1-1-2001

Why people don't go to church : a study of factors associated with non-participation and participation in church in Australia

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WHY PEOPLE DON'T GO TO CHURCH

A study of factors associated with non-participation and participation in church in Australia

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Perth, W.A.

December 2001

ABSTRACT

Church-based religion in the western world is considered by many sociologists to be in decline. The causes of this decline have been linked to secularising processes such as institutional differentiation, urbanisation, industrialisation, and the rise of scientific rationalism.

The primary research aim of this study is to identify what contribution the religious beliefs of individuals, their demographic characteristics, their work and leisure patterns, their attitudes and experiences of churches and their experience of the urban environment, make towards understanding patterns of non-participation and participation in local churches.

A secondary research aim is to identify to what extent theories of secularisation and other theories of religious change receive support from these empirical findings, as well as from other social surveys and historical sources examined in the study.

In order to address the primary research aim, a random sample, community survey was carried out. This survey included a wide range of questions covering the issues designated for research, as well as eliciting stated reasons for non-participation. This survey differs from many others in that it was limited to selected local areas, enabling some assessment to be made of the impact of the physical characteristics of these local areas on church attendance patterns.

Initially the data analysis focuses on bivariate relationships between particular characteristics of respondents and their extent of church participation. Thereafter, the data are subjected to multi-variate analysis, in order to identify the contribution of each variable while controlling for the effects of other variables. Path analysis and partial correlations are used to begin to identify the likely causal links between variables in the study.

The study concludes that the certainty and salience of traditional religious beliefs and practices make the greatest contribution towards explaining patterns of church participation and non-participation. While the relationship between beliefs and non-participation can be shown to conform with secularisation theory, there are doubts about the direction of causality. There is evidence of the significant impact of religious socialisation during childhood on later patterns of participation and non-participation, and the likelihood of further declines in church attendance levels due to cohort differences.

Many of the variables traditionally associated with conventional secularisation theory such as education, workforce involvement and aspects of urbanisation offer only a partial explanation of non-participation in church. By comparison, variables associated with leisure, material goals and the pursuit of happiness are more strongly related to church participation at the individual level. These provide evidence of other ways in which modernity interacts with religion to produce secularisation, apart from the rising tide of rationality associated with modernity.

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(i)   incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: CHURCH ATTENDANCE IN AUSTRALIA

The years since the Second World War have seen a remarkable array of changes to the way Australians live. A range of new technology has become available to ordinary Australians. The car, TV and household appliances have changed the way we live. The computer is fast becoming part of our way of life. Global communications continue to advance, drawing individuals, households and companies together in an increasingly smaller world.

There have been major social changes. The introduction of the contraceptive pill and the 'sexual revolution' of the 1960s have had a significant impact on relationships and family life. Women have entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, changing child-rearing practices and expectations of family life.

Attendance at church services is an important public expression of religious faith by individuals and the main regular corporate gathering of Christian believers. A concurrent social change has been a decline in church attendance in many Western countries, including Australia. Social surveys show that the proportion of the Australian population claiming to attend church at least once per month has decreased dramatically, from 47% in 1950 to 20% in 1998.

There has been a great deal of alarm and concern among church leaders in the wake of such massive declines. The title of the book, *Can God Survive in Australia?* (Wilson, 1983) captures that mood; written by an Anglican clergyman, it suggests that many Australians have found they can happily live with only a vague sense of God, far from any firm sense of commitment which would be needed for regular church attendance (Wilson, 1983: 101).

THE PATTERN OF DECLINE

'Church attendance' usually means the number of people attending church worship services. While it is increasingly common for churches to record average attendances, the main way in which adult attendance is measured in the community is by means of sample surveys.

Sample surveys using the Gallup poll method have been carried out among Australian adults since the 1940s. A question about the respondent's general frequency of church attendance has been asked periodically since 1950. Similar questions about the frequency of attendance have also been used in other sample surveys, such as the 1983 Australian Values Study Survey, 1993 National Social Science Survey and 1998 Australian Community Survey. Responses to these questions allow the creation of comparable statistics of weekly church attendance and attendance at least monthly. Further details about these surveys are provided in the Appendix.

Murray Goot has documented the general declines in church attendance after the Second World War, as measured by these random sample surveys of Australians. The general pattern of decline shows that attendance dropped from some 47% of the population attending monthly or more often in 1950 to 33% by 1971 (Goot, 1987: 437-438). Table 1.1 shows that this had declined still further to 27% by the early 1980s and to 20% by 1998.

Weekly church attendances have declined in a similar way. Table 1.1 shows that the proportion of respondents claiming to attend church weekly or more often has declined from a high of 27% in 1961 to 13% in 1998. Other sample survey evidence collected over the period suggests a steep decline in weekly attendance. A number of Gallup polls since the Second World War asked respondents whether they had attended church in the past week. The percentage of people who said that they attended church in the past week dropped from 30% in 1960, to 25% in 1970 and to 19% in 1980 (Goot, 1987: 437-438).

Table 1.1

CHURCH ATTENDANCE LEVELS AMONG ADULT AUSTRALIANS

Year	Percent attending at least monthly (%)	Percent attending at least weekly (%)
1950	47	23
1961	-	27
1971	33	21
1983	27	21
1993	24	18
1995	25	17
1998	20	13

Sources: 1950, 1961 and 1971 Gallup polls; 1983 Australian Values Study Survey; 1993 National Social Science Survey; 1995 World Values Survey; 1998 Australian Community Survey.

It is likely that the proportion of the population currently attending church is even less than these statistics suggest. Kaldor *et al*. (1994, 259-262) have found that church attendance estimates derived from sample surveys in Australia have been inflated compared to head counts and estimates obtained from clergy. It is likely that the percentage of the population attending church monthly or more at the present time is more in the range of 15-20%.

Declines in church attendance are not simply a reflection of changing religious identification as measured in the Census of Population and Housing. McCallum notes a decline in church attendance even among those who identify with a Christian denomination, from 25% attending church once per week or more in 1967 to 18% attending church once per week or more in 1985. At the same time, there has been an increase in the proportion going less than once a year, from 29% to 39% of the population (McCallum, 1986: 8).

It also appears that declines in church participation have not been uniform across various sections of the population. The 1966 Religion in Australia Survey found that church

participation levels were very similar across all age groups (Mol, 1971: 35). By 1983, however, a very different picture had emerged; people aged in their 20s and 30s were so under-represented in church life as to be referred to as a 'missing generation', a situation that has persisted to the present day (Kaldor, 1987: 158-161; Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 280).

The rate of church attendance also varies significantly from one type of community to another. People in 'blue-collar' communities are much less likely to attend church than are people in 'white-collar' communities. A major survey of Anglican and Protestant church life in Australia, the 1991 National Church Life Survey, showed that weekly Anglican and Protestant church attendance is as low as 13 per 1000 people in blue-collar areas of Sydney such as Liverpool, Fairfield, Campbelltown and Blacktown, and as high as 72 per 1000 people in white-collar areas such as Ku-ring-gai (Kaldor and Castle, 1995). This scenario is repeated across Australia, with higher attendance levels being reported in white-collar areas than blue-collar areas, and in areas with older populations compared to younger ones.

WHY HAS CHURCH ATTENDANCE DECLINED?

The main task of this thesis is to identify and consider what are the main factors behind these declines in church attendance. It does so by examining empirical evidence gathered through social surveys of the population, as well as evidence from historical sources. This approach seeks to establish the relationships that exist between church attendance on the one hand and a host of variables on the other hand. Where possible, changes over time in these relationships are highlighted and explored.

Theories regarding religious change are discussed in the light of this empirical evidence. Perhaps the leading theory that has been advanced to explain the decline in church attendance is the theory of secularisation, a theory much developed during the late 1960s through the work of Peter Berger (1969), David Martin (1978), Bryan Wilson (1966) and Thomas Luckmann (1969) among others. In its simplest form, secularisation can be

defined as the decline of religion in the face of rising modernity, though it has been acknowledged that this definition lacks analytical precision (Chaves, 1989: 464). Secularisation can be conceived as a multi-faceted process having societal, institutional and personal dimensions, of which church attendance forms part of the personal dimension (Dobbelaere, 1981). Definitions of secularisation and the application of secularisation theory in this thesis are discussed in Chapter 2.

Declines in church attendance can also potentially be explained in terms of other theories. The decline in the importance of the churches has been theorised as part of the transformation or evolution of religion more generally, rather than as a decline in religion. While the institutional churches may be in decline, it could be that most people remain influenced by private forms of religion or spirituality. People may create their own private meaning from a variety of sources rather than relying upon a system of religious belief advocated by the churches (Luckmann, 1967: 99; Bibby, 1987: 144-149). Or people may 'believe without belonging', following forms of religion without any church commitment (Davie, 1994: 75-84).

Others theorists have seen post-War declines in church attendance as being the result of short-term shifts in values in Western society rather than long-term, continuous processes associated with modernisation. Robert Wuthnow (1976) collected empirical evidence in the United States to suggest that the acceptance of counter-culture values among youth during the 1960s explains their non-participation in church life.

Other theorists propose that declines in church attendance have more to do with the churches themselves than societal processes associated with secularisation. Kelley (1972) proposed that 'strict' churches with clear-cut systems of meaning, high expectations of individual commitment and a willingness to proselytise are much more likely to be growing than their more liberal or mainstream counterparts. Drawing on marketplace economic theory, Iannacone (1994) has argued that the strictness of such churches acts like an entry fee, discouraging those not seriously interested. Such churches are able to demand more of their members but at the same time promise more by way of spiritual

rewards for religious 'consumers'. Change in the level of church attendance is thus explained in terms of the presence or absence of such churches. Stark and Bainbridge (1985) suggest that proponents of secularisation theory have underestimated the impact of new religions and sects, which continue to grow and develop in modern society.

This and other explanations for declining church attendance will also be examined in this thesis.

STUDYING THE REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

The survey data examined in this thesis has been gathered among individuals and as such reflect beliefs, attitudes and behaviours at the time of the survey. By contrast, the social processes that cause secularisation are found at the societal level and are often historical in nature. Therefore, variables that directly measure the effects of such social processes are generally unavailable for inclusion in an analysis of sample survey data of the population. Two approaches have generally been used in this thesis to identify possible links between social processes associated with secularisation and declining church attendance.

The first approach involves examining comparable survey data from one period of time with another, to see if various indicators of religious belief and practice have increased or decreased over time, and to identify theories that are most consistent with these changes. Some work has already been done in Australia in this regard, comparing time series data from the 1960s with data from the 1980s and 1990s (McCallum, 1986; Wilson, 1983). But extensive investigation along these lines is difficult due to a lack of such data in any depth or quality, as well as the relatively short time frame in which to examine what is perhaps a longer term phenomenon.

A second approach is to examine the relationship between church attendance and other variables in the lives of individuals, particularly those variables that could reflect the influence of secularisation processes. For example, one such variable is the length of

residence of a respondent; changing of address has been hypothesised to result in the breakdown of community-based behaviour patterns, such as church attendance (Bibby, 1997; Wuthnow and Christiano, 1979). Increased mobility is a manifestation of urbanisation, which has been theorised as a leading cause of secularisation. Thus the strength of the relationship between church attendance and mobility provides some indirect evidence of the influence of secularisation processes on church attendance.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Chapters 2 to 4 of this thesis discuss the theory of secularisation, its scope and limitations in understanding reasons for non-participation in church life in Australia. Making use of both historical and contemporary data, this section of the thesis explores the relationship between processes associated with secularisation and church attendance levels.

Chapters 5 to 13 examines a range of factors and their relationship to church attendance across five broad areas, namely:
- patterns of belief,
- age and socio-economic status,
- work and leisure,
- the institutional church,
- the urban environment.

Further details about these five areas are outlined below.

Chapter 14 considers the stated reasons given by respondents for why they are not more involved in churches. Chapter 15 explores the relative importance of variables affecting non-participation in church life and Chapter 16 draws together conclusions from the research presented in this thesis, and outlines possible directions for future research.

Patterns of Belief

Previous research in Australia has noted the strong relationship between holding traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance (eg. Hughes *et al.*, 1995: 40). Yet Australia is a country where religiosity is quite widespread beyond a church involvement. For instance, the majority of Australians believe in the existence of God or a spiritual power of some kind, see religion as important to their lives and identify with a Christian denomination (Bouma and Dixon, 1986: 166).

Many versions of secularisation theory link declines in church attendance to the loss of religious belief. As modernity has increased, so religious thinking has progressively lost its grip over individuals, resulting in a decline in church participation. Examining this relationship is a central part of this thesis. This thesis will also consider whether non-participation in church is better explained by the growth of other forms of religion which have no connection to a church. There are high levels of adherence to traditional Christian beliefs to be found beyond churches. Is this part of a move towards more individualised religious expressions that do not come under institutional control? Such individualised religious expressions may or may not incorporate traditional Christian belief. This issue is taken up in Chapter 4.

It can be hypothesised that while many non-attenders and infrequent attenders have high levels of agreement with Christian beliefs, a cognitive aspect, the key reasons for their non-participation have more to do with:
- A lack of certainty about those beliefs,
- Religious beliefs being seen to have little salience for daily living.

According to this hypothesis, non-participation results not from the abandonment of traditional Christian beliefs but rather a decline in the certainty or importance of religious beliefs in everyday life. The certainty or salience of belief would thus emerge as a more important predictor of church participation than would simply assenting to particular beliefs. This issue is taken up in Chapter 5.

It can also be hypothesised that, among those infrequent church attenders or non-attenders who have high levels of Christian belief, most will have at one time been involved frequently in churches as adults or as children. Their reasons for non-participation may be linked to something other than a rejection of Christian beliefs, as might be assumed under particular versions of secularisation theory. This issue is further explored in Chapter 6.

