/2.

¹⁸⁵ ABC, *Supplementary Information on ABC Activities, 1981-2*, p. 32.

¹⁸⁶ Lebanese Moslems' Association, Lakemba, letter to P. Kirkwood, 6.7.83, held by P. Kirkwood.

and arguments based on its inappropriateness to the flow formats of night programmes weighted management's decision against it.

While it diversified its sources for 'Evening Meditation', the Department decided to keep on with 'Readings from the Bible'¹⁸⁷ and held to this until 1984, when the Director of Radio 2 asked for some adaptation to the new 'Breakfast Show'.¹⁸⁸ The Department decided at a conference in September to vary the readings each day of the week:

Monday - Bible; Tuesday - social/theological comment; Wednesday - Bible or poetry with, perhaps, comment on life actuality; Thursday - reflective or spiritual comment; Friday - religion or philosophy.¹⁸⁹

After an evaluation in November, the format of the programme was changed again. Each week would have a single theme; each State would take responsibility for a week's series of five readings. There would be an 'emphasis on the richness of the Bible, but flexibility to allow other great sacred literature to be read, including the works of ancient and contemporary writers'.¹⁹⁰ The programme was given a new title, 'Sacred Readings'.

'Sacred Readings' then followed a similar route to that taken by 'Evening Meditation', one which the Department and ABC radio management considered appropriate to the Australian society of the 1980s. The new policy, however, brought new problems. In one series in March 1986, Philip Hinton, a leader in the Baha'i community, read from the Koran, choosing excerpts dealing with Christian themes.¹⁹¹ His respect for the holy book and his subject matter was unquestioned, but the programme prompted this reasonable reaction from a Moslem listener:

Why didn't you have a Moslem read it? Recitations [of the Koran] should be preceded by ritual washing. There is also a ritual prayerful beginning and a small prayer at the end.¹⁹²

It was a call to the Department to ponder more deeply the meaning and purpose of its 'multi-faith' approach to this programme.

In the same year, the ABC received many complaints, expressing dislike of the mix of readings from many different sources and the 'hotch-potch' of 'vague religious

¹⁸⁷ P. Kirkwood, Paper for Commission Meeting Oct. 1982.

¹⁸⁸ M. Long, memo to Directors, Managers, Controllers, 25.6.84, held at Religion Dept, Sydney.

¹⁸⁹ Dept conference, Report, 14.9.84.

¹⁹⁰ P. Kirkwood, memo to Religion staff, 16.11.84, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹¹ The series was broadcast 17-21.3.86. File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹² Achmad Kienekamp, Australian Islamic Movement, letter to ABC Brisbane, 20.3.86, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

notions' presented in the programme.¹⁹³ There were two issues here: the first was the use of sacred texts of religions other than Jewish and Christian; the second was the inclusion of other literature. The Department acted on listeners' dissatisfaction with the second of these, that is, with the intrusion into the programme of the writings of individual thinkers. In August 1986, Ronald Nichols enunciated a revised policy for 'Sacred Readings': '...unless material offered by producers can be comfortably described as great sacred literature, another place needs to be found for it'.¹⁹⁴ The brief of the programme was re-stated: '...readings from sacred literature with a heavy emphasis on the Bible, with frequent reading from the Koran and other central sacred texts of the world's religions'.¹⁹⁵

A review of 'Sacred Readings' in 1986 shows that the use of 'central sacred texts' greatly increased in the latter part of the year. In the period January-July, they were used in 31% of the programmes; in the period August-December, in 78%. This balance was not, however, maintained in later years. By 1989, only 46% of the Readings were from the great sacred texts and in 1990, this declined to 32%. Most of the other readings dealt with religious and related themes and were written by religious people, but they did not have the status of 'central sacred texts'.¹⁹⁶ It was difficult for the ordinary listener to comprehend what meaning the Department gave to the term 'sacred literature', which is how it continued to describe the programme in its publicity leaflets. However honorable and inspiring, how might Professor Manning Clark's visions and doubts, or Dr E. F. Schumacher's economic philosophy fit this description?¹⁹⁷

'Sacred Readings' lost the support of loyal listeners who wanted to hear Scripture and were disappointed too often. The force of their opinion had secured the place of 'Readings from the Bible' in the schedule for decades but, when the programme was dropped at the end of January 1991, the protests were not powerful enough to cause management any misgiving.¹⁹⁸ No one can be sure that there would have been a different outcome had the Department adhered firmly to the reading of 'central sacred texts of the world's religions' and selected its sources on grounds that were well considered and well communicated to its listeners. What is evident is that

¹⁹³ File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹⁴ R. Nichols, letter to H. Neish, 21.8.86, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹⁵ P. Loxton, C. General Progs (Radio), letter to G. Stubino, 21.8.86, File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹⁷ These series of readings went to air in Dec. 1989 and Sept. 1990, respectively. Cf. File Sacred Readings, ABC Document Archives.

¹⁹⁸ N. Swan, Director Spoken Word Progs (Radio National), personal interview, 22.11.91.

the Department's willingness to adapt its programmes to accommodate more religious diversity in the case of 'Evening Meditation', and more secularity in the case of 'Sacred Readings', did not secure these programmes in the schedules beyond a few years. How inclusive can a programme be while still retaining sufficient focus and coherence of purpose to appeal to a regular audience? Certainly from 1985, there were staff members in the Department asking this question in relation to 'Sacred Readings', apprehensive about the direction in which the programme was moving.¹⁹⁹

The demise of 'Sacred Readings' was more than the loss of a four-to-five minute programme; it was a strong symbol erased. For more than forty years, there it had been, just before the news bulletin at the start of the working day, testifying before millions of Australians to another order of reality beyond the temporal world and suggesting that they be attentive to it. It symbolised all the Department's efforts elsewhere to keep religion on the public agenda.

While devotional programmes as such were removed from the schedules, devotional themes remained in other religious programmes. People would talk about prayer, although they did not pray; scriptures were no longer read, but their theological and social implications were expounded and discussed. Kirkwood, looking back over the 1980s, observed: 'In recent years we have pulled back from devotional broadcasting, according to format trends. But this has created an imbalance which needs to be addressed, particularly in local popular radio'.²⁰⁰ Even if the Department shared Kirkwood's concern, present management in ABC Radio would seem to be quite opposed to his view. By 1991, it was no longer a matter of the Department's re-designing its devotional programmes so that in format and style they fitted well with what surrounded them in the schedule. Now, it was the content and intention of such programmes that were incompatible with the objectives of ABC Radio. This was a very significant shift in attitude and an alarming one by a national broadcasting institution with an obligation to be comprehensive in its programming.