Age and Socio-economic Status

Commentators on church life in Australia such as Kaldor (1987), Bentley and Hughes (1998) and Blombery (1989) have noted the relationship between church participation and the age of individuals. Those who are younger are less likely to attend churches than those who are older. This could be a generational effect, in which case church attendance levels would be expected to diminish among the members of each succeeding age cohort. But it could also reflect a life-stage effect, in which case people would be expected to return to church as they get older (Greeley, 1989: 10-11). The role of age in explaining non-participation and the possible mechanism by which age makes a difference, are discussed in Chapter 7.

Declines in church participation may also reflect changes in the age profile of the wider society, as well as within denominations. The higher levels of church attendance in the 1950s coincided with the beginnings of the 'baby boom' – the higher attendance levels among adults may reflect the higher numbers of children present in 1950s society, with people attending church more for the sake of their children (Bouma and Mason, 1995: 46). The thesis will outline the evidence for the continuation or otherwise of this 'child-rearing' effect on church participation.

Studies of participation in voluntary organisations have focused more on the impact of social class on participation than on any other variable (Smith and Freedman, 1972: 154).

As will be outlined in Chapter 8, theories regarding lower participation levels among lower socio-economic groups focus on the cumulative effects of economic restrictions, lack of education and psychological constraints on individual patterns of participation. Other theories focus on the culture of lower socio-economic groups and their preference for socially-centred or informal associations. In the Australian context, Kaldor (1987: 139-143) has theorised that highly educated people are more involved in churches because of their greater conceptual skills, higher literacy levels and greater familiarity with the procedures of formal organisations that are required. By contrast, working class associations tend to be more informal.

Some versions of secularisation theory identify a process whereby people are less likely to act from religious motivations and more likely to view the world in empirical and rational terms (eg. Wilson, 1966). Access to a secular education would be expected to aid such a process. This thesis also examines the relationship between levels of education, church attendance and Christian belief.

Work and Leisure

A number of sociologists have commented on the relationship between work and non-attendance at church (eg. Luckmann, 1967: 30). This is considered to be part of the way in which industrialisation has affected church attendance patterns as part of a process of secularisation, through the exposure of individuals to rational processes, as well as the differentiation of the churches from other institutions in society.

The thesis examines the strength of relationship between workforce involvement and non-participation in church and outlines the important role of work in accounting for gender differences in attendance. Among the many theories that have been advanced to explain the negative impact of workforce involvement on church attendance, the increased opportunity to fulfil personal material goals is explored empirically in this thesis. This discussion is documented in Chapters 8 and 9.

The inclusion in this thesis of the impact of leisure activity on church attendance reflects the observation of some historians that declines in church attendance have coincided with changes to leisure patterns (eg. Smith, 1987; Jackson, 1987). The relationship between leisure activities and church participation is also explored in Chapter 9.

Attitudes to and Experience of the Institutional Church

Having religious parents and a church involvement early in life would be expected to influence patterns of involvement later in life, just as a lack of such childhood involvement would also be expected to have a negative influence towards adult involvement. The presence or otherwise of a religious upbringing can be shown to have a significant impact on patterns of church participation. This introduces an important social question to the thesis: to what extent are people simply brought up to be church attenders, through the influence of parents and others encountered during childhood? The effect of religious socialisation is explored in Chapter 6.

An important distinction is made in the thesis between those who once had a frequent church involvement as an adult and those who were never involved frequently as an adult. Unlike childhood attendance, such involvement was more likely to be volitional not compulsory. It would be expected that former adult attenders would have very different reasons for non-participation than those who had no such involvement. The differences are explored in both Chapter 6 and Chapter 14.

The issue of a church upbringing also introduces the question of the part played by the quality of direct experience of the church institution in producing adult patterns of church participation. Or to put it negatively, to what extent has the church itself contributed to the declines in church attendance that have taken place? This issue is explored in Chapter 10.

Some commentators have accused the churches of failing to sufficiently modernise their styles of worship to meet the needs of younger church attenders. This may provide some explanation not only of the lower levels of church participation to be found among younger adults, but also of the rise of new denominations such as the Pentecostal denominations. There is empirical evidence both from Australia and overseas, that the internal life of churches does make a difference to church growth and decline. Churches are more likely to grow and attract newcomers where their styles of worship, leadership, direction and mission have particular key characteristics.

It can be hypothesised that the way the church is manifested institutionally may be associated with its success or otherwise among different demographic groups. Rather than being pushed to the margins of life because it is a religious institution per se, only those congregations that persist with outmoded forms of institutional life will tend to decline. An issue that follows is whether there are new, perhaps untried approaches to congregational life that may encourage non-attenders to consider a church involvement. The expectations that non-attenders and infrequent attenders have of churches are considered in this thesis, along with their reactions to new models of church life. These issues are discussed in Chapter 11.

The Urban Environment

Like industrialisation, urbanisation has been linked to declining church participation, by providing the conditions necessary for secularisation processes to take place. The creation of large cities has weakened familial and institutional ties and diminished the possibility of a single, agreed set of community values. Institutions thus no longer have the same role in the formation of individual consciousness or identity (Luckmann, 1967: 97).

The question can be raised as to whether urbanisation continues to have a secularising effect. One possibility is through the operation of the housing market, urban land release mechanisms and the creation of new dormitory suburbs on the outskirts of cities. The

large size of cities forces many people to live far from their place of work, exacerbating the demands placed on them through increased commuting time, and hence decreased discretionary time available for participation in church. Another possibility is the impact of changing residences on church attendance patterns (Wuthnow and Christiano, 1979). Urbanisation can induce people to break family and other relational ties through the need to move house. These issues are explored in Chapter 12.

The orientation of people towards their local neighbourhood may also play a role in their involvement in local associations such as churches. It can be theorised that the reduced importance of local community life has had an adverse impact on local community institutions such as the churches (Hughes, 1994). Others have theorised that aspects of local community design can have an effect on behaviour patterns, including participation in local institutions. These issues are explored in Chapter 13.

SOURCES OF DATA FOR THIS THESIS

1993 Western Sydney Survey

The main source of social survey data for this thesis has been the 1993 Western Sydney Survey, which was developed and conducted by the author. The Western Sydney Survey was a random sample survey of residents in the western and north-western parts of Sydney. Altogether, more than 1100 people responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 65%.

The primary aim of the survey was to explore reasons for non-participation in churches. Unlike nearly all other databases available for this thesis, the survey was purposely designed to explore this particular issue. The survey contained about 100 different items, enabling different variables to be compared for their explanatory power in relation to patterns of non-participation.

The Western Sydney Survey was conducted in outer suburban areas of Sydney. Two of the four sub-areas were 'blue-collar', low-income areas. One sub-area (Mt Druitt) contains a substantial mix of public housing. The remaining two sub-areas were predominantly 'white collar', middle income areas. As such, the respondents to the Western Sydney Survey do not form a national sample, but were gathered on an area basis with a view to relating area characteristics with patterns of participation and non-participation. This adds a significant dimension to the thesis, enabling exploration of the impact of the community environment on church attendance patterns, alongside dimensions of socialisation and belief that have traditionally been central to such work. It is possible to test some propositions in relation to the effect of the built environment on attendance patterns

Since the respondents to the Western Sydney Survey do not form a national sample, the results of the survey cannot be generalised to the entire population. However, relationships between the dependent variable (frequency of church attendance) and other variables generally conform with those obtained through national sample surveys.

Further details regarding the Western Sydney Survey, including the questions used in the survey, can be found in the Appendix to this thesis.

National Surveys

Data from a number of national sample surveys have been used in this thesis. The 1993 National Social Science Survey has been used as the main source of national comparison data, having been conducted in the same year as the Western Sydney Survey.

Other surveys to which reference has been made in this thesis include:
- Morgan Gallup polls conducted between 1946 and 1976,
- 1966 Religion in Australia Survey,

- 1983 Australian Values Study Survey,

- National Social Science Surveys: 1983, 1989-90 and 1993,

- 1995 World Values Survey,

- 1998 Australian Community Survey.

Data from the Census of Population and Housing have been occasionally used in this thesis. The Census is carried out every five years in Australia. The Census contains a question regarding religious identification that has been used to track religious change in Australia during the twentieth century.

Some reference has been made in this thesis to the 1991 and 1996 National Church Life Surveys and 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey, major surveys of Australian church attenders.

Details about all of these surveys can be found in the Appendix to this thesis.

SOME CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS THESIS

In social surveys, church attendance is often measured by a question where respondents are asked to nominate their usual frequency of church attendance by selecting from a series of categories ranging from 'never' through to 'weekly or more often'. Typically in Australian surveys, most people select a category such as 'never' or 'yearly or less often', with a large minority selecting categories at the 'weekly' end of the scale. The remainder of respondents are scattered among intervening categories such as 'monthly', 'several times a year', or 'special religious festivals only'.

The issue of non-participation in churches then is a matter of degree. While those who 'never' or 'hardly ever' attend churches can be clearly said to be non-participants, the same is not necessarily true of those who attend church occasionally. Such people may

well be 'regular' church attenders in the sense that they have always participated at such a level throughout their lives.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that people in different denominations have different expectations regarding the necessity of church attendance. Among people identifying with Anglican, Presbyterian or Uniting Churches, most would rarely or never attend church. But among people identifying with Catholic and other Protestant denominations, church attendance levels are generally higher (Bouma and Dixon, 1986; 8-9). Higher levels of attendance among people identifying with these latter denominations reflects the relatively high degree of importance placed upon church attendance by these churches.

But the presence of such differences means that it is hard to arrive at a definition of a 'regular churchgoer' that will satisfy all concerned. For instance, some Anglicans may well consider attendance at Christmas and Easter services to be a form of 'regular' churchgoing, while some Protestants would consider a person attending less than once a week to be in danger of 'backsliding'!

To enable the presentation of empirical results across a range of survey databases, the convention of grouping respondents into two categories has been adopted here: 'frequent church attenders' and 'infrequent and non-attenders'. Such categories provide consistency of discussion across surveys that may well have used differing church attendance questions. Those respondents attending at least once per month or more often have here been defined as 'frequent church attenders', while those respondents who attend church less often have been categorised as 'infrequent and non-attenders'.

The statistics presented in the tables in this thesis generally show the two categories of frequent attenders and infrequent and non-attenders. Similar conventions have been adopted in other sociological works, to facilitate discussion of issues related to church participation in terms of groups of people rather than as a pattern of behaviour (eg. Bentley *et al.*, 1992: 25; Mol, 1985: 26).

Nevertheless the correlations presented in the tables in this thesis are based upon the full church participation variable, not simply the two combined categories shown in the tables. The relationships between church participation and the variables examined in this thesis are generally linear in the sense that each variable increases (or decreases) with increasing levels of church participation.

Gamma is the correlation coefficient shown in most tables throughout this thesis. Gamma is a suitable correlation coefficient to use with ordinal data, as are mostly found here, and is the preferred measure of association when variables have relatively few categories (de Vaus, 1985: 134-135). Its absolute value ranges from 0 (where the variables are completely independent) to 1 (where there is a perfect association between two variables).

For independent variables where the data are categorical rather than ordinal, the Cramer's V or phi correlation coefficients have been used as the measures of association with church attendance.

Where the correlations between variables shown in tables are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, this has been indicated by a footnote accompanying the table. It should be noted, however, that some of these correlations would also be significant at more stringent levels such as $p < 0.01$.

CHAPTER 2: SECULARISATION

The Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne, Sir Frank Little urged Christians to preserve the symbols of the faith from 'attacks of the secular culture', such as the Crown casino (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 December 1995).

Peter Jensen, the Anglican theologian, believed 'the results of a recent values survey suggest that Australia is the Western world's most secular nation' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February 1985).

It is accepted wisdom that Australia is a secular society. But in what ways has Australia become so secular as to earn the reputation of being the 'most secular' of Western nations? And how important is the notion of secularisation to an understanding of why people do not attend church in Australia?

The theory of secularisation forms an important backdrop to this thesis. Secularisation has been suggested as a primary explanation for church decline; indeed, declining church attendances are seen as part of the wider process of secularisation.

WHAT IS SECULARISATION?

An agreed definition of secularisation has proven to be elusive. In an early review of the literature, Larry Shiner (1967) identified six different definitions used by various scholars. Since Shiner's article was published, definitional issues have continued to plague discussions about secularisation (see, for example, Johnson, 1980: 328-331; Yamane, 1997). The six definitions of secularisation identified by Shiner are outlined below and provide a starting point for a discussion about secularisation.

1. The decline of religion

The first definition is that secularisation involves the decline of religion. What is meant by the decline of religion, is that, 'the previously accepted symbols, doctrines and institutions lose their prestige and influence' (Shiner, 1967: 209). The decline of religion may involve declines in religious practice, such as church attendance, and a weakening of religious institutions. It may also involve a decline in religious thinking - people are less likely to act from religious motivations and more likely to view the world in increasingly empirical and rational terms (Wilson, 1966: 10; Crippen, 1988: 319).

Similar definitions have been used by sociologists. Peter Berger (1967: 107) defined secularisation as 'the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols'. Bryan Wilson (1966: 14) defined secularisation as, 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance'. Under this definition, secularisation involves the relentless rise of rationality in all areas of life, at the expense of traditional or religious thinking. As a consequence, church attendance begins to decline as people no longer agree with religious thinking or no longer see it as of particular relevance to their lives.

2. Conformity with 'the world'

Here the religious group or religious society, 'turns its attention from the supernatural and becomes more interested in the world' (Shiner, 1967: 211). Under this definition, sects become more part of and like the world (Pfautz, 1956: 246) and mainstream denominations engage in rationalisation from economic rather than spiritual motives (Berger, 1963).

3. The disengagement of society from religion

Under this definition of secularisation, society becomes autonomous from religion, requiring no religious legitimation. Religion itself becomes limited to the private sphere of human activity (Shiner, 1967: 212). The notion of disengagement includes the loss of traditional functions, particularly the transfer of property and educational, welfare and community organisational roles from church to civil authorities (Wilson, 1982: 149; Crippen, 1988: 319). The disengagement of society from religion is a similar process to the differentiation of religious institutions from other parts of the social structure (Hill, 1973: 239). This does not necessarily imply, however, the decline of religious organisations, but a change in their role (Parsons, 1963). Indeed, the loss of secondary functions may in fact free the church to better perform its primary function of drawing people to the worship of God.