Responsibilities of staff

Until the 1960s, staff in the programme departments were, as far as the listening public was concerned, almost totally anonymous.²⁰¹ Programmes once prepared

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Watkins and Paul Collins, personal interviews, 22.5.89 and 8.5.89 respectively. Watkins said John Fleming had shared his concern and that ABC colleagues in other Depts had expressed the view that 'secular opinion in this programme was the wrong track to go down'.

²⁰⁰ Kirkwood, interview, 28.7.89.

²⁰¹ There was one reference in the archives to Henderson's playing a role in the Watchnight Service on New Year's Eve 1954 while he was still Head of Dept. He and John Munro broadcast regularly as guest speakers after they had resigned from the ABC. Cf. Hyde, 'Files of the Sixties'.

were presented by ABC announcers or guest broadcasters. By the mid-1960s, some programme staff were presenting their own material.²⁰² ABC staff were expected to prepare and present their material with balanced objectivity, but the latter half of the 1960s saw the beginnings of a trend, which has continued ever since, to more personal involvement of staff in their programmes. A small shift was made when announcers were instructed to sound less aloof and to project to listeners more personal warmth and interest in the material before them.²⁰³

The influence of journalism on programme-making was great. As documentaries and interviews replaced scripted talks by guest speakers, staff necessarily acquired more editorial control over programmes and personally participated in them more.²⁰⁴ By the 1980s, the ABC, in line with others in the broadcasting industry, was raising the personal profile of staff on air. In these circumstances of more personal subjectivity in programmes, the ABC's credibility as a balanced and impartial national broadcaster could easily be damaged. Heads of Departments, managers and members of the Commission, or Board, have been greatly tested endeavouring to maintain the institutional integrity of the national broadcaster and, at the same time, allow its creative staff sufficient freedom to make strong, lively programmes.

How these developments in the Religion Department have affected its broadcasts is the subject for discussion here. The first point to be made is that the Department needed to follow these broadcasting trends in order not to sound out of date in comparison with others. A contemporary sound and style was essential to its purpose and impact.

For most of its history, the Department's culture was strongly communal. Its structures and processes of organisation were firmly established; its philosophy, policies and programme commitments were clear. Production tasks were shared among the staff in all States by means of a roster prepared in Head Office. There were benefits and drawbacks in this way of operating. The sense of common purpose and common achievement was strong. People from the various States, both producers and guest broadcasters, were assured of regular participation in programmes. The rosters were a stimulus to staff to explore their own State resources widely and to extend their capacities and skills into areas of their specialisation and profession that they might otherwise not have explored. On the other hand, people felt frustration and

²⁰² Patrick Kirkwood became the presenter of 'Sacred Music' in 1962. At first, the announcer introduced him but later even this was dispensed with. Cf. Kirkwood, interview, 29.5.89.

²⁰³ Inglis, p. 319.

²⁰⁴ Kirkwood and Nichols, interviews 29.5.89 and 3.3.89 respectively.

disappointment when they were asked to produce programmes for which they lacked the appropriate resources or abilities.²⁰⁵

When staff became participants in their own programmes greater personal demands were made upon them and their workload increased. As they turned away from producing guest speakers to researching and crafting more complex programmes, such as documentaries, interviews and thematic series, the task of getting their material to air called for more skills and consumed more time and concentration. In circumstances where additional skilled staff and resources were hard to acquire, the alternatives for a small, stretched Department seemed clear: it might decide to make fewer, more consistently excellent programmes; or continue with the same quota of broadcasts prepared less well than their producers would wish.²⁰⁶ Fewer programmes would mean fewer opportunities to reach audiences, less variety to offer them and a less substantial role, perhaps a more marginal existence, within the ABC.²⁰⁷ It was noted earlier that, since 1988, the Department has had more air-time per week for its programmes than it ever had before.²⁰⁸ 28% of those hours were taken by repeat broadcasts of some of the week's programmes. With favourable scheduling, it was possible, in this way, to reach two quite different audiences with the one programme. This has been a compromise solution to the Department's dilemma, which has kept up its share of broadcast hours but has reduced the range and variety of programmes it is able to offer.

Producers have always been personally involved in their programmes, despite ABC rhetoric about objectivity and detachment. The Religion Department had its goals and purposes, as did other departments, which staff believed in and committed their creative talent to achieving. Even when it appeared that guests were responsible for the content of programmes, for example scripted talks or 'Community Hymn Singing', and the role of the ABC was only the technical one of ensuring a competent transmission, there were many decisions made by producers which shaped and influenced what listeners heard: selecting who and what would be broadcast, and so who and what would not, advising and editing.

The use of more journalistic methods, however, gave staff greater influence on the final impact of their programmes, as they designed documentaries around these

²⁰⁵ Challis and Strauss, interviews 27.4.89 and 23.12.91, respectively.

²⁰⁶ Neil Gill, personal interview, 22.6.89. Gill produced a series of six programmes in 1989 entitled 'Many Faiths, Many Ways' which required particular delicacy and sensitivity. In his view, it fell short of excellence because of insufficient time for the thinking, research and fine editing needed.

²⁰⁷ Cleary, interview 13.3.89.

²⁰⁸ Cf. fn. 37 above.

and themes of their choosing, commented, analysed and controlled interviews on air. The Department embraced these approaches to broadcasting but there were some features of journalism that were hardly compatible with its ethos or objectives. In a society that gave them little public credence, the Department wanted to affirm the importance for the world of religious views of reality. It respected the established churches and religious institutions and needed their continuing support. Religious faith deeply informed the personalities of almost all of its staff. In these circumstances, the Department's analyses and criticisms of religious communities and persons lacked the hard scepticism characteristic of much contemporary journalism.