4. The transposition of religious beliefs and institutions

In the case of the disengagement idea, religious bodies lose functions which did not necessarily belong to the religious sphere, such as welfare and education. Under this fourth definition, the religious functions themselves are transposed into other human systems (Shiner, 1967: 214). Examples of such human systems which can be said to replace religious beliefs and institutions include communism, nationalism, humanism and scientism (Hill, 1973: 243).

5. The emptying of the sacral or magical character of the natural world

Rather than relying upon supernatural explanations for phenomena, society increasingly relies upon rational-causal explanations (Shiner, 1967: 216). Scientific discovery clearly plays an important role in removing mystery from the natural world under this definition.

6. The movement from a 'sacred' to a 'secular' society, characterised by a greater openness to change

What is in view here is the willingness to abandon traditional ways of thinking in favour of more rational approaches; the final outcome of the application of this approach would be a society open to complete change. As such this final definition of secularisation describes societal changes which are much broader than religious changes (Shiner, 1967: 216; Hill, 1973: 247-248). Characteristically, rural areas are more likely to maintain traditional forms of community life and to resist cultural change. As a consequence, church involvement has been observed to be greater in rural areas. Through the processes of urbanisation and industrialisation, church involvement has become marginalised in the city, but retains some relevance in rural areas (Luckmann, 1967: 29-30).

DIMENSIONS OF SECULARISATION

Karel Dobbelaere (1981) wrote an important analysis of secularisation which sought to clarify the definitional issues raised by Shiner and provide some direction for empirical testing of the secularisation thesis. Dobbelaere identified secularisation as a multi-dimensional process. Firstly this process involves the development of institutions which perform different functions. This differentiation of institutions or 'laicization' results in religious institutions becoming one institution among many, losing any claim to providing an overarching system of meaning.

Referring to Shiner's definitions, Dobbelaere considered three of them (nos. 3, 4 and 5 above) to be complementary aspects of the one laicization process: desacralisation, differentiation and transposition (Dobbelaere, 1981: 11). Dobbelaere also distinguished laicization from *religious involvement*, which includes individual behaviour such as church attendance, and from *religious change*, which refers to changes to religious organisations themselves. These latter dimensions broadly equate to Shiner's first and second definitions respectively (Dobbelaere, 1981: 12).

Dobbelaere's approach seeks to facilitate empirical analysis of the secularisation concept, by combining its various strands into three clear dimensions. Rather than treating secularisation as a single unified process, it is seen as having independent dimensions in the modern situation. These three dimensions also represent three different levels of human existence: the societal, the organisational and the individual (Dobbelaere, 1985). Berger too saw secularisation as more than a process at the societal and cultural levels, but one occurring among individuals:

> As there is secularisation of society and culture, so there is secularisation of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations (Berger, 1967: 107).

In applying the concept of secularisation to Australia, sociologist Rowan Ireland (1988: 4-11) also begins with Shiner's six types of secularisation and Berger's overarching definition of secularisation as 'the process by which sectors of society are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols'. Following Berger, Ireland (1988: 9) identifies three main strands within the process of secularisation:

- Evacuation by the churches of institutions previously under their control or influence,
- Decline of religious content in society's culture and symbols,
- Loss of belief among individuals.

Ireland (1988: 10) notes that this omnibus concept of secularisation is both useful for empirical analysis and respects the complexity of the religious phenomenon. It takes into account the fact that religion is manifested in the culture, at an institutional level and at the level of individual consciousness.

This thesis is primarily concerned with church attendance, itself an individual level behaviour pattern. But the secularisation processes that may impact on this individual activity may arise from the societal, the organisational or the individual levels. For conceptual clarity, the present thesis is mainly concerned with the individual level and the

relationship between variables at that level. But changes at the societal level can affect individual level relationships. It is clearly important not to lose sight of the society within which individuals live and to seek to understand the interplay between the two levels (Inglehart, 1993: 4). For this reason, the thesis identifies societal trends that can be shown to have a bearing on church attendance levels at the individual level. Dimunition or acceleration of such trends could reasonably be predicted to impact on future levels of church attendance and to contribute to an explanation for previous patterns of decline in church attendance.

Later secularisation theorists such as Mark Chaves (1994) define secularisation as a decline in religious authority rather than a decline in religion itself. Following Chaves, Yamane (1997: 115) asserts that secularisation occurs where religious authority structures decline in their ability to control societal level institutions, organisations and individual beliefs and behaviours; of these three, decline at the societal level is said to be the most important. Lechner (1991: 1107) goes even further than this, suggesting that changes to the religious beliefs and practices of the masses are not particularly decisive to the progress of secularisation. Changes at the societal level cannot be ignored in seeking to understand the impacts of secularisation on individual patterns such as church attendance.

USE OF 'SECULARISATION' IN THIS THESIS

In view of the variety of meanings that can be attached to the term 'secularisation', it is important to clarify what is meant by the term in this thesis. The multi-dimensional approach to the definition of secularisation formulated by theorists such as Berger and Dobbelaere and used by Ireland and others, has also been adopted in this thesis. However, what is of greatest interest in this thesis is that dimension of secularisation that includes the loss of religious belief or decline in religious thinking among individuals, and which has been of interest to Berger (1967) among others.

In applying secularisation theory here, what is of most concern is the impact of modernity, as found in various socio-cultural trends, in the creation and maintenance of a consciousness among individuals that is only mildly informed or completely uninformed by church-oriented religion. With the exception of Chapter 3, the thesis does not focus on the relationship between church attendance and the laicization of the Church and other institutions in society, though this remains important historical background to the findings reported here. The thesis is more concerned with secularisation as represented by declines in religious thinking and practice, and less concerned with secularisation as the transformation of religious institutions or the loss of particular functions by churches.

Such secularisation among individuals can include:

- less than positive attitudes towards the churches,
- increased interest in worldly affairs at the expense of more religious pursuits,
- seeing church-oriented religion as a private affair with little or no public relevance,
- church-oriented religion losing its ability to explain life phenomena,
- church-oriented religion losing its authority to direct the behaviours of individuals,
- church-oriented religion being valued relativistically to other religions and world views,
- rationally-based thinking, such as found in modern science, being perceived to be superior to religious thinking.

The definition of secularisation used in this thesis thus conforms with the definitions provided by Wilson (1982: 149) – 'the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance' and by Berger (1967: 107) – 'the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols'. For Berger (1969: 107), this process has an important cognitive dimension, since it is manifested as much in a secularisation of individual consciousness as it is a secularisation of society and culture. It is the secularisation of this cognitive dimension,

with its flow on effects upon religious practices such as church attendance, that is the main focus of this thesis.

Since the focus of the thesis is on searching for and establishing relationships that exist between church attendance and the beliefs, values and characteristics of individuals in modern society, different versions of secularisation theory concerned with the development of individual consciousness may be drawn upon to explain these relationships. Since secularisation theory seeks to explain religious change, it is important to include particular variables that have been changing significantly in the Australian population.

CAUSES OF SECULARISATION

Major social processes are generally not susceptible to monocausal explanations. Secularisation is no exception to this rule. There are many factors which are said to contribute to the secularisation process; three of the major ones are outlined below.

The Judeo-Christian World View

According to Berger (1967), the seeds of secularisation were sown by the Judeo-Christian religion itself. God was viewed as being separate to the creation, which in turn was given to mankind to rule and use. This outlook was to be important for the growth of science and technology, the created world being seen as under the stewardship of mankind. It also meant that areas of life that would otherwise have been invested with a spiritual significance or seen as under the control of the supernatural were removed from such influences. Thus areas of life were 'secularised', if only to come under the authority of the God of Israel (Ireland, 1988: 24).

Distinctions between the people of God and the world also lead to the institutionalisation of this dichotomy. Reality was clearly divided into the divine and the human. Thus the church also came to be seen as separate from the world; religious symbols became concentrated in the one specialised religious institution.

According to Berger (1969), these elements of the Judeao-Christian tradition interact with the forces of modernity. As Ireland notes (1988: 25), the Catholic stream of Christianity tended to restore God into the world through a web of sacraments, institutions and rituals, whereas Protestant Christianity dismantled most of this system, relying upon the Bible and the Word within the believer as the primary link to the transcendent. For some theorists, the key secularising event in Europe was the Protestant Reformation, which hastened the rise of rationality and individualism (Bruce, 1996).

The Onset of Modernity

The rise of secularisation has been closely linked with the onset of modernity. Peter Berger (1979) identified the expansion of choices across a wide range of life areas as perhaps the chief characteristic of modernity that distinguished it from traditional, pre-modern societies. These choices are not limited to the external arrangements of life such as residential location, mode of travel, leisure time, work, material goods and family arrangements, but include the inner world of morality, ideology and religious beliefs. An individual living in the modern world is confronted with a range of ways of seeing reality, and thus a relativising of worldview. Pre-modern societies tended to be characterised by a worldview where fate and certainty dominate; modern societies are characterised by a plurality of worldviews, an array of choices and diminution of certainty (Berger, 1979: 2-20).

Another key aspect of modernity theorised to undermine religion has been the rise of rationality in all areas of life. With the onset of industrialisation, explanations arising from purely rational considerations superseded religious or supernatural explanations, as natural

forces which had previously been seen as matters of fate were found to be increasingly susceptible to human intervention and control (Gilbert, 1980). Religion came to be seen as having a past-oriented character different to the 'matter of fact' orientation of the world. The gulf between the two has widened so much that faith in the supernatural is now irreconcilable with the suppositions that underlie everyday activities (Wilson, 1966: 10).

Thomas Luckmann observed that church religion is so unrelated to modern society that it no longer legitimates or gives meaning in society. Luckmann took the view that the lack of relationship between the symbolic reality of religion and the social structure of society 'suffices to explain why traditional church religion moved to the margin of contemporary life'. The stage had been reached that if church religion did give meaning, it would do so only by compromising its own inner meaning (Luckmann, 1967: 37). Compared with traditional societies, public institutions no longer significantly contribute to the formation of individual consciousness or identity, according to Luckmann (1967: 97). He concluded that 'this is perhaps the most revolutionary trait of modern society'. Consequently a central role of churches in the formation of personal beliefs and values has been compromised. Church religion has simply become irrelevant to many in contemporary society.

Not all sociologists would see the rise of rationality as being the key factor in the undermining of religion. Daniele Hervieu-Leger (1993) argues that modern societies are less able to maintain collective memories as a basis of their existence. Important parts of such collective memories are the traditional forms of religion that were at the basis of the historical formation of these societies. This is a different argument to the one that modern societies have now found a better alternative to religion and have chosen to discard traditional religion in favour of more rationally based approaches (Davie, 1999: 81).

Nor do all sociologists agree that modernity is the enemy of religion. David Martin has presented evidence of the relative vigour of religion in North America compared to Western Europe, citing the former's emphasis on freedom of religion compared to the latter as a battleground between the Church and the Enlightenment (Martin, 1991). It is

perhaps no coincidence that some of the most vigorous opponents of secularisation theory have come out of North America.

The low levels of church attendance in Northern and Western Europe are often cited as evidence that religion does retreat in the face of modernity. There has been a decline in religious practices and beliefs in countries such as Holland, Germany, Scandinavia, France and Britain over the last century. These countries have become 'a massive sector of low religiosity unique in both the contemporary world and world history' (Martin, 1991: 468). However, Martin does not see the experience of Northern Europe as normative in the modern world. He cites the fact that Europe was the original battleground between the Church and the Enlightenment; churches in many countries were either nationalised or repressed. The Church was seen either as a buttress of power or of reaction - in either form it was not well positioned to respond to other changes associated with modernity, such as the decline of local community and the rise of modern cities (Martin, 1991: 468-469).

Martin (1991: 469) also points to the continuing importance of religion among European nationalities who have experienced external rule. Examples include Catholicism among the Irish and Poles, as well as Flanders, Croatia, Basque country, Slovakia and various Muslim communities in Europe.

The continuing strength of religion in the United States of America (USA) has been cited as proof that claims that religion retreats in the face of modernity have been exaggerated. In recent years there has been strong growth of evangelicalism in the USA, which has burst into the public arena in the form of political campaigns and moral debates. In addition, there has been the emergence of new religious movements, which contain a wide range of beliefs and practices (Lyon, 1985: 234). The continuing high levels of church attendance in a country that is one of the most modern and technologically sophisticated would seem to run counter to the notion that modernity erodes religion. In order to account for the US situation, Luckmann took the view that the church is on the periphery in the USA as well, since it is dominated by a secular form of Protestantism: the American

dream has been absorbed by the Church. In Europe, religion was pushed to the periphery of modern life; in the USA, according to Luckmann, it simply became modern (Luckmann, 1967: 36-37). Martin (1991: 470) rejects such notions on the grounds that there are no comparative studies that show American institutions to be any more secular than similar institutions elsewhere.

So on the one hand there is evidence that church attendance is indeed low in many Western countries. Yet in other countries, particularly the USA, church attendance remains relatively high. This suggests that processes such as the separation of the church from other institutions, the redefinition of church functions and the rise of science and modernity, which are central to different versions of the secularisation thesis, can act in different ways on church attendances levels. Countries where church and state are still closely tied are more likely to have low levels of church attendance, despite the high social status of the church as a national body (Martin, 1978: 35).

Martin's study highlights the importance of examining the history of each country in order to understand better the possible causes and development of secularisation within each unique setting. Such an examination of secularisation in Australian history is carried out in the next chapter.