A major shift in the Department towards more creative freedom for producers occurred in 1985 when the roster system was formally abandoned and, instead, responsibilities were distributed more on the basis of staff members' particular talents, sensibilities and interests. The co-ordination of the various programme strands was shared among the Department's producers, each co-ordinator being responsible for planning and management, clarifying policy when necessary, monitoring and advising on standards - in short, for ensuring, with contributing producers, that broadcasts of an acceptable quality went to air regularly. Some programmes were consistently the sole responsibility of a single producer and presenter.²⁰⁹ David Millikan encouraged staff to focus their energies on doing what they could do well. If they were well-equipped to speak with authority on a subject, it was held to be appropriate for them to express their opinions. Since a producer's views could be highly influential in a programme without being apparent, Millikan preferred that staff reveal their position on a matter honestly and openly so that listeners could take it into account in their appraisal. He argued that the more conviction and passion they brought to their broadcasting the more vitality and power it would have to stir listeners to respond and to take their own stance on issues.²¹⁰

There were benefits and dangers in giving freer play in programmes to the talents, personalities and views of staff. It could bring greater diversity of content and style into religious broadcasts. A producer with long-term responsibility for one programme strand could focus it and define its range more exactly than was possible under the regime of the roster. Producers with mastery in a particular field could offer informed leadership in their programmes.²¹¹ There were matching risks, however.

²⁰⁹ For example, 'Sacred Music' and 'Sunday Morning'. 'Kronos', 'Insights', 'Encounter', 'Sacred Readings' were examples of programmes requiring a co-ordinator because a number of staff contributed to these.

²¹⁰ D. Millikan, 'On personality and objectivity', memo to Religion staff, 3.4.89; also, radio interview, 'The God-Botherers'.

²¹¹ Over the years, the Dept has been strong in highly qualified and experienced staff in the fields of music, theology, Scripture, philosophy, sociology, community development,

The sharper focus and definition in a single programme strand could narrow its range of relevance and appeal to listeners, so that what it gained in penetration it lost in scope. The advanced level of knowledge and skills gained through concentrating on one programme area had to be weighed against the lack of experience with other programmes. The worst outcome would be a display of bias, or an ill-considered use of the power of the airwaves to press a view, such as to wreck the integrity of the programme and destroy people's trust in the broadcaster, or even the whole Department.

These have all been matters for strong argument among the staff, particularly at times when errors of judgment have occurred.²¹² Protecting the Department, and the ABC, against individuals' idiosyncracies, excesses or carelessness would seem to have depended on the functioning of ^{several} processes:

Departmental policies and purposes, and relevant ABC policies, had to be clear and known to all the staff. They, in turn, needed to make their own the Department's vision, values and norms. Even so, 'collegial criticism'²¹³ of programmes was essential as well as continuing oversight of all the Department's productions by the Head and his deputy. The Department also needed to seek the appraisal of others, the listening public in particular, and to heed and respond to their comments. One way of refreshing particular programmes and of keeping staff challenged and extended has been to change their areas of responsibility from time to time, as far as the demands of programmes could be matched to their talents.

These questions of creative freedom for programme makers and their accountability, as ABC staff, to the Australian people for their use of the power of the airwaves are fundamental for publicly funded broadcasters. The different ways the Religion Department has addressed them over the years have affected the range and quality of its programmes and their relevance, appeal and impact in the lives of their makers as well as their listeners.

history, art, drama, literature, journalism. They have introduced listeners to new ideas by prompt reviewing and discussion of recently published books and periodicals and interviews with significant thinkers around the world; they have often raised the awareness of listeners to situations of human importance of which they had known little. 'Search for Meaning', in content and broadcasting style, has broken new ground in Australian radio. The Dept has led in the promotion of sacred music of high quality and in developing understanding and co-operation among different religious communities.

²¹² J. Cleary, R. Nichols, P. Collins, F. Spurling and K. McLennan were some of those who discussed these questions in personal interviews, 13.3.89, 7.4.89, 8.5.89, 20.7.89 and 17.6.89 respectively.

²¹³ R. Nichols, personal interview, 7.4.89.

Religious diversity

In response to the multicultural composition of the society resulting from planned immigration, aspects of world religions other than Christianity have been more and more included in programmes, along with some attempts to bridge the gap of understanding between the majority society and the spirituality of Aboriginal Australians and other indigenous peoples.²¹⁴ However, although since the 1950s those invited to broadcast have generally been committed adherents of these religions, Christian questions and concepts have largely set the agenda for such programmes. In 1971, James Peter, addressing the Tasmanian State Advisory Committee, emphasised this point. It was important, he said, that the listening public know the religious views of other countries, especially neighbours, but 'as Australia is a Christian country any argument on theistic belief should be framed in Christian terms - not from the standpoint of another religion or culture'.²¹⁵

From the second half of the 1970s, the Department described its policy as a 'deliberate' one of 'widening the scope of its programmes beyond the point of view of Christianity', aiming 'to feature as wide a spectrum of traditions as possible'.²¹⁶ It was no longer a matter of providing for Australians' general education about the religions of neighbouring countries but of responding to the social realities of Australia itself, where national policies of multiculturalism were being enunciated and pursued. At this time, the Department was receiving comments on James Peter's paper, 'The treatment of religion in ABC programmes',²¹⁷ among them suggestions for ways in which the Religion Department could relieve 'assimilatory pressures' on the minority religious groupings in the society. Rabbi Apple, from the Synagogue in the city of Sydney, argued for 'a disproportionately higher allocation of air-time to groups such as the Jews and Moslems to help them keep in touch with their own adherents [who were] subject to considerable weakening and assimilatory pressures' as well as to enable 'the public to have a reasonable understanding of such lesser known

²¹⁴ Australian Aboriginal spirituality and that of other indigenous peoples have been included in 'Sacred Readings', 'Encounter' and 'Insights' over the years. Cf. Files of these programmes, 1986-91, ABC Document Archives.

²¹⁵ Tas. State Advisory Committee, Minutes of meeting, 28.5.71, AA (NSW): C2427/1, file R17/1/1.

²¹⁶ 'Divine Service', 'Sacred Readings', 'Evening Meditation' and, occasionally, 'Encounter' and 'Sacred Music' were the main vehicles for this policy. Looking back in 1984, Kirkwood was surprised, himself, at the extensive list of broadcasts with this purpose. Cf. P. Kirkwood, memo to Director Board Secretariate, 1.3.84, held by P. Kirkwood.

²¹⁷ Paper written in Feb. 1976, cf. ch. 8, fn. 82.

traditions...which are of crucial importance in the history of religion and world culture'.²¹⁸

In seeking to pursue its policy of including a wider range of religious traditions in its programmes, the Department entered into complex and ambiguous territory. The Moslem comment, quoted above, about a 1986 series of 'Sacred Readings', when a Baha'i leader read from the Koran on Christian themes, demonstrated this. When the series, 'Many Faiths and Many Ways', voiced the expectation of an harmonious co-existence of diverse faiths in Australia and of their future enriching of society, some critics thought it over-reverential in tone and unconvincing, because it lacked any reference to the links in history between religious loyalties and material conflict.²¹⁹ These were two illustrations of enduring problems for the Department in its presentations of different religious traditions, prompting questions it needed to probe deeply. What was its commitment to authentic, honest communication of different religious traditions and ways of life? What was needed to achieve this: what assumptions and values underpinning the briefs for its various programmes? what policies for staff education and recruitment?²²⁰ What was the appropriate balance between reflecting diversity and promoting social cohesion and solidarity? between the contributions of believers and those of empathetic observers?

Henderson was opposed to giving broadcast time to small sectarian groups and Munro continued that policy. In the late 1960s a variety of new religious movements began to spring up in Australia warranting some examination by the Department and, in the latter half of the 1980s, they have been the subject of a number of programmes and programme items. The treatment has largely been journalistic, including analysis and critique from non-adherents.²²¹ However, the Department has been criticised for excessive attention, in the late 1980s, to idiosyncratic groupings and cultic practices and a consequent disproportionate allocation of the available broadcast hours to others. James Murray, who had praised the Department in March 1988 for its comprehensive coverage of religious affairs, its 'more equitable recognition of the pluralism of the society and readiness to feed the innate religious curiosity of the population not notable for church-going' wrote, a year later:

²¹⁸ Raymond Apple, letter to Religion Dept, 18.3.76, File POL/PPP, Religion Dept, Sydney.

²¹⁹ G. Lord, 'Holy Convincing', *Listener*, 12-18.11.88, p. 5.

²²⁰ Over the years the staff has mostly comprised committed Christians, such as liberal Anglicans, Protestants both liberal and evangelical, Roman Catholics and a Greek Orthodox priest, but there have also been Jewish women on staff and, occasionally, agnostics with an interest in religion.

²²¹ 'Sunday Night Talk' on the more popular Metropolitan Radio has provided a forum for discussion with devotees and inquirers.

[The ABC Religion Department] shows less and less regard for the numerical niceties of religion in Australia and apparently thinks it is on a winner by giving an inordinate exposure to New Age religion or other pseudo or quasi religions.²²²

The census figures had long been used by the Department to justify decisions it made about the allocation of broadcast time among various religious groupings. We noted earlier that, in 1984, the Department was pondering whether a different basis for decision-making might be found, but no clear alternative policy was formulated and documented. Staff working in the Department at the end of the 1980s asserted that their judgments about programming were based on their own reading and study and personal involvements in the wider society; on listeners' correspondence; on data derived from sociological research into religion in Australia and other published information; and on events and issues elsewhere in the world with implications for Australians.²²³ How the apportioning of broadcast hours was systematically monitored, however, was not clearly enunciated.

Henderson was well aware that radio was particularly suited to intimate communication and, from the outset, programmes were designed to speak directly to the individual listener about his, or her, personal faith and devotion, moral values and commitment.²²⁴ Until the 1980s, however, the spiritualities informing these programmes were deeply communal, that is, born and grown and shared in religious communities of faith. Since the late 1960s, and particularly in the 1980s, there has been a marked growth in Australia of an immense variety of expressions of individual, and individualistic, spirituality and the Religion Department adjusted its programmes to accommodate this new diversity. The contrast between the two approaches is starkest if we consider, side by side, 'Plain Christianity - a Word to the Wayfarer' and 'Search for Meaning'. Both, highly esteemed in their day and each with its own kind of missionary intent, affirmed people in their personal search for faith and meaning and values to live by. The first offered talks of intellectual substance read from carefully prepared scripts by the leading Christian thinkers in the English speaking world. The second brought to the microphone people, well-known and unknown, to reveal themselves in their own terms and explore the subjective meaning of their

²²² J. Murray, 'Religious broadcasts', 1.3.88; and 'The apologetic Anglicans', *Australian*, 17.3.89. Over 20% of available tapes of 'Sunday Night Talk' were concerned with new religious movements and various expressions of individual spirituality and religiosity, cf. ABC Radio Tapes, Catalogue (n.d. but current in 1992). Other programmes also included such material.

²²³ Cf. current staff members, personal interviews, 1989.

²²⁴ 'The microphone excludes all else but the broadcaster and hearer and records intimacy and sincerity.' 'The sound [of the radio] enters a family living room, where it is heard by one, two or three, each listening in his own solitariness.' Cf. Henderson, 'Broadcasting', pp. 8, 13; also, ch. 5, fn. 26.

experiences. Adaptations to 'Evening Meditation' and 'Sacred Readings' described above provided a little for more individual and eclectic spiritualities, but generally still breathed the spirit of the great religious traditions of the world.²²⁵ 'Encounter' and 'Search for Meaning' followed the trend further. In 1987 and 1988, 'Encounter' showed a strong preference for themes concerning the inner life of the individual person. According to the co-ordinator of the programme, listeners without any association with a religious grouping or on the margins of communities especially appreciated them, indeed, depended on ABC religious broadcasts for their sense of connection with others:

There are those spiritual people who have no support except, for example, the ABC. For some, the ABC is the only source of reinforcement, affirmation, nurture, information.²²⁶

'Search for Meaning' also received correspondence along these same lines:

When introducing the evening programme...you included my town in your greeting....I felt included in the vast community of people who listen to your programme. I've never felt at home with those who label themselves Church of something-or-other....but I've never lost the feeling of sharing with those others who are seeking and trying to learn.²²⁷

Neither of these two programmes, however, lost connection with religious communities in Australia. Indeed, by 1991, the number of broadcasts of 'Encounter' concerned with self-focussed spirituality had become few in comparison with those exploring social situations, world religions and theology in culture.²²⁸ Among those interviewed in 'Search for Meaning' were many who belonged to communities of faith and reflected on their experiences from the perspectives these gave them.