Industrialisation and Urbanisation

The twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation have been identified as further causes of secularisation, or at least as necessary conditions that allowed secularisation to flourish (Luckmann, 1967: 38). Church-oriented religion in the West was confronted with profound changes as society has progressed from agricultural to industrial to post-industrial. Individual consciousness changed due to improvements in health and material conditions: life became less precarious, allowing people to make their way in life without relying upon the explanations or comforts offered by religion (Acquaviva, 1979: 197-198).

Church-oriented religion once provided significance and meaning to individual and communal life in its totality (Wilson, 1982: 154). But industrialisation resulted in the specialisation of roles in society and of institutions. Within each specialisation, there was an agreed set of values and norms that developed without reference to the values of church-based religion. This in turn led to the Church having a specialised role as well. Meaning could then become attached to separate domains without reference to religion (Luckmann, 1967: 39, 96).

Urbanisation in the West has largely occurred in tandem with the changes wrought by industrialisation. As societies moved away from agrarian economies, so people flocked from the countryside to the major towns and cities. The agreed value systems of smaller rural communities could neither be imposed nor maintained in the cities (Tonnies, 1955: 265-269). According to Wilson (1982) pre-industrial societies were characterised by small settlements where individuals had a limited set of long-term relationships. In such settings, individual roles, personal ethics and the maintenance of goodwill were paramount. By contrast, modern societies are characterised by larger urban areas where impersonal interactions based on practical or rational prescriptions are the norm (Wilson, 1982: 155).

CONCLUSION

'Secularisation' can be defined in a multidimensional way with societal, organisational and individual dimensions. Secularisation at the individual level can involve a loosening of the hold of religious thinking over the individual, resulting in a lessening of religious practices such as attendance at church.

What is meant by 'religious thinking' is more than an acceptance of orthodox Christian beliefs. This thesis seeks to identify the erosion of religious thinking reflected not only in adherence to orthodox Christian beliefs but also in the salience

of such beliefs for everyday living, the acceptance of opposed rational or scientific ways of thinking, the adoption of worldly priorities and the absence of any religious authority in the lives of individuals.

The main causes of such secularisation among individuals have been theorised to lie in the onset of modenity and the twin processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. This thesis seeks to identify and explore the links between these processes and levels of church attendance.

While modernity and the associated processes of industrialisation and urbanisation are seen as being corrosive of religion, how modernity brings about secularisation is not necessarily a linear progression observable to the same degree in all Western countries. The progress of secularisation in Australia is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: SECULARISATION IN AUSTRALIA

A familiar sight on the skyline of many country towns in Australia is the church steeple. The church-as-landmark harks back to a time when the church played a more important role in society. But in the cities and suburbs of today, commercial and retail buildings often dominate the skyline, while churches are hidden in the backstreets or behind taller buildings. Keith Castle, planner for the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, sums it up this way:

> In many communities the local church is sited in a prime location. At the time of construction the role of the church was integral to the life of the community. This is reinforced where, in some places, as many as 5 or 6 denominational churches are in prime locations...In contrast today, a casual glance of the high street reveals how financial institutions have taken over the mantle previously held by churches (Castle, 1992: 30-31).

The changing place of the church in the urban fabric would seem to point to changes in the place of the churches in Australian society. Secularisation theory as outlined by Berger, Wilson and others in the previous chapter points not only to the potential importance in changes to individual consciousness in a longitudinal process of secularisation, but also to the importance of various structural changes in the relationship between the churches and various institutions in society.

The key question which this chapter seeks to address is,

> *When did such structural changes take place in Australian history and did these accompany or precede a decline in church attendances?*

SECULARISATION AS SOCIETAL AND ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE

In addressing this issue, what are some of the societal and organisational changes that might be expected as part of a longitudinal process of secularisation?

According to Berger (1967: 107), secularisation includes the following characteristics, which are discussed below:

- the evacuation by churches of institutions previously under their control or influence,
- loss of church property,
- loss of cultural relevance,
- the rise of science separate from religion.

Loss of Influence over Other Institutions

Secularisation theory holds that there has been a declining capacity for religious authorities to exercise power or influence over other institutions. According to secularisation theory, Among society's institutions, there has been a supplanting of religious precepts by more technical criteria among society's institutions. Institutions set their own norms, replacing any overarching norms once provided by religion (Wilson, 1982: 149; Luckmann, 1967: 101). Religion is no longer an overarching meaning system, but a sub-system within society.

Important changes in the relationship between churches and other institutions can include a loss of political influence, such as in the separation of church and state, and a decline in the economic and social influence of churches (Chaves, 1994: 757; Bruce, 1990: 7). Education, which was once provided by churches, has been taken over by the state in many countries. As a result the educational process is no longer under the authority of the churches. There can also be diminished control over resources and a loss of legal and financial privileges for the churches (Chaves, 1994: 757; Ely, 1981: 553). The social

standing of religious institutions is reduced and churches pushed to the margins of contemporary life (Luckmann, 1967: 35).

Not all sociologists agree that this loss of influence by the churches has reduced their social standing. Talcott Parsons (1966: 21-23) argued that the divestment of more secondary functions can allow organisations to concentrate their energies on their primary functions. A loss of secondary functions would give churches greater adaptive capacity to perform primary religious functions.

Loss of Church Property

The term 'secularisation' was originally used to describe the taking of church lands by the state following the religious wars in Europe in the seventeenth century. In negotiations for the Peace of Westphalia, it signified land and possessions removed from church control and placed under civil control (Shiner, 1967: 208; Lyon, 1980: 3). The lands were said to have been 'secularised', the church being seen to have lost power, control and significance in the process (Bouma, 1992: 160).

Loss of Cultural Relevance

Furthermore, secularisation can have a cultural aspect as well. The religious content of the arts, philosophy and literature has diminished (Berger, 1967: 107). Christian imagery was once primary in much medieval painting and churches were major patrons of the fine arts. The modern period has seen a lessening or trivialisation of religious rites and symbols (Ely, 1981: 553).

The Rise of Science Separate from Religion

Perhaps the most important change has been the rise of science separate from religion (Berger, 1967: 107). Science acting independently of religion undermines traditional, non-scientific, non-rational explanations for various phenomena.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE LEVELS IN AUSTRALIA'S HISTORY

In order to link changes in church attendance with changes at the societal or organisational levels, historical levels of church attendance need firstly to be established. A major problem in identifying a process of secularisation is in establishing an historical baseline against which comparisons can be made with the current situation. To talk of 'religious decline' or even of 'religious transformation' requires some baseline or yardstick against which to draw comparisons.

For instance, some theorists have pointed to medieval Catholicism as the high point of church-oriented religion in Europe, where society was integrated by religion (eg. Sorokin, 1966). But the religion of medieval times is not easily compared with today, being a religion of compulsion rather than volition (Le Bras, 1963). While everyone lived within the structure of a Christian society, it is purely an assumption that people lived virtuous lives as a consequence. Little is actually known about the extent or intensity of individuals' religious beliefs, practices and experiences in these times (Casanova, 1994: 16).

Establishing a baseline for comparison is not straightforward even in a country such as Australia, with its relatively short history. As Ireland (1988) observes, religious institutions are treated as marginal in the classic accounts of Australian history, leading one to assume that religion has always been marginal in Australian life. If this was the case, then there would be no room in Australian history for a religious 'Golden Age' nor for processes of secularisation (Ireland, 1988 32). But as will be seen, there is evidence of

higher church attendance levels in some previous periods of Australian history, even if these do not amount to a 'Golden Age' of church attendance.

Church Attendance in Nineteenth Century Australia

The first European settlement in Australia was established as a penal colony. The first ministers-of-religion were chaplains attached to the military establishment and the first church attenders were soldiers and convicts.

There was much about early colonial life that militated against the formation of patterns of voluntary church attendance. Compulsory church attendance was the rule for convicts, although enforcement of this rule varied with each governor. There is evidence that convicts who had been forced to attend church were unlikely to attend voluntarily once they became emancipated. This is hardly surprising, in view of the association between religion and the coercive powers of the state (Grocott, 1980: 272; Hogan, 1987: 20).

The period up to 1850 was characterised by a lack of clergy and church buildings during a time of population expansion. The lack of clergy and church buildings meant that church attendance was not even a possibility for many. But between 1836 and 1851, church attendance increased to probably more than 20% of the population in Sydney. In Melbourne, it was higher again (Grocott, 1980: 97-100). By 1850, around one quarter (26%) of the population attended church each week (Jackson, 1987: 188; Hogan, 1987: 21-22). These figures are not dissimilar to church attendances in Australia today.

Extensive work has been done by W.W. Phillips on estimating attendance levels in NSW in the second half of the nineteenth century. The basis for Phillips' work was the annual returns of attendance made by the churches to the Government from 1850 to 1894 and in 1897, 1900 and 1904 (Phillips, 1972: 385). Phillips points out that, in order to estimate the proportion of the population attending church, it is necessary to compare these annual returns with the total *adult* population of NSW, not the total population. This reflects the

fact that the annual church returns generally did not include children, particularly those returns made later in the nineteenth century (Phillips, 1972: 387-389). Consequently, the church attendance rates which Phillips has calculated are significantly higher than those quoted by other writers (eg. Bentley *et al.*, 1992: 22).

Table 3.1 shows that church attendance was generally better than 40% of the adult population of NSW in the second half of the nineteenth century. There is evidence that attendance was even higher in the other states. This was in no small measure due to differences in denominational mix; high attendance groups such as Methodists, Congregationalists and Baptists were present in higher proportions in South Australia and Victoria than in NSW (Davison *et al.*, 1987: 350). It is estimated that by the 1880s around six out of ten adults attended church each Sunday in Victoria and South Australia (Jackson, 1987: 105).

TABLE 3.1
ESTIMATE OF PROPORTION OF
ADULT POPULATION ATTENDING
CHURCH IN NSW

Year	%
1850	36.5
1860	41.1
1870	58.6
1880	49.0
1890	43.1
1900	44.5

Source: NSW Government returns cited in Phillips, 1972: 388

Bollen describes the significant growth in church attendance in Sydney from 1870 onwards. Protestant church attendances doubled during this period, with rates of growth exceeding that of the community at large. Even though Protestant ministries barely touched working class men, large congregations were to be found in the working class

suburbs. Anglican churches in suburbs such as Redfern, Ultimo, Darlinghurst and Pyrmont claimed congregations exceeding 1,000 persons (Bollen, 1972: 4, 5).

Church Attendance in Twentieth Century Australia

There is less statistical material available on church attendance for the first half of the twentieth century than for the latter half of the nineteenth century (Mol, 1971: 13; Bentley *et al.*, 1992: 16). There are, however, detailed membership statistics available. Church membership figures for the major non-Catholic denominations of the period (Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian) show steady rises in membership throughout most of the twentieth century, with slow growth or declines during the two World Wars, particularly in NSW (Phillips, 1987: 428-430).

Among Catholics, a 1933 survey of clergy in the Sydney Diocese revealed that about half of all Catholics attended Mass regularly (O'Farrell, 1985: 372). It is estimated that by 1938, around six out of ten Catholics were at Mass on Sunday. By comparison, only about 1 in 10 Anglicans were in church on Sunday. Overall, around 3 in 10 Australians attended church each week, a proportion that had declined since the late 1800s. Declines in attendance were mostly felt by Anglican and Protestant denominations during this period (Smith, 1987: 394; Phillips, 1972: 393-394).

After the Second World War, there is evidence that church attendance became more widespread. With increasing birthrates after the War, Sunday school enrolments grew rapidly, increasing by more than 50% from 1946 to 1956 (Hilliard, 1988: 228; Phillips, 1987: 432-435). As the members of this large new generation were christened and entered Sunday schools, parents and other relatives resumed religious practice, at least temporarily (Bouma and Mason, 1995: 46). In a sample survey conducted in 1961, around 29% of the population claimed to attend church in the past week (Goot, 1987: 438). Since the 1950s, however, there have been substantial falls in church attendance, with around 19% claiming to have attended church in the last week by 1980 (Goot, 1987: 439).

TABLE 3.2

CHURCH ATTENDANCE 1850-1990

	Attendance as a Percentage of Adherents			
	1850 (NSW)	1900 (NSW)	1950* (Aust)	1990* (Aust)
Anglican	19%	17%	6%	9%
Baptist	-	55%	53%	48%
Catholic	19%	31%	62%	30%
Methodist	74%	69%	19%	23%**
Presbyterian	30%	21%	11%	12%
Total Adult Population	37%	45%	23%	17%

Sources: NSW Government returns cited in Phillips, 1972; 1950 Gallup poll; 1990 National Social Science Survey
* Proportion attending weekly
** Uniting Church

Declines in church attendance have not affected each denomination in the same way. In the late 1800s, churchgoing was weaker among Anglicans than among Catholics and Presbyterians and weaker among Catholics and Presbyterians than among Baptists, Methodists and other non-conformist groups (Davison *et al.*, 1987: 350). However by the 1950s, as shown in Table 3.2, the picture had changed substantially; Catholics had become a stronger church attending denomination, while church attendance had become relatively weaker among Methodists and Presbyterians.

In summary, attendance estimates provided by churches from 1850 to 1904 suggest that church attendance levels rose during the nineteenth century, with more than 40% of the Australian adult population being church attenders during the second half of the century. Apparent declines in Protestant church attendance rates until the 1950s were offset by increased attendance rates among Catholics. Although sample surveys of the population suggest that high levels of church attendance were still in evidence immediately after the

Second World War, attendance rates declined substantially from the 1950s until the 1980s.

SECULARISATION IN AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

In examining secularisation in Australian history, it is important to appreciate the place of the churches in the fabric of colonial society. Secularisation theorists often assume that a previous era was indeed more religious than the present. However, available evidence suggests that in the early years of British settlement in Australia, the white population was, on the whole, less well disposed towards religion than was the case in some later periods.

At the time of Australia's settlement in 1788, the Church of England was the Established Church, an institution to which most people in England belonged, even if they did not regularly attend. But the Church of England was not to enjoy the same status or privilege in Australia. The early years of the colony were particularly difficult for the Church, attracting as it did only minimal support from the ruling governors (Woolmington, 1976: 7-9).

Until Macquarie's governorship (1810-1821), Church of England chaplains were part of the military establishment of the colony and subject to military rules. The head of the state was effectively the head of the Church in NSW in these early years and sought to use the Church as part of the machinery of government. Manning Clark (1962: 75) summed up the situation as follows:

> Where he saw religion as the divine medium for eternal salvation, the governor treasured it as a medium of subordination and esteemed a chaplain according to the efficacy of his work as a moral policeman.

After serious disagreements with Governor Macquarie, Rev. Samuel Marsden returned to England to seek release from military rules. Rather than the state becoming emancipated

from the church, the Australian experience was that the church needed to be emancipated from the state.

Perhaps more significantly, the churches had to become established in what was already a thoroughly secular environment. The population in these early years of the colony, appear to have been largely uninterested in religion. In a detailed exploration of early colonial life, Alan Grocott (1980) has shown that the truly religious convict was the exception rather than the rule. Most of the convicts came from urban slums where Christianity had very little impact (Grocott, 1980: 22). The convict world was 'aggressively hostile to religion' (O'Farrell, 1985: 34).

In England, convicts were notorious for their irreligion. Many had never been to a church or even heard a clergyman (Jackson, 1987: 15). Irish Catholic convicts may have been more devout than their English counterparts, but it is unlikely that more than a fifth would have been regular churchgoers even if they had been given the opportunity (Hogan, 1987: 26). Church services, though meant to be compulsory for convicts in NSW, were poorly attended (Grocott, 1980: 62).

The pessimistic views of the first clergy towards the populace are not surprising, given the number of convicts or ex-convicts which made up the society in the first half of the nineteenth century Woolmington, 1976: 8-10). The proportion of convicts in the colony of NSW was generally more than half of the population until 1796 (after which many became emancipated), and more than 30% of the population from 1796 to 1837 (Grocott, 1980: 285). In addition, not only did men far outnumber women, but the women were largely unable to exert a 'civilising influence', as they did in English society (Hogan, 1987: 21).

Only a minority of people in the colony were particularly religious. The priority of the governors was the survival and development of the colony; the promotion of religion was a much lower priority. Grocott (1980: 65) sums it up this way:

It may be fairly concluded that during this period both convicts and officials manifested little interest in religion. The practical atheism of the colonists, both bond and free, prevailed for a generation or more.

From these shaky beginnings, the churches grew in size and influence during the 1800s. Early acceptance of the Presbyterian Church and freedom for Catholic priests to conduct Mass from 1820 onwards meant that there were soon four primary religious groupings in the colony - Anglican, Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian, along with smaller groups such as the Baptists (O'Farrell, 1985: 2).

The Separation of Church and State

The separation of church and state began early in Australian history. As mentioned above, the Church of England had effectively been part of the machinery of the state until the 1820s.

Early legislation in Australia was aimed towards creating a superior position for the Church of England. The Church and Schools Corporation, which commenced in 1826, endowed the Church of England with vast amounts of land and complete control of public education. The Registration Act of 1826 made local Anglican clergy the official registrars of births, deaths and marriages, to which the clergy of other denominations had to provide details of ceremonies performed and pay registration fees (Gregory, 1973: 9-10).

However, neither the Church of England nor any other denomination was to become the Established church of Australia. In just a few short years the Church and Schools Corporation had been dissolved. The Church Act of 1836 saw a complete change of direction, placing other denominations on an equal footing with the Church of England. Even the Catholic Church which, just 30 years earlier had been prevented from holding Mass, was able to develop alongside the Church of England. The Church Act gave expression to the notion of religious freedom and plurality, and separation of church and state.

The basic issue of the relationship between church and state was largely settled early in Australian history. The dominant model in Australia was to be one of denominational structures independent of the state and serving their own constituents. The new order reflected the presence of large constitutencies from England, Scotland and Ireland, where the Church of England, Presbyterian and Catholic Churches respectively held sway.

What was the effect of these changes upon church attendances? It is unlikely that the separation of church and state resulted in declines in attendance, even among adherents of the Church of England. If anything, the Church Act strengthened the position of the denominations, which were then able to access state aid on a more equitable basis, in order to provide both church buildings and clergy.

It is also unlikely that inroads could have been achieved by an English, state-sponsored church among a populace with large Irish and Scottish minorities. The opposition of Catholic convicts to attending Church of England services has been well documented (Grocott, 1980). It is unlikely that they would have been more amenable to attendance as free men.

Church Property and Finances

In a number of Western countries, churches had property taken over by the state. By comparison in Australia, as a series of newly established colonies, it was the absence of property rather than the loss of it which played a part in hindering the growth of church attendances until the latter half of the nineteenth century.

The first chaplain, Richard Johnson, saw the absence of a church building during the first six years from 1788 as a major hindrance to people's gathering together to worship God. Consequently, Johnson had to assume the role of an open-air preacher or use whatever buildings were available for small worship services. Eventually Johnson was forced to erect his own church building (Grocott, 1980: 60). But the restrictions he experienced typified a growing problem for the churches in the new colonies.

The lack of buildings and clergy was a major challenge to the churches; they needed to build and deploy clergy in order to keep up with the expansion of the population in an enormous continent. The Church Act of 1836 outlined a new basis for state aid to churches in NSW. Grants for stipends and buildings were allocated to Church of England, Catholic and Presbyterian denominations alike, and to Wesleyans and Baptists after 1839.

By 1850 church accommodation in NSW and Tasmania was five times that of 1836, even though the population had only increased one-and-a-half times over the same period (Breward, 1988: 19). As church buildings were provided, attendances increased dramatically. This can be seen in the growth in attendance in Victoria. In 1851, about 14% of the population in Victoria attended church; by 1881, this had risen to 34% (Jackson, 1987: 104).

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the complete abandonment of the principle that the state had any duty to uphold the church (Gregory, 1973: 13). Instead a principle of voluntarism was adopted, which saw churches raise funds for expansion from their own constituents. South Australia was the first state to abolish state aid to religion (1851) and Western Australia the last (1895).

The Australian experience demonstrates the relationship between the provision of church buildings and church attendance levels. Clearly the provision of state aid to the churches was important in the expansion of the church to reach a sizeable proportion of the Australian population.

But the impact of the end of state aid on future expansion is not so easily demonstrated. Even after state aid had ended, there were still many rural settlements that had no church (Davison *et al.*, 1987: 350). These settlements, as well as the new suburbs of the major cities, required the voluntary efforts of denominations to supply church buildings and clergy. It is difficult to speculate what difference this change made to ultimate levels of attendance in different parts of Australia.

Today, the older mainstream denominations continue to benefit from the legacy of state aid to the churches, not only in terms of church buildings but also by way of investment property. In addition, much church-owned property is exempt from local government rates.

The Provision of Education

The Church and Schools Corporation was founded in 1826 on the assumption that the Church of England would be largely responsible for ensuring the education of children in the colony. Yet the system which was finally adopted was a dual system of state-run and denominational schools.

The system of state schools was first introduced into Ireland in 1831. Although the schools were non-sectarian, religious education had a place in these schools, with clergy of different denominations being invited to impart religious instruction to the students on one day per week.

The reasons behind the adoption of this system are instructive in understanding secularisation in Australia. It was not so much the demise of the Christian religion or weakness of the churches which lead to the dual system, but rather the rivalry between the various denominations. Disagreement between Catholic, Anglican and Protestant denominations about religious education in schools and about state aid influenced both the Victorian and South Australian governments to opt for secular systems of state education (Phillips, 1983: 5). Fear of sectarian conflict also lead to the exclusion of the churches from the establishment of universities (Howe, 1980: 66-67)

Secularism was seen by some as a solution to sectarianism and by others as a way of overcoming the reactionary power of the churches (Hogan, 1987: 78-79). However, as Breward has observed, the word 'secular' in the nineteenth century often meant 'non-

denominational'; it did not necessarily imply the exclusion of religion (Breward, 1993: 79).

In recommending a system of school education for NSW based on the Irish model, Governor Bourke was concerned not to oust the churches from education, but rather that one denomination could not be counted on to provide education for people from a range of religious denominations (Austin, 1963: 48-55, 57-58). For this reason it was to fall to the state to take the lead in education; it was around this time that the first grants were made by the British Government for education (Gregory, 1973: 16-17). In the latter half of the nineteenth century when the British colonies in Australia were establishing systems of 'free, compulsory and secular' education, it is important to note that 'secular instruction' was defined in the NSW Act as including 'general religious teaching' but not 'dogmatical or polemical theology' (Black, 1983: 5).

Table 3.3 shows that by the 1880s, children were mainly educated through state schools. Denominational schools accounted for about 20% of enrolments; this situation remained unchanged from the 1880s onwards.

Although the dual system of State and denominational schools was well established by 1879, the Catholic Church strongly denounced the concept of a secular education as contrary to the first principles of religion and as breeding grounds for future immorality and lawlessness (O'Farrell, 1985: 184; Breward, 1993: 80). In 1885, the Catholic bishops went further by declaring that Catholics were obliged to send their children to Catholic schools, under threat of exclusion from the confessional (Dixon, 1996: 6). In view of Catholic opposition to secular education, many of the schools in the denominational school system were Catholic. Thus from the latter half of the nineteenth century, Catholic and non-Catholic children were likely to have been educated in denominational and secular systems of education respectively.

TABLE 3.3

SCHOOLS AND ENROLMENTS IN AUSTRALIA

| Year | ENROLMENTS | | Total |
	State schools (%)	Private schools (%)	(No.)
1850	17.2	82.8	13 531(a)
1860	24.0	76.0	69 133(b)
1870	40.6	59.4	199 490(b)
1880	86.2	13.8	480 717(c)
1890	82.7	17.3	622 506(c)
1900	81.8	18.2	765 376(c)
1910	79.8	20.2	786 604(d)
1922	80.6	19.4	1 038 665(d)
1930	79.1	20.9	1 155 792(d)
1941	76.5	23.5	1 093 676(d)
1951	75.6	24.2	1 339 132(d)

Source: State Government statistics cited in Grundy and Yuan, 1987: 330-340
(a) NSW only
(b) NSW and Vic
(c) All states except Tasmania
(d) All states and NT

Is there a link between church attendance and control over education? The Catholic Church became a major provider of education in Australia, whereas other denominations were largely content to rely upon state controlled education. And as shown previously in Table 3.2, the Catholic Church was the only major denomination to see increased attendance rates among its affiliates up to the 1950s.

It could be theorised that part of the reason for increased attendances was the direct involvement of the Catholic Church in the education of its children. Yet there is no evidence available prior to the Second World War which would enable a comparison of the religious practices of Catholics who had attended parish schools with those who had not (Jackson, 1987: 124). While Mass attendance rates and involvement of the Catholic Church rates appear to be correlated, causation cannot be readily tested.

However, survey research since the Second World War suggests that adult church attendance patterns among Catholics can be partly attributed to attendance at a denominational school. The 1966 Religion in Australia Survey found that attendance at a Catholic parish school was likely to have a reinforcing effect on adult attendance at Mass, particulary where parents were also practising Catholics (Mol, 1985: 108-121). As Jackson (1987: 124) has observed, there is no reason why the same relationship should not have been true in earlier periods.

Decline in Political and Social Influence

Chaves has argued that secularisation is best understood not as declining religion, but as declining religious authority. Religious authority is exercised by clergy and other religious professionals within the society and is manifested in the overall social influence of religious structures (Chaves, 1994: 756, 770).

In the first part of the nineteenth century, religion had a social salience. There were influential individual clergy. The first Australian Anglican bishop, William Broughton, was said to have profoundly shaped the future civil society in Australia, through his access to political power (Shaw, 1988). He was a key opponent of the introduction of secular education and delayed its introduction during the time of Bourke's governorship. Indeed, Governor Bourke was opposed to Broughton's reappointment to the Legislative Council, being against the appointment of a clergyman to political office (Gregory, 1973: 24-25). Other clergy such as the Presbyterian J.D. Lang in the nineteenth century and Catholic Archbishop Mannix in the twentieth century were also very influential. Such influential clergy are much rarer in today's political system.

To a great extent, the political influence of the churches reflected the sectarian rivalries of the times. Each group exerted influence in order to prevent the other from gaining dominance. Catholics and Protestants were active in the support of various political

candidates during the nineteenth century in Australia (O'Brien, 1976). This was to extend well into the twentieth century through the close association between the Catholic Church and the Labor Party, which remained unbroken until the 1950s.

Another reason behind the widespread influence of the church was the broader acceptance of Christian morality as a basis for civilised society. For instance, family law was virtually dictated by religious teachings. The passing of a law in Victoria in 1872, permitting a man to marry his dead wife's sister, was seen by some Presbyterian clergy as being in direct opposition to both the Old Testament and the Westminster Confession of Faith. A decision by the Presbyterian Assembly that the matter should be left to individual conscience marked a weakening in the influence of the clergy on the law and family life; secular considerations began to receive more weight than traditional or Biblical ones (Breward, 1993: 82-83).

The failure of clergy to prevent the widening of the grounds for divorce in 1892 was also seen as a turning point; until then divorce had not been permitted except on the grounds of adultery - an exception that was acceptable to all churches except the Catholic Church. But in 1886 a proposal was made to widen the grounds for divorce to include desertion, drunkenness and repeated assault. This proposal drew the ire of Protestant churches as well and pitted laymen against clergy. But ultimately the reforms were passed (Judd and Cable, 1987: 147).

Yet churches continued to be a major influence well into the twentieth century. Churches were active during the 1930s and 1940s in opposing the establishment of state lotteries and betting shops (Raftery, 1991: 435-442). The temperance movement, which was strongly supported by Protestants, was at its height in the 1890s and early 1900s in Australia. The influence of the Protestant churches was a key factor in the passing of laws which reduced liquor licences in 1905 and in the introduction of 6.00pm closing times for hotels after World War I (Hogan, 1987: 152-153).