It might be said that to the extent to which the Department's programmes followed the trend towards private, eclectic, and self-focussed spiritualities, they gave support to the process of modern secularisation of religion, of which this trend was a sign. On the other hand, such broadcasts were a means of making what had been private and individual public and shared, and so, it may be argued, acted as a counterforce to the secularisation process, confronting the prevailing assumptions of Australia's godlessness and materialism with evidence, and encouragement, to the contrary. A number of letters to the programme, 'Search for Meaning', seem to support this second view, for example:

²²⁵ 'Insights' in 1986 focussed on individual spirituality several times, but has since concentrated on events, issues, people and writings of importance to the major religious traditions and their relationships with modern society. File Insights 1986-91, ABC Document Archives.

²²⁶ Spurling, interview 20.7.89.

²²⁷ Excerpts from listeners' correspondence, n.d., File Search for Meaning, Religion Dept, Sydney.

²²⁸ Cf. File Encounter 1987-91, ABC Document Archives.

I never thought I would hear publicly such honesty and depth from so many people from so many different walks of life.

As an agnostic my preconceived ideas have taken quite a beating...The programme has begun to destroy my stereotypes. Thank you for this freedom.²²⁹

Since the mid-1970s, the Department has reduced the dominance of 'mainstream' Christian faith and thought in its programmes to give more space to religious traditions of the world other than Christian, to new religious movements and to contemporary expressions of individual spirituality, on the grounds that these constitute aspects of religious diversity in Australian society which the Department should acknowledge. In the 1970s, the Pentecostal churches in Australia began attracting more and more members. Pentecostalism world-wide was growing rapidly at a time when other Christian churches were losing members.²³⁰ One might have expected this development to have been given some prominence in the Department's broadcasts in the 1980s, but, in fact, these churches featured very little in programmes and we need to seek an explanation for this before closing our discussion.²³¹

The view was expressed in the Department that Pentecostalism, with its international resources, seemed well able to fund radio and television productions and purchase broadcast hours on commercial channels and stations, so that the Department did not think it necessary to allocate further time to it. In any case, the Pentecostal churches were not pressing for inclusion in ABC programmes.²³² There were two major obstacles within the ABC itself to the inclusion of Pentecostals in its programmes. First, their zeal for converts did not accord with the ABC's image of impartiality. The second obstacle lay in the incompatibility of their interpretations of Scripture and of the mission of the Christian church with those of modern, liberal Christianity, which had prevailed in the Department since it began.

Concluding comment

In spite of its small size and spare resources, the Religion Department of the ABC has been remarkably tenacious in its efforts to present religious faith and insights in ways that demonstrated their relevance to the realities of people's lives. In an evolving cultural context, this involved making choices that were far from simple. In different times and regimes, the Department shifted its emphases and used new words to

²²⁹ Excerpts from listeners' correspondence, n.d., File Search for Meaning, Religion Dept, Sydney.

²³⁰ Cf. ch. 7, fnn. 47, 60.

²³¹ Cf. review of 'Sunday Night Talk', 'Insights', 'Kronos', 'Encounter', Files of these programmes 1986-91, ABC Document Archives.

²³² Millikan, interview, 25.9.91.

express them; yet it maintained a remarkable consistency of vision and orientation, such that John Munro, James Peter and Patrick Kirkwood all applauded what they heard on radio under David Millikan's leadership.²³³ With its productive mix of creativity and steadfastness, the Department, despite its flaws and errors, has indeed made an outstanding contribution to the religious vitality of Australia in both public and private spheres.

²³³ Munro, Peter, Kirkwood, interviews, 21.7.89, 31.5.89 and 28.7.89 respectively.

CHAPTER 11

EPILOGUE AND CONCLUSION

Epilogue

In July 1993, ABC staff were notified of a number of decisions taken by radio management concerning some changes in policy and organisation and the allocation of funds in the coming period. The programme areas hardest hit by what was proposed were Arts and Drama (including Light Entertainment, Documentaries and Features), Religion and Science. The Federal Government had committed funds to the ABC for 1993-4 which represented an approximate 2% increase over the previous year. Television and radio had each received roughly the same increase, but it had been decided at the top levels of radio management that capital investment would be increased by more than 18% and Triple J-FM expanded, at the expense of other networks, particularly Radio National and ABC-FM.¹

The proposals stirred strong and widespread protests from staff members, which took the form of union and sector meetings, the publication of position papers, submissions to management and the Board and public demonstrations of staff solidarity against decisions which, they claimed, imperilled ABC Radio.² They deplored, in particular, the assault on Radio National and its specialist production units, which were the source of the network's capacity to put to air a wide range of creative and authoritative programmes, and so the source of its strength and international reputation.

The General Manager of Radio National, Norman Swan, announced a number of measures to streamline the organisation of this network. Among these was a proposal to abolish the position of Specialist Editor in both the Religion and Science production units. The remaining staff in these two units were to join with those specialising in social history and women's programmes under a single Manager-Editor. The position of producer of religious programmes based in Western Australia was also to be eliminated.³

There could be no doubt that these changes would have severe consequences for the Department. An already stretched, small production unit could not lose two positions and sustain its present levels of production, despite management's assertions

1 ABC National Officer, Public Sector Union, 'Bulletin', 5.7.93.

2 Board members, arriving at the ABC Centre in Sydney for their monthly meeting on July 13, were met in the foyer by staff gathered en masse to present them with a dossier, entitled 'Radio in Peril', and a dramatic portrayal of the funeral rites of Radio National.

3 ABC National Officer, Public Sector Union, 'Bulletin', 5.7.93; 'Radio in Peril', 13.7.93.

that it could.⁴ Just when the spiritual and moral claims of the Aboriginal people were high on the nation's agenda, Western Australia's particular potential for contributing to religious broadcasts on these themes was to be disregarded. The Department's ability to offer a genuinely national service would be further eroded.⁵ The Specialist Editor was providing the Department with essential intellectual and administrative leadership, was directly involved in management decisions affecting the Department's staff, budgets and schedules and, as well, was a programme producer. This leadership, this level of participation in management, this programme production would all be lost to the Department with the abolition of this position.