One key measure of the extent of church influence in the community was the regulation by law of activities on Sundays. The Sabbath laws were symbolic of Christian domination of society (Lineham, 1988: 237). Supporters of the Sabbath had successfully prevented the opening of libraries on Sunday in Melbourne in 1871 and again in 1874, and forced the closure of musical entertainments in Sydney (Breward, 1993: 81-82). Up until the 1930s, shops, workplaces, schools, sporting venues, cinemas and hotels were closed on Sundays. Public transport was limited to the hours of church services. Activities such as home repairs or housework were constrained by social convention (Smith, 1987: 391-392; Raftery, 1991: 444).

Protestants in particular were keen supporters of the Sabbath as a day for church attendance and spiritual reflection. It was the only day of the week where fathers could be at home to provide moral leadership and to spend time with their children (Jackson, 1987: 113; Smith, 1987: 391). Catholics saw their main Sunday obligations to be Mass attendance and abstaining from labour; to them, the Protestant emphasis on abstaining from recreation and entertainment was far too restrictive (Raftery, 1991: 433).

By the 1920s, there is evidence of a widespread breakdown in Sabbath-keeping. Organised sport, the opening of various amusements, relaxing of laws on Sunday trading, and increased motor vehicle usage all contributed to this breakdown. While there was great resistance by many churches, some churches simply accommodated these new realities. In South Australia in 1926, the rescheduling of Anglican Sunday schools from the afternoon to the morning was seen as the first 'major cave-in' by the churches in that state on the Sabbath issue (Raftery, 1991: 447). The 1930s saw further liberalisation despite the protests of the churches, including Sunday broadcasting of racing news and brewery advertisements, Sunday work for public transport and central business district building workers and scheduled airline flights on Sundays (Smith, 1987, 405).

There is a general agreement that the political influence of the churches has declined in Australia (eg. Raftery, 1991: 434; Lawson, 1972: 146). As the above discussion shows, it could be argued that this decline began at any number of points in our history up until the

1930s. And it was not simply a matter of churches wielding a united influence in the society; traditional Protestant concerns about gambling, drinking and Sabbath entertainments were not necessarily supported by either Catholics or Anglicans.

Yet as discussed earlier, available survey evidence suggests that church attendance levels only began to decline sharply during the 1960s. However, this lag between loss of socio-political influence and declines in church attendance is not unexpected. As Swidler (1986: 281) has remarked,

> People do not readily take advantage of new structural opportunities which would require them to abandon established ways of life. This is not because they cling to cultural values, but because they are reluctant to abandon familiar strategies of action for which they have cultural equipment.

While the evidence presented here does not prove a link between loss of socio-political influence and declining church attendances, the phenomenon of 'cultural lag' does caution against dismissing the possibility of such links.

The Rise of Science and Higher Criticism

Some secularisation theory posits that religion recedes before science; with each new discovery, nature is further demystified and the religious arena is lessened. Like opposing armies, science and religion clash in a war slowly being won by science.

The motif of science and religion as opposing armies arose as a result of debates over Darwin's *Origin of Species*, published in 1859. Darwinism and evolutionary ways of thinking cast doubt on the necessity of God in the design and maintenance of the Universe and posited natural methods of change. According to standard histories of the period, this constituted a major shift in world-view, bringing with it a religious crisis (Gauvreau, 1985: 434-437).

But the relative importance of science in the decline of the religious worldview in Australia has been questioned. Phillips has argued that some Australian churchmen came to accept Darwin's theories as early as the 1860s, and sought to reconcile the new theories with the Biblical record of Creation. While the Catholic Church officially rejected Darwinism, there was no organised movement among Protestants against the theory of evolution - unlike creationism today (Phillips, 1990). Most clergy in Australia were, however, opposed to evolution at this time, although a distinct softening of attitude took place during the 1890s (Phillips, 1977: 408-410).

Perhaps a far greater threat to traditional doctrine was to be found in the development of historical criticism of the Bible (Moore, 1979: 350-351). Phillips (1977: 412) sums it up this way:

> The higher criticism of the Tubingen school, with its denial of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, its view of the New Testament writings as second century compilations, its questioning of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and its rejection of the miracles and the old notions of prophecy, was more threatening to belief in verbal inspiration and an infallible book than the challenge of modern science.

Phillips concludes that the widespread acceptance of evolution and higher criticism by Protestants may have had little effect on church attendances in the late 1800s. It could be that, in the short-term, acceptance of these ideas actually provided the churches with further protection from intellectual attacks by rationalists and freethinkers, which were common in this period (Phillips, 1977: 416-420).

However, biblical criticism did pose significant questions about the source of religious authority for Protestants, a problem that was not faced by Catholics, who largely rejected modernism (Phillips, 1977: 416-420). In view of Chaves' comments about secularisation as a decline in religious authority, the rise of liberal theology during this period may well have been an important contributing factor to the steep declines in Protestant church attendances in the twentieth century.

There are echoes here of more recent theories regarding the decline in church attendances in the United States of America. Kelley (1972) notes that more theologically conservative denominations in the United States have continued to grow, while the more liberal or theologically-diverse denominations have begun to decline. Kelley suggests that this has to do with conservative Protestant churches providing a more clear-cut message, better meeting the meaning needs of their constituents. In addition, these churches expect higher levels of commitment from their members, which discourages those who are not seriously interested but retains those who wish to pursue the goals of the church. By comparison, the more theologically-diverse churches seem to be offering something in the current social climate which is little different from the surrounding society; there comes a point where the rewards being offered by such churches appear to be few and even lacking in plausibility. The result is that attenders leave such churches to seek fulfilment in the secular environment or in the more conservative churches (Finke and Stark, 1992: 275).

Recent research in Australia suggests similar patterns. As in the United States, the more theologically conservative churches, such as Pentecostals and Baptists, have the highest rates of growth among Protestant churches. Empirical research suggests that conservative approaches to faith, plus higher levels of commitment to church life and evangelism, tend to be more characteristic of growing churches in Australia (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 259-268; Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 208-218).

OTHER FACTORS IN DECLINING CHURCH ATTENDANCES

Catholic and Protestant attitudes towards church attendance

Church attendance levels reflect the importance of attendance within each tradition. The Mass has traditionally been central to Catholic experience; however, the sanctions associated with absence from the Mass have changed. According to the catechism used in the early 1900s, absence from Mass was seen as a mortal sin. And according to the same catechism, a person dying in a state of mortal sin was condemned to hell (Jackson, 1987: 120).

Presence at Mass was more spiritually necessary for Catholics than church attendance was for Protestants (Inglis, 1965: 44). Vatican II seriously weakened inherited patterns of religious authority among Catholics (Breward, 1993: 232). The decline in Catholic attendance since the early 1960s in Australia may in part be an outcome of relaxation of religious authority and prescribed sanctions.

By comparison, Protestants missing church were not subject to the same sanctions as Catholics, which may help to explain why Catholic church attendances remained high. Protestant attenders found it easier to disengage from regular patterns of attendance. In 1931, a New Zealand Methodist committee found that, while the number of Methodists who never went to church was small, there was an increasing number of infrequent churchgoers. E.S. Kiek described the emergence of 'Private Christianity' in New Zealand (Jackson, 1987: 117)

Immigration

The second half of the nineteenth century was characterised by rapid population increases to 3.75 million by 1900. The religious background of migrants has played a defining role in the overall religious mix in Australia (Batrouney, 1996: 27). It is therefore highly probable that immigration has also played an important role in church attendance levels as well. This is particularly the case when it is considered that attendances for different denominational groups varied widely, from relatively low levels of attendance among Anglicans to very high levels among Baptists and Salvationists. Immigrant free settlers too would be much more likely to be church attenders than the existing ex-convict population and their descendants.

Phillips points to the fact that declines in church attendance in NSW between 1870 and 1890 were almost wholly felt in the city; attendance levels dropped by over a third in metropolitan areas but were stable in the country. At the same time, the metropolitan

population increased from 26.7 to 34.3% of the population of the whole colony, an increase composed primarily of English working class, most of whom were indifferent to religion (Phillips, 1972: 389).

Jackson attributes the rise in Catholic church attendance in part to the slowing of immigration from Ireland from the 1860s. By 1890, the flow of new immigrants from Ireland had all but ceased. As the Catholic population stabilised so the supply of priests was able to meet the demand; by contrast Protestants were hard pressed to find clergy to meet the demands created through increased immigration from England and Scotland from 1905 onwards (Jackson, 1987: 120).

One quarter of all people resident in Australia come from overseas. Since the Second World War, the majority of immigrants to Australia came from the United Kingdom (Bentley and Hughes, 1998). There have also been major flows of immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds into Australia, particularly from countries with a Catholic or non-Christian religious heritage. The arrival of these groups also had an impact on church attendance levels.

Mobility and Population Shifts

Shifts in population may have also played a role in declines in attendance in Australia. In 1954, 24% of Australia's population lived in rural areas, declining to 15% by 1986 (Breward, 1993: 190). Since church attendance levels have been lower in the city compared to the country, the further concentration of population in urban areas might be expected to reduce church attendance levels overall.

A related phenomenon is the impact of moving house on established patterns of church attendance. In an analysis of the decline of Congregational Church attendances in Melbourne during the 1890s, Hugh Jackson (1980) found that moving house was perhaps the key factor in explaining the serious declines which took place. According to Jackson,

moving house was of greater significance than factors such as marrying into other denominations, economic depression or the lack of a denominational school.

Increasing Leisure Activity

Broome (1980: 3) has observed that, by the end of the nineteenth century, most clergy believed that it was worldliness and indifference rather than intellectual opposition that kept people away from church. The period was marked by changing leisure patterns. The Saturday half-holiday became commonplace during the 1880s in Australia; thus the 'weekend' was born (Inglis, 1977: 68, 69). In conjunction with this development came a steady liberalisation of the Sabbath as a day of recreation rather than religion. By the mid-1890s, Sunday amusements were popular, such as concerts, picnics, excursions, tennis and cricket. The introduction of the motor car and weekend trips away led to a further pronounced relaxation in Sabbath-keeping after the First World War.

Based on an analysis of church attendance statistics in New Zealand, Jackson (1987: 114-117) suggested that these developments in the use of leisure time closely parallel declines in church attendance. In Melbourne in the 1930s, increasing attendances at cinemas and a more individualistic approach to leisure pursuits coincided with declines in church attendance (Smith, 1987: 398).

The 1930s onwards marked the beginnings of mass marketed sporting events, a trend that has only increased since the introduction of television in the 1950s. These increased opportunities for leisure may well have had an impact on church attendance levels.

CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter shows that the major characteristics of secularisation, defined here as the laicization of the Church in society, can be seen in Australian history.

The relationship between church and state was progressively transformed throughout the nineteenth century, from a situation where the church was part of the machinery of the state to one where the state no longer provided any direct support to the churches. The education function was largely taken over by the state by the mid-1800s and the political and social influence of the churches declined progressively. By the end of the nineteenth century, the impact of scientific discoveries and historical criticism were beginning to be felt, particularly among Protestants.

There were a number of events that can be associated with secularisation theory that preceded or accompanied a long term decline in church attendance from the 1880s among Anglicans and Protestants in NSW:

- the end of State aid to churches,
- a free and secular education for more than 75% of children,
- a relaxation of the application of the Sabbath laws to leisure activities and a weakening of the influence of churches over lawmaking more broadly,
- prolonged theological controversy over the authority of the Bible.

By contrast, Catholics were more insulated from these events; religious authority was bolstered by the declaration of papal infallibility in 1870 and continuance of church control over the education of Catholics. Catholic attendance rates remained stable or grew in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

However, by the 1960s, all of the major denominations were experiencing downturns in rates of church attendance. While direct links between secularising processes in the nineteenth century and declining attendance in the twentieth century are difficult to establish, it is likely that these events provided some of the conditions necessary for subsequent declines in church attendance, which were in turn brought on by other factors. For instance, while particular scientific discoveries may not have had much impact on church attendances at the time, in combination with other factors, such as a liberal education and increasing specialisation, the environment for religious belief gradually became less conducive in Australia than it previously had been.

CHAPTER 4: THE RISE OF NON-CHURCH RELIGION

> Many people continue to identify as Christian; but it may be that they have privatised their religion and feel they have no need to express their beliefs in a corporate way. (Alan Black, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Mar. 1997: 3)

Some versions of secularisation theory see the decline of religion as inevitable, both in terms of its influence on the individual and more broadly in society (eg. Bruce, 1990: 7; Wallis and Bruce, 1991: 3). Traditional or religious interpretations of human experience are progressively abandoned in favour of scientific or rational ones; reason gains ascendancy over religious values. Prayer is replaced with rationality and mythic interpretations abandoned in favour of 'matter of fact' interpretations (Wilson, 1982: 149).

Others see that rather than being in decline, religion is being transformed. Declining church attendances do not necessarily mean that religion has declined as such; it may mean that there are increasing numbers of people who have religious beliefs without any form of corporate expression or who express their beliefs in religious organisations apart from the churches.

A PRIVATISATION OF RELIGION?

The formal separation of church and state foreshadowed the relegation of religion to the private world of the individual, as distinct from the public world of government, the economy, education and media. Essentially this means that religion has become confined to serving the spiritual needs of believers. While levels of religious belief may not have declined overall, the extent of its authority and influence has changed (Yamane, 1997).

Since religion no longer receives any official support, it loses its public function. In turn, individual religiosity receives no confirmation from primary public institutions (Luckmann, 1967: 94, 105). The public and the private spheres effectively operate independently.

However, it should not be assumed that privatisation means that religion is in decline. Privatisation of religion can be viewed as part of an evolution of religion in society, with individuals having greater autonomy to form their own world-view free of institutional control. Privatised religion can be highly individualistic; believers follow their 'own little voice' rather than official sources such as the churches. Following Bellah *et al.* (1985), Greer and Roof (1992: 346) sum up the nature of privatised religion as:

> ...a deeply personal concern which in its most radical expression need not involve communal loyalties. It does involve belief in God, although just what imageries and attributes of the divine are invoked is not clear. The locus of moral and religious decisionmaking lies within an autonomous self, dislodged from any meaningful social and institutional context.

The key question then to be examined in this chapter is,

Are church attendances in Australia declining as part of the transformation of religion beyond the influence of the churches?

FORMS OF RELIGION

In order to explore the shape of religion in Australia beyond the churches requires some definition of the term 'religion'. In sociological literature, religion can fall into one of two broad categories:

- Substantive definitions of religion,
- Functional definitions of religion.

Substantively Defined Religion

Religion can take a number of different forms, depending upon the definition adopted. Substantive definitions frame religion in terms of a system of beliefs and practices that have a supernatural focus. In Western countries, religion is primarily viewed as the religion of the specialised religious institutions - the churches.

Religion beyond a church involvement may involve holding traditional Christian beliefs. Another possibility is that it involves non-Christian beliefs. Beyond traditional Christian belief, there is a range of unofficial beliefs as well as beliefs associated with mainstream non-Christian religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Judaism. Migration, international travel and the global transmission of ideas have greatly increased the possibility of individuals' coming into contact with religious beliefs beyond the Christian faith.

Substantively defined religion can take the form of unofficial or 'common' religious belief. The combination of the diminution of the symbolic value of churches and privatisation of religion provides the circumstances for the rise of non-official religious forms (Acquaviva, 1979: 48). These beliefs may be disorganised and changeable, existing alongside 'official' church religion. Common religion can include belief in luck, belief in the influence of the moon and the stars, and belief in magic (Towler, 1974: 150-153). In contrast to official church religion, common religion is outside of society's institutional structure; its survival depends upon its continuing ability to tap the transcendent aspects of peoples' experience. Consequently the level of common religion in a society may be a better indicator of the true extent of religion than are the measures of official religious belief (Towler, 1974: 149).

An intermediate category between official and common religion is that of customary religion. This includes beliefs and practices that have their origin from official religion but are no longer under its control (Hornsby-Smith *et al.*, 1985; Hornsby-Smith, 1991: 92). Generally these involve a watering-down of official beliefs and practices. For instance, the

commonly heard phrase that one 'doesn't need to attend a church to be a Christian' would fit within the framework of customary religion. There are similarities here with those who have been identified as 'nominally religious' in other research (eg. Glock and Wuthnow, 1979: 47-68).

Functionally Defined Religion

There are several problems with secularisation theory as religious decline, but one problem that has been commonly cited is in the definition of 'religion'. Michael Hill (1973: 228) summarises the problem this way:

> If religion is defined solely in terms of institutional practice, then secularisation must mean the decline of church membership and attendance...if we define religion as some quantum of religiousness within every individual, secularisation would become impossible by definition.

One of the chief functions of religion is to create a sense of meaning and purpose in life; something that fulfils this same function could thus be described as having a religious function. A more functional definition of religion can include things not usually thought of as 'religious', such as technology or political movements (Lyon, 1985: 234).

In a book of the same name, Luckmann (1967: 110-114) describes the characteristics of 'invisible religion', where people gain meaning from a variety of sources apart from formal religion, such as family, sexuality, status achievement and individual autonomy. Religion becomes a subjective system of ultimate significance that lies beyond official models of religion (Luckmann, 1967: 79). It is the natural outcome of the human ability to transcend the biological nature; any degree of consciousness beyond the biological nature can be regarded as religious (Luckmann, 1967: 69).

A functional approach to religion is not without its critics. Lechner (1991: 1112) notes the danger of functionalist definitions of religion; there can never be any decay of religion, only transformation of it. This forces a broadening of the definition of religion and the

inclusion of anything that can be made to fit the definition. This in turn leads to bland 'new gods' and the assumption that these are as significant or functionally equivalent to the 'old gods'.

SUBSTANTIVELY DEFINED, IS RELIGION DECLINING IN AUSTRALIA?

According to particular versions of secularisation theory, religious beliefs and practices will have declined throughout our history. However, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about changes to the religiosity of the community from historical sources. As discussed in Chapter 3, it is likely that the early colonists had little interest in Christianity, in view of their convict associations. The high levels of attendance later in the century suggest that belief in God and a range of Christian beliefs and practices were widespread. But as Gary Bouma has noted, 'we have virtually no idea of the shape, intensity, form, or distribution of private forms of religion a century ago' (Bouma, 1992: 163).

Sample surveys carried out since the Second World War do provide some evidence both of the extent and development of religious belief and practice. In common with much of the survey work in Western countries, the form of religion being investigated usually reflects official church religion (Towler, 1974: 145-146). Yet the statistics which have been collected are sufficiently broad to include elements of official, common and customary religion.

There is some evidence that Australians are more religious than is often assumed. Bouma and Dixon (1986) argue strongly that, on the basis of results from the 1983 Australian Values Study Survey (AVSS), Australia is not a particularly secular country. They point out that Australia cannot be said to be essentially secular and irreligious when:

• 57.9% of Australians claimed to be religious persons and only 4.5% claimed to be atheists,

- On a scale of 1 to 10, 57.4% of Australians rated the importance of God in their lives as 6 or more, and only 13.7% rated God as 1 (not at all important),

- 85.6% of Australians identified with some religious group,

- Two-thirds of Australians pray, meditate or contemplate occasionally or more frequently,

- Nearly half of those who claimed to have no religion pray, meditate or contemplate occasionally or more frequently (Bouma and Dixon, 1986: v-vi).

Bouma and Dixon (1986: vi-vii) also note that both denominational identification and the degree of religiosity of individuals make a difference to their attitudes on social and moral issues. They conclude that Australia 'is not a secular, God-less society comprised mostly of irreligious persons who discount the importance of God in their lives' (Bouma and Dixon, 1986: 166).

However, both Wilson (1983) and McCallum (1986) argue that, not withstanding the relatively high proportion of Australians who claim to hold religious beliefs, the proportion that do so is dwindling. This has been taken by both writers as evidence that secularisation is indeed occurring at the individual level in Australia.

Apart from declining church attendance levels, McCallum outlines changes in three other indicators which have been covered in surveys since the 1960s: religious identification, belief in God and patterns of prayer.

Religious Identification

Religious identification is measured through the Census of Population and Housing held in Australia every five years. Census data show a rapid increase in the proportion of people stating no religion, from 0.8% in 1966 to 10.8% in 1981. McCallum concluded that the increase up to 1971 could well be due to changes to the instructions accompanying the Census question: for this reason changes from 1971 to 1981 represent

the most meaningful evidence, namely a rise from 6.7% to 10.8% of the population. There was also an increase in the proportion of the population not answering the Census question, from 6.1% to 10.9% of the population (McCallum, 1986: 5).

Since that time, the proportion of respondents claiming no religion has continued to grow. In 1996, some 16.5% of the population claimed to have no religion and a further 8.7% did not state an affiliation. By comparison, the proportion identifying with a Christian denomination has declined from around 87% in 1966, to 76.4% in 1981 and 70.0% in 1996.

The growth of the 'no religion' category, particularly among young adults, appears to be part of a decline in church-oriented religion in Australia. 'No religion' implies an unwillingness to identify with any religious institution and may also be a sign of declining religious practice among the young, as discussed in the next chapter. This could be part of a single process where religious practice ceases, such as in the decrease in children attending Sunday school or church, followed by declining levels of religious belief and, finally, declines in identification with a religious denomination.

However, it cannot be assumed that all of those respondents claiming to have 'no religion' are atheists or agnostics. Although commentators commonly see an increase in the 'no religion' category as proof that overall levels of religious belief are declining (eg. McClelland, 1997), analysis of the National Social Science Survey data shows that only half of those citing no religion also claim to be atheists or agnostics (Hughes, 1993: 60-61).

Belief in God

To provide evidence of change in the levels of belief and religious practices of the population, survey data collected in the 1950s and 1960s can be compared with data from later surveys. Most such survey data is based upon national samples with one important exception: the 1966 Religion in Australia Survey. While based on a large number of

personal interviews, these were conducted only in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania. Although these three states accounted for more than two-thirds of Australia's population at the time, demographic and cultural differences between these states and the rest of Australia may have had some impact on the statistics generated from the survey. Where possible it is important to consider the evidence of other surveys at the time and not to rely solely upon the 1966 survey.

Those who believe in God or, at the very least, in a higher power, declined from 95% in the 1950s and 92% in 1966 to 74% in 1998. There were also increases from 1966 to 1998 in the percentage of people claiming to be atheists, from 2% to 9%, and those claiming to be agnostics, from 6% to 17%.

While the overall levels of belief in God or a higher power are still very high, the nature of that belief has changed. In 1966, 52% of respondents believed in a personal God without doubt. This had declined to 35% by 1985 and to 30% by 1993 (McCallum, 1986: 9; Hughes *et al.*, 1995: 13).

Prayer

Comparisons can also be made between the 1966 Religion in Australia Survey and later surveys in relation to prayer. The proportion of persons praying decreased slightly from 74% to 70% between 1966 and 1998. However, steeper declines can be observed in the proportion of those claiming to pray daily, from 34% in 1966 to just 21% in 1998.

TABLE 4.1

CHANGE TO RELIGIOUS INDICATORS, 1947-1998

	Identify with a Christian denomination	Believe in God or a higher power	Pray	Pray daily	Attend religious services	Attend religious services (monthly or more)
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
1947	88					
1950		95	-	-	76	47
1966	87	92	74	34	77	39
1981	76					
1983		79	65	17	63	27
1991	74					
1993		78	64	20	66	23
1996	70					
1998		74	70	21	48*	20
Percent change 1966-1998	-17	-18	-4	-13	-29	-19

Sources: 1950 Gallup poll; 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1983 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys; 1998 Australian Community Survey; Census of Population and Housing (1947, 1966, 1981, 1991 and 1996).
Note: * excludes attendance at weddings, funerals and christenings

Notwithstanding the high levels of religiosity that are implicit in these statistics, the survey evidence points to a decline in various aspects of religion in Australia, in parallel with the decline in church attendances. McCallum concluded that the survey evidence shows 'the shrinking relevance of values, institutionalised in religion, for organising and motivating Australians in the 1980s' (McCallum, 1986: 13). Wilson (1983: 49) too concluded that 'during the past twenty years, on every external measure from the rate of church attendance on Sundays to Australian social morality, the influence of the Gospel has declined.'

McCallum posed the question as to whether this decline represented a single shake-out of nominally religious people rather than an ongoing process of decline. While it is still too soon to be certain, the statistics show that the rate of decline has slowed in the period since McCallum and Wilson made their conclusions. Levels of Christian identification, belief in God, levels of frequent church attendance and daily prayer declined to a lesser extent in the 15 years between 1983 and 1998 than in the 17 years between 1966 and 1983.

Table 4.1 also shows that frequent church attendance (monthly or more) has declined at a much faster rate than the proportion of people who claim to believe in God's existence. While the proportion of people who believe in God declined from 95% in 1950 to 74% in 1998, frequent attendance of at least once per month has diminished more sharply from 47% in 1950 to just 20% in 1998.

The large decline in frequent church attendance suggests that private religious belief, as distinct from one entailing a frequent involvement with a church, has now become the major form of religious expression in Australia. To what extent this 'private' religion is comprised of customary religion or common religion requires examination of other survey evidence.

NON-CHURCH RELIGION AND DECLINES IN CHURCH ATTENDANCE

To what extent are declining church attendances part of a trend towards privately held religious beliefs and practices that do not involve a corporate expression, here termed 'non-church' religion? As used here, the term 'non-church' religion does not necessarily imply that the particular religious beliefs and practices pursued are entirely unrelated to those in church-oriented religion. It means rather that they do not involve participation in the officially organised activities of churches, such as public worship.

One approach in addressing this question empirically is to calculate the difference or 'gap' between the proportion of the population who are frequent church attenders and the proportion who are religious according to other measures. Such an approach has been used by Bentley *et al.* (1992: 24-31) to calculate the growth in Christian nominalism in Australia. They compared the proportion of people who identify with a Christian denomination with the proportion who attend church once per month or more often. In 1950, 41% of the population identified with a denomination but did not frequently attend church. Table 4.2 shows that by 1998, this proportion had increased to 50% of the population, who could be defined as being nominal.

TABLE 4.2

RELIGIOUS IDENTIFICATION AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE, 1947 - 1998

	(I) Identify with a Christian denomination (%)	(II) Attend church monthly or more often (%)	Difference between percent in column II and previous Census in column I
1947	88		
1950		47	41
1966	87	39	48
1981	76		
1983		27	49
1991	74		
1993		23	52
1996	70		
1998		20	50

Sources: 1950 Gallup poll; 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1983 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys; 1998 Australian Community Survey; Census of Population and Housing (1947, 1966, 1981, 1991 and 1996).

In the same way, differences can be calculated for other measures of religiosity, such as belief in God or patterns of prayer. Table 4.3 shows that the proportion of the population who believe in God but don't attend church frequently has increased from 48% of the population in 1950 to 54% in 1998. Similarly, the proportion who pray

at least occasionally but do not attend church frequently has increased from 35% in 1966 to 41% in 1993 and 44% in 1998.

TABLE 4.3

BELIEF IN GOD AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE, 1950 - 1998

	Believe in God or a higher power (%)	Attend church monthly or more often (%)	Difference between percentages
1950	95	47	48
1966	92	39	53
1983	79	27	52
1993	78	23	55
1998	74	20	54

Sources: 1950 Gallup poll; 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1983 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys; 1998 Australian Community Survey.

The growth in the proportion of people who believe yet do not attend church frequently suggests that a shift towards 'non-church' religion has been slowly occurring in Australia over the past few decades. The large proportion who, in 1950, already had privately held beliefs and practices only, shows that this was the preferred option for a large minority of Australians at least since the Second World War. Profession of beliefs for which there is no strong conviction may continue long after congruent actions, such as church attendance, have ceased (Swidler, 1986: 281).