The staff of the Department vigorously pressed their case against the proposals. Like others in Radio National, they agreed that management structures within this network were unwieldy and needed some reform, but not at the price of further weakening and diminishing religious broadcasting in the structures and programmes of ABC Radio. Management's public protestations that there was no wish to see the Religion Department anything but 'intact and strong'⁶ and that religious programmes were considered 'central to Radio National's output'⁷ rang rather hollow in the ears of staff members and their listeners, considering the proposals just announced and previous decisions which had reduced the range of religious broadcasts and their access to audiences.⁸

Throughout July, media commentators in the secular and religious press reported on this crisis in ABC Radio and offered their analyses of the proposed changes and their implications.⁹ Religious leaders around the country - Christian, Jewish and Moslem - made public statements and wrote letters to the management and Board of the ABC decrying any lessening of the status of religious broadcasting and reminding them of promises they had made to maintain the strength and integrity of the Department.

⁴ Both the Science and Religion units described management's expectations in this regard as unrealistic. Cf. 'Radio in Peril' 13.7.93.

⁵ The decision not to maintain a producer of religious programmes in Tasmania had been taken in 1985. Cf. Religion Dept conference, Minutes, Aug. 1985.

⁶ N. Swan, letter to *Australian Jewish News*, Sydney Edition, 16.7.93.

⁷ N. Swan, letter to *Australian*, 16.7.93.

⁸ These were discussed in chs 9, 10.

⁹ Cf. R. Ackland, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5.7.93; C. Baxter, *Catholic Weekly*, 7.7.93; V. Alhadeff, *Australian Jewish News*, Sydney Edition, 9.7.93; G. Davis, *Church Scene*, 9.7.93; J. S. Murray, *Weekend Australian*, 10-11.7.93; G. Williams, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13.7.93; E. Simper, *Australian*, 13.7.93 and *Weekend Australian*, 24-25.7.93; R. Owen, *Catholic Leader*, 21.7.93.

At its meeting on July 13, the Board, under the Chairmanship of Professor Mark Armstrong,¹⁰ affirmed 'the ABC's strong commitment to high quality radio broadcasting and to Radio National, in particular' and declined to approve some of radio management's proposals. It declared its support for 'the maintenance of separate and distinct specialist units including Science and Religion' and called for continuing consultation between management and the staff and their unions.¹¹

In consequence of the interplay of the various forces and influences present in this most recent ferment in ABC Radio, the team of religious broadcasters has kept its Specialist Editor, Dr Paul Collins, and, at least until the end of 1993, he will retain the level of participation in management decisions that he has enjoyed since he became the first appointee to this position at the end of 1991.¹² His continuing role in management at a level which affords religious broadcasting adequate representation in programming decisions is not, however, secured in a new coherent structure; and, so long as it is not, the future of the specialist Religion Unit will remain precarious. It was likely that, with the abolition of his post as Specialist Editor, Paul Collins would have become the Manager-Editor of religious, science, social history and women's programmes.¹³ As such, he would surely have supported religious broadcasting, but there was no assurance in this of a reliable future for religious programmes.¹⁴ Australian religious broadcasters would have been, like their New Zealand counterparts, dependent on the personal qualities and capacities of management appointees, lacking adequate structural protection of their identity and role and, therefore, without guaranteed access to the resources necessary to keep their productions on air.

Although this episode lies outside the period, 1941-91, to which our account of ABC religious broadcasting has been largely confined, its relevance to that account is obvious. Indeed, all the significant issues of those fifty years are contained in it, explicitly or implicitly. At the same time, it points to a future in which the producers of religious programmes, and other specialist programme makers, can have little confidence as long as ABC management does not acknowledge the significance of their work for the Australian community in a way that matches words with deeds and provides them with appropriate security of status in the structures of the institution.

¹⁰ The *Financial Review*, 14.7.93, published a strong article from Armstrong in which he insisted on the necessity of the ABC's continuing to be comprehensive in its programming and 'willingly tied to intellectual, informative, artistic and non-commercial content'.

¹¹ ABC Media Liaison Officer, 'Media press release', 14.7.93.

¹² R. Nichols, personal interview, Sydney, 16.8.93.

¹³ R. Ackland, 5.7.93, based on a view widely held in Radio National.

¹⁴ 'I can assure you that the Religion Department will remain intact and strong,' wrote N. Swan, GM Radio National, to *Australian Jewish News*, Sydney Edition, 16.7.93.

Meanwhile, religious broadcasters, and their listeners and allies in the community, will need to be vigilant and vigorous in opposing any further weakening of their position.

Conclusion

This account of ABC religious broadcasting began with two main assertions. First, the ABC has an obligation under its Charter to provide the resources and opportunities needed to ensure that the religious dimensions of Australian culture and society are reflected in its programmes. Secondly, it has remained faithful to this obligation because skilled specialist staff have devoted themselves both to producing appropriate programmes and to resisting moves as they occurred, inside and outside the ABC, that would eliminate or erode their function in the institution and in society.

The ensuing chapters presented an historical study of this unique agent of religious communication in modern Australia, exploring the range of its endeavours in religious broadcasting, at the same time discovering the complex interaction of elements, favourable and obstructive, influencing its achievement in this regard.

For the ABC as a whole, these influences have been the Australian society and culture in which it is immersed, the competitive broadcasting environment in which it must work, its Charter, the ethos of the BBC which informed its development, and Federal Governments with their power to legislate, control funds and appoint members of the Commission (or Board). Since the 1960s, the rate of diversification in the society and culture of Australia, in its broadcasting system and in communications technology has greatly increased. In these changing circumstances and conditions, the ABC has been challenged to renew its commitment to public service of the Australian people.

The Religion Department, as part of the ABC, has been subject to these same influences. Because of its specific orientation, however, its work has been shaped particularly in relation to the religious communities in Australia and all those with an interest in religious and spiritual perceptions of reality. These have become considerably more diverse in the last twenty five years. Religious programming has also been affected by increased secularisation in Australian society over the same period. Within the ABC, secularist values, along with new management philosophies and systems since 1983, have made their impact.

With a view to present circumstances and future possibilities, this study concludes now with some observations on three issues of major importance to ABC religious broadcasting, which have emerged from our reading of the past.

First, it is clear that Australians have been able to benefit from a continuous, comprehensive religious broadcasting service only because the ABC has existed. For

over sixty years, it has been funded and managed well enough to have prospered and expanded into a sophisticated communications network able to link even the most remote outback settlements with the world abroad. This institution has been the guarantee in Australia of professional religious broadcasting of national and international scope and significance.

The future of broadcasts of this range and quality depends on the ABC's continuing integrity as a national public broadcaster with a Charter demanding comprehensive programming appropriate to Australia's society and culture; and on its maintaining its capacity to respond to this demand with authority and independence. Production units of skilled specialists are central to the enterprise; and their security and claims to a fair share of the available resources need to be structurally guaranteed within the organisation.

The second matter of substance is closely connected with the first. It is concerned with the number of times, in the past ten years, that ABC managers have insisted, in verbal assurances to the Religion Department and its listeners, that management had no desire, or intention, to damage religious broadcasting, even while changes in structures and programmes with obvious deleterious consequences were being proposed. How might one explain this disturbing discrepancy between assertions and deeds? Setting aside the suggestion that managers were being less than honest on these occasions - although some people have certainly come to this view¹⁵ - a different explanation may emerge from considering particular features of ABC management over this period.

The creative production of programmes has always been the central purpose of the ABC. Efficacious management of an enterprise of creative people, with their different specialisations and personal visions, is a difficult business of constantly seeking and finding the acceptable compromise in the midst of inevitably conflicting priorities. 1983 heralded a new era of corporate management in the ABC aimed at a re-organisation that would achieve optimum productivity from staff by the most cost-effective means. The structures and processes of a public service bureaucracy gave way to methods of management advocated by business administration theorists of the day. Whereas, formerly, staff could aspire to a permanent career in the ABC, more and more new appointments were made on the basis of relatively short-term contracts. A contract could be renewed, providing that the particular project was continuing, that management had not decided to abolish the position, and that the incumbent had satisfied those empowered to assess his, or her, performance.

¹⁵ Cf. J.S. Murray, 'Losing faith in the ABC', *Weekend Australian*, 10-11.7.93.

Whatever dynamism and competence were injected into the institution by putting managers on contract, there were other consequences also. Changes of personnel in management positions occurred much more frequently than in the past. The system encouraged managers, certain of only a short term in office in which to prove themselves, to make their mark with new initiatives, while not having to deal with the longer-term consequences of their decisions. Managers whose tenure was dependent on the approval of certain identifiable others in the corporation were, also, generally disposed to please rather than offend those with power to affect their employment status. In these circumstances, the collective memory in management circles became shorter, the voices of long experience less welcome and heeded, and relationships in the institution less reliable. Promises made in one year could be overlooked in the next; proposals successfully resisted by staff at one time could be presented again, as though new, not long afterwards. In a situation of intense concentration on the goals and values of corporate management, the prolonged effects of a change of structure, or procedure, on a specialised programme department could simply escape consideration. Finally, if, within the structures of power, the importance of religion in Australian culture and society was little comprehended or valued, this could inform management decisions without particular managers' having this attitude of mind themselves.

In this system, there is a bias towards constant change, an implicit threat to anything long-enduring. We have said earlier that religious broadcasting can go on with the scope and quality it has had in the past, only if the ABC continues to be faithful to its traditions of comprehensive public service. Now it must be said that management theories and methods currently in vogue in the ABC put these prospects seriously at risk.

The last important issue concerns the responses of the Religion Department itself to the challenge to be, and to be seen to be, both comprehensive and balanced in its programming.

As we have seen, until the 1970s, the religious perspective of the Department's programmes was 'mainstream' Christian, justified by census reports indicating the religious affiliations of Australians as proportions of the total population.¹⁶ More precisely, the Department projected in its programmes the beliefs, ethics, devotions and social attitudes of those who formed the liberal Christian consensus in the community. It claimed that it was achieving a balanced comprehensiveness with these policies. There were, however, two weaknesses in this approach: the religious

¹⁶ John Munro's aspirations to modify this perspective were not realised to any significant extent in this period.

perceptions of small groupings, both Christian and other, were rarely, or never, heard; and Christians of the 'mainstream' who did not concur with the liberal consensus were largely absent from programmes, also.

In more recent years, as the religious life of Australians became much more diverse and less attached to the conventional 'mainstream', the Department responded more freely with programmes exploring this religious plurality. It continued generally to align itself with liberal Christian views of the time; and it took a stronger journalistic approach to all religious institutions and movements. However, non-Christian religious traditions and new religious movements, all with relatively small memberships, as well as idiosyncratic spiritual journeys of individuals, were allocated more air-time than their proportion in the population would have warranted. These new developments inevitably displaced some programmes closely tied to 'mainstream' Christian traditions. Census numbers became less influential in determining balance in programming. The Department depended rather on its other guidelines for deciding on the content of programmes: cultural and social trends, as appraised by the Department and sources of analysis available to it; topical and newsworthy subjects; the Department's perceptions of the needs for community education on certain matters; the continuing need people had for inspiration; the knowledge, capabilities and interests of particular staff members themselves.

The application of census numbers to programme planning had always been less objective than it seemed. Quite apart from the subjective content in people's responses to the question on religious affiliation, the interpretation and use of the data by the Department involved subjective thought and judgment.¹⁷ Furthermore, as we have already noted, even when working within the frame of the census data, the Department still favoured certain interpretations of 'mainstream' Christianity over others. It should not be assumed that, in having less regard for the census numbers in later years, the Department necessarily made more subjective and partial decisions than in earlier times.

Even so, the practice of relating its overall production to the census data was accepted for a long time in the Department, the ABC and the wider society, as an impartial check on the balance of content in the Department's programmes. Importantly, it was a symbol of its concern to be seen to be reasonable, and accountable to the society it served, in its allocation of limited air-time.

The FRAC, comprising people of repute and good standing in their religious communities, had symbolic value also. The practical effectiveness of the Committee was constrained by its strictly advisory status, its meeting only annually and the

¹⁷ Cf. ch. 5, 'According to the census'.

limitations of its members. Even as we concede this, however, we need also to appreciate its value as a symbol of the Department's wish for regular review of its religious programmes by competent members of the public.

Both of these policies of the ABC - reference to the census statistics and to the FRAC - also signified the Department's concern to sustain a co-operative alliance with the well-established religious communities in Australia.

These symbols are gone; and their practical usefulness now is doubtful. Sociological research into religious beliefs and practices has been steadily growing in Australia since the 1970s, providing more precise information about the religious affiliations of Australians than the census could, and, indeed, correcting false impressions conveyed by the census data.¹⁸ The religious diversification that has occurred, in the last twenty years, across Australia and within many of its religious communities, has made the formation of an efficient and broadly acceptable advisory committee a more complex and questionable project than it was in the past.

Although these earlier structures are no longer in place, what they signified remains important, however. They were public evidence that the Department was aware of its interdependent relationship with the Australian people, and particularly with Australia's major religious institutions. The Department needs the strong, genuine collaboration of organised religion, if it is to remain a significant agent of religious communication in Australia.

Just as the Science Department depends on the science establishment, or the Sports Department on the sports establishment, so the Religion Department needs the religious establishment of Australia, to offer events, personalities and achievements of sufficient stature for a national broadcaster.¹⁹

Institutions respond most easily to other institutions.²⁰ The risk of erosion of the Department's identity is greater the more its constituency of support is detached from the major religious traditions and becomes less institutional.

Further research and development

With the completion of this fifty-year history of religious broadcasting for adults on ABC radio, there remains a number of aspects of ABC religious programmes meriting further research. The story of religious programming on ABC television has yet to be told. Forty years of religious broadcasting to children is a contribution to religious education in Australia well worth examination and appraisal. The role of ABC religious broadcasts in the lives of rural Australians would be a fascinating field of

¹⁸ Cf. ch. 7, 'Religious plurality in Australia'.

¹⁹ Alan Ashbolt, personal interview, 11.12.92.

²⁰ Ashbolt, interview, 11.12.92.

study. As well as these topics which have not been dealt with in this account at all, there are other themes in this work which might be probed in greater detail: for example, the comparison of the ABC Religion Department with that of the BBC, or with another ABC department such as Science; or the contribution of the ABC to ecumenical reconciliation and unity among religious communities in Australia; or the role of mass media in helping isolated people to feel a sense of belonging to a community. A close study of particular long-running and very popular programmes might offer valuable insights into the art of effective religious communication.

It is to be hoped that more studies will be made of this and other specialist production sectors of the ABC, to draw public attention to the vital and extensive contribution they have made to Australian society. The ABC's unique identity lies in its mandate to be comprehensive. The more faithful it is to this mandate, the more its singular and respected place in Australian culture and society is assured, as future generations, like past generations, recognise and appreciate its commitment to their diverse interests and needs.

APPENDIX I
CHAIRMEN AND CHAIRWOMEN (COMMISSION/BOARD)

1932-4	C. Lloyd Jones.
1934-45	W. J. Cleary.
1946-61	R. Boyer.
1961-7	J. A. Darling.
1967-73	R. Madgwick.
1973-5	R. Downing.
1975-6	E. Hackett (acting).
1976 (July-Dec.)	H. Bland.
1976-81	J. D. Norgard.
1981-3	L. Kramer.
1983-6	K. Myer.
1986 (Apr.-July)	W. McCarthy (acting).
1986 (July-Oct.)	D. Hill.
1987-91	R. Somerville.
1991-	M. Armstrong.

**GENERAL MANAGERS (COMMISSION) and
MANAGING DIRECTORS (BOARD)**

1932-3	H. P. Williams, GM.
1933-5	W. T. Conder, GM.
1935-64	C. Moses, GM.
1965-82	T. Duckmanton, GM.
1982-3	S. Revell, A/GM.
1983	K. Jennings, GM. [Transition to Corporation]
1984-6	G. Whitehead, MD.
1986-	D. Hill, MD.

APPENDIX II
HEADS OF RELIGION DEPARTMENT

[1941 1943	K. T. Henderson, Editor of Special Talks, Melbourne. Henderson made responsible for religious programmes.]
1949-56	Kenneth T. Henderson.
1956-61	John Munro.
1961-77	James Peter.
1977-86	Patrick Kirkwood.
1986-91	David Millikan.
1991-	Paul Collins.

APPENDIX III
LIST OF PERSONAL INTERVIEWS

Religion Department

FORMER STAFF

1. Morris Bills (SA), 16.5.89.
2. David Collier (SA), 18.5.89.
3. Patrick Kirkwood (NSW), 9.5.89, 29.5.89, 28.7.89, 14.11.89.
4. Maureen McInerney (NSW), 18.4.89.
5. Lawrence McIntosh (Vic.), 19.6.89.
6. John Munro (Qld), 21.7.89.
7. John Nicholson (Vic.), 23.6.89.
8. James Peter (NSW), 31.5.89, 3.8.92.
9. Ross Saunders (NSW), 10.9.92.
10. Dagmar Strauss (Vic.), 23.12.91.
11. Jan Taylor (NSW), 22.3.90.
12. Geoffrey Ward (WA), 8.5.89.

CURRENT STAFF (at time of interview)

1. Bronwyn Allen (SA), 19.5.89.
2. John Cleary (NSW), 13.3.89, 25.9.91, 31.10.91.
3. Paul Collins (NSW), 8.5.89, 26.10.91.
4. John Fleming (NSW), 13.2.89.
5. Neil Gill (Vic.), 22.6.89.
6. Stephen Godley (NSW), 31.10.91.
7. Caroline Jones (NSW), 6.9.89.
8. Kay McLennan (Vic.), 17.6.89, 7.4.93.
9. David Millikan (NSW), 14.4.90, 25.9.91, 9.10.91.
10. Michael Mullins (NSW), 20.4.89.
11. Ronald Nichols (NSW), 24.2.89, 3.3.89, 7.4.89, 20.7.89.
12. Frank Sheehan (WA), 8.5.89.
13. Florence Spurling (Qld), 20.7.89.
14. Stephen Watkins (SA), 22.5.89.

Other sectors of ABC

FORMER STAFF

1. Allan Ashbolt (NSW), 11.12.92.
2. John Challis (NSW), 27.4.89.
3. Neil Hutchison (NSW), 6.11.91.
4. Darrell Miley (NSW), 7.11.91.

CURRENT STAFF (at time of interview)

1. Malcolm Long (NSW), 22.1.92.
2. Stuart Revill (NSW), 5.11.91.
3. Norman Swan (NSW), 22.11.91.
4. Marius Webb (NSW), 8.12.92.

Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand

1. David England (Auckland), 5.5.91.
2. Gavin McGinley (Wellington), 9.5.91.
3. Errol Pyke (Wellington), 9.5.91.

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