However, it needs to be acknowledged that the statistics examined here give only the faintest outline of the place of religion in the lives of Australians. From the viewpoint of traditional Christian faith, the statistics tell little about changes to the intensity of faith or the detailed content of belief over this period. There is evidence that the more intense forms of religiosity, such as daily prayer or belief in a personal God without any doubts, are generally not found beyond persons with a frequent church involvement. It could be

that the growth in non-church forms of religion recorded here may also be accompanied by a loss of religious intensity. This issue is further discussed in Chapter 5.

THE IMPACT OF NON-CHURCH APPROACHES TO RELIGION

Customary Religion

As previously discussed, customary religion can be defined as those aspects of religion which are derivative of official church religion but are beyond its influence. Rather than rejecting official religion, a customary approach sees it as respectable but in need of modification.

Trivialisation, conventionality, apathy or self-interest play a role in the development of customary religion. Under a customary approach, beliefs and practices become part of a person's routine through socialisation processes, rather than through the development of an adult religious commitment. Church attendance or praying become dependent upon one's mood rather than being seen as regular activity. The dropping of costly religious practices such as fasting or 'difficult' beliefs such as hell can also be part of a customary approach (Hornsby-Smith *et al.*, 1985: 248-249).

Commenting on Towler and Chamberlain's work in the United Kingdom, Hornsby-Smith (1985: 246) summarised some of the features of a customary approach to religion as one where:

- Religion is still seen as important, though people do not think about it much,
- Church attendance as a child, even where it is involuntary, is seen as being the source of religion (ie. 'I wouldn't have a religion if I hadn't been to church'),
- Religious beliefs help people to cope with life, particularly in dealing with suffering or perplexity,
- Religion is seen as valuable as a form of training in a practical ethic,

- Religion is a personal matter (ie. 'You don't need to go to church to be a Christian').

In addition, there are high levels of heterodoxy among those with a more customary approach to religion; less than two-thirds of self-identified Catholics in Hornsby-Smith's study had no doubts about the existence of God (Hornsby-Smith, 1985: 245).

There is evidence of widespread customary religion in Australia. Bentley *et al*. (1992: 70-95) found evidence of less intensity of faith among nominal adherents, as evidenced by response to credal items and images of God; a greater propensity to see the role of religion as giving standards to live by rather than as a way of coming into relationship with God; and a greater likelihood of seeing the role of the church as one of encouraging good morals and decency. But there is little statistical material available from different periods of time to discern whether a customary approach to religion has been growing in Australia, in parallel with declining church attendance.

The 1966 Religion in Australia Survey asked some questions which probe some of the features of customary religion identified by Towler, one of which can be compared with a later survey. The question concerned whether it is necessary to go to church to be a good Christian. In 1966, some 84% of non-attenders and infrequent attenders believed that it wasn't necessary to go to church to be a good Christian. In 1998, the Australian Community Survey also found that, in response to a similar question, 83% of non-attenders and infrequent attenders believed that it wasn't necessary to go to church to be a Christian.

By comparison, 53% of frequent church attenders in 1966 believed that it was not necessary to go to church to be a good Christian, compared with 45% in 1998. Notwithstanding differences in the wording of the questions, this may indicate a growing trend towards exclusivity among church attenders – a growing sense that being a *good* Christian may of necessity involve church attendance.

Initial analysis of the relationship between this variable and church attendance in the 1998 Australian Community Survey shows that it does have some independent effect on church participation, suggesting that a customary approach to religion is part of the reason that many Australians are not motivated to attend church. The comparison of 1966 and 1998 survey evidence suggests that this attitude, which forms a part of a customary approach to religion, is widespread in Australia and has been so for some time. However, it doesn't appear that it has increased since the 1960s.

Common Religion

As defined previously, 'common religion' covers those beliefs and practices not derived from official church religion but which nonetheless have a magical or supernatural referent (Hornsby-Smith *et al.*, 1985: 247). Belief in fate, magic, witchcraft and astrology would fall within common religion (Towler, 1974: 150).

There is some question as to whether common religion is really religion at all. In response, Towler (1974: 146, 150) criticises academics for being superficial in their assumptions about the role of common religion and of being overly influenced by the norms of church religion. Yet he concedes that whether common religion has any role at all in helping to make peoples' lives meaningful in a systematic way remains an untested proposition (Towler, 1974: 161). In considering the relationship between church attendance and common religion, it is important to consider the salience as well as the presence of such beliefs.

There is very little statistical evidence about the shape and growth of common religion in Australia, let alone whether it competes with church religion (Glasner, 1983: 167-180). The 1966 Religion in Australia Survey asked respondents whether they ever acted on the advice of their stars. Only 2% often did so and a further 11% sometimes did so; most respondents (87%) indicated that they never acted on their stars. This suggests that, whatever the level of interest in astrology in Australia at the time, only a minority of

people were willing to act upon the advice so obtained. Frequent church attenders (9%) were only a little less likely to act on their stars than infrequent and non-attenders (16%). A similar question was asked in the 1998 Australian Community Survey. Respondents were asked whether, in the past 12 months, they had sought direction from a horoscope, tarot, fortune-teller or similar method. Overall, 6% of Australians had often done so and a further 20% had done so on at least one occasion, a total of 26%. Most people (74%) still indicated that they had not acted on the advice of a horoscope, tarot or similar method.

By comparison, 87% of frequent church attenders indicated that they did not act on the advice of a horoscope, tarot or similar method, a figure that is little different to that obtained in 1966 (91%).

It appears from the comparison of the two surveys that acting on the advice of horoscopes, tarot or similar method is an activity that has increased among Australians in the last few decades, particularly among infrequent and non-attenders. Further questions in the 1998 Australian Community Survey also show an interest in New Age practices among a significant minority of Australians. Some 12% of Australian adults practised Eastern meditation at least once in the previous year and 10% used psychic healing or crystals in the past year.

Overall, adherents to New Age religions account for only 0.4% of the population. Gary Bouma has found that some 30,000 Australians identified with New Age religions in the 1996 Census, an increase of more than 50% since 1991 (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 Sep. 1997: 3). While this makes nature-based religions the fastest growing religions in Australia, their direct impact on church attendances would be small. But clearly the level of interest among Australians in New Age spirituality is far greater than these numbers suggest, as evidenced by the proportion of Australians who have made use of psychic healing, crystals or Eastern meditation.

Mainstream Eastern religions

The increase in New Age religion in Australia points to the indirect influence of mainstream Eastern religions among Australians. The size of mainstream Eastern religions in Australia can be identified from the Census. Adherents to mainstream non-Christian religions comprise 3.4% of the Australian population according to the 1996 Census. This figure has increased from about 35,000 in the late 1940s to more than 600,000 by 1996. Buddhism has increased to 1.1% and Islam to 1.1% of the population, while adherents to Judaism constitute about 0.4% of the population. These increases are primarily explained in terms of migration rather than conversion to these religions. Migrants from Lebanon, Turkey, North Africa, Indonesia and Yugoslavia have caused increases in the percentage of Muslims. Vietnamese migration accounts for a large part of the increase among Buddhists (Hughes, 1993: 57-58).

Overall, mainstream non-Christian religions form only a small part of the religious landscape and have only a small direct impact on church attendance levels. But they may have a more significant impact in the growth of non-church religion, both as a resource for alternative beliefs and practices, and in enhancing the sense of religious plurality.

Reincarnation is a fundamental plank in many mainstream Eastern religions, as well as in New Age spirituality. The influence of mainstream Eastern religions can be demonstrated by the growing acceptance of a belief in reincarnation among Australians. In a 1969 Gallup poll, only 13% of adult Australians believed in reincarnation and a further 17% were unsure. However, by 1998, the Australian Community Survey found that 27% believed in reincarnation and 34% were unsure. These statistics suggest that Australians have rapidly become more open to the possibility of reincarnation, or have been prepared to embrace this belief.

Religious Relativism

Recently published research from the Australian Community Survey (Bellamy *et al.*, 1999) suggests that relativism is a distinct approach to spirituality among Australians. This approach embraces the importance of living for the present while at the same time remaining uncommitted to any one approach to spirituality, religion or values formation. Thus, while people holding a relativist outlook do not reject spirituality out- of-hand, they also do not place much importance upon it.

Data from the Australian Community Survey indicate that worldly relativism is far more negatively correlated with traditional Christian beliefs than is New Age spirituality. In addition, the research shows that the numbers of those strongly and exclusively holding a relativist approach (15%) was almost as large as those strongly and exclusively holding traditional Christian beliefs (23%) (Bellamy *et al.*, 1999).

As will be discussed in the next chapter, there is evidence of the growth in the level of uncertainty regarding religious beliefs. Along with the widespread acceptance of a relativist approach to spirituality, this provides evidence for those who maintain that the modernist 'project' has stalled, being overtaken by post-modernism. Post-modernism is characterised by fragmentation, indeterminacy and a rejection of meta-narratives; it eschews large-scale theoretical interpretations that are meant to have universal application (Harvey, 1989: 9).

In relation to religion, such an approach tolerates plurality but rejects the exclusive claims of traditional Christian belief. It appears, however, that while such an approach may be negatively related to traditional Christian belief and to church attendance, it does not necessarily imply the embracing of atheism.

FUNCTIONALLY DEFINED RELIGION AND CHURCH PARTICIPATION

As previously noted, functionally defined religion does not necessarily have a supernatural referent. Potentially technology, sexuality, sport, environmentalism or the family could take the place of traditional religion in providing a sense of meaning and significance.

There is a clear need for empirical research on 'invisible religion', which looks beyond official models of religion (Luckmann, 1967: 91-92; Towler, 1974: 145-146). If invisible religion is on the increase, then particular aspects of life are invested with greater significance in the private sphere than at a previous time. It may then be possible to identify key areas that provide a sense of ultimate significance.

But 'invisible religion' is difficult to detect and such individualised systems of meaning have largely eluded researchers (Bibby, 1983; Bibby 1987: 41-42). In Australia, Bentley *et al.* (1992: 101) found that, for many people, a number of different areas offered meaning and purpose, including work, family and church. Certain themes and philosophies also shaped a person's outlook, but again these were fairly diffuse. They concluded that few people seem to have, or feel the need for, a well-integrated system of meaning. Instead, a 'culture of individualism' holds sway.

Canadian sociologist Reginald Bibby (1987: 137-149) paints a similar picture; people are increasingly picking and choosing beliefs from a range of sources rather than adopting a systematic approach to belief. Consequently, such beliefs lack consistency, resulting in a fragmented approach to religion. Bibby argues that this is the logical outcome of increasing role specialisation and the rise of consumerism; people choose religious 'fragments' which address particular areas of their lives in preference to commitment to all-inclusive meaning systems, which require a high level of consistency across all areas.

Whether traditionally non-religious areas of life actually do fulfil religious functions remains an open question. On the basis of Canadian research, Bibby concluded that social

researchers often make the assumption, perhaps unreasonably, that invisible threads of meaning exist or that having an integrated meaning system is important to most people. In looking for such meaning systems, it may be that conventional religion is the only coherent meaning system to be found (Bibby, 1993: 116-118).

The role of other elements in life in providing a functional substitute for substantively defined religion has generally not been pursued in this thesis. Nevertheless, the presence or absence of statistical relationships between church participation and variables such as family life, leisure activities, work and involvement in other voluntary associations has been pursued and will be highlighted in coming chapters.

CONCLUSION

Under some versions of secularisation theory, declining church attendance has been taken to be evidence that religion is waning. Another possibility is that religious belief remains stable across the population but has no corporate expression. There is evidence that rather than completely divesting themselves of religion, many Australians have a privately held form of religion that does not involve frequent church involvement. This is shown by the fact that the majority of Australians continue to identify with a Christian denomination, believe in the existence of God and pray at some time.

However, it must be conceded that such indicators of religion give only the barest outline of the shape of religion in the community. The use of these indicators for drawing conclusions about the process of secularisation has attracted strong criticism (Ireland, 1988). Little can be deduced about the depth or intensity of privatised religion from these indicators, or about whether the quality of belief has changed over time. It could be that such privatised belief outside of a corporate involvement is little more than rhetoric that does nothing to inform the way people live.

Data collected through the Australian Community Survey provide an opportunity to explore the shape of privately held approaches to religion. Initial analysis suggests a widespread relativism on religious issues that has led to a growth in adherence to other beliefs, such as reincarnation, or the adoption of a neutral position on religious beliefs.

The next chapter takes further the issue of private forms of religion from the viewpoint of church-oriented religion. To what extent are Christian beliefs and practices important to those outside of church life? Or is it more a case that they are not involved in church life because such beliefs and practices are also unimportant to them?

CHAPTER 5: RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Resarchers often treat religious commitment as a multi-dimensional concept. Charles Glock and Rodney Stark (1965) described five main dimensions of religiosity: the ideological, the ritualistic, the experiential, the intellectual and the consequential. Later researchers expanded the number of dimensions still further (eg. King and Hunt, 1972), though it has been recognised that the types of populations studied influence both the number of dimensions found and their relative significance. Studies of church attenders would be expected to yield a greater number of dimensions than general population studies due to the relative homogeneity and finer distinctions of church attender samples (Roof, 1979: 37-38).

Some have argued that of all the dimensions of religious commitment, the ideological dimension is central and that all other aspects of religious commitment flow from it (eg. Clayton and Gladden, 1974). It is therefore important to understand the relationship between the traditional Christian beliefs which often form the ideological dimension and what bearing these have on non-participation in church life. This will be the subject of this chapter.

Overseas research has shown a strong relationship between holding Christian beliefs and church involvement (Faulkner and De Jong, 1966; Hadden, 1969; Stark and Glock, 1970; Hoge and Carroll, 1978). Australian studies have also shown a high correlation between holding Christian beliefs and church attendance (Hughes *et al.*, 1995). The 1993 National Social Science Survey included a range of questions covering traditional Christian beliefs. Table 5.1 demonstrates the relationship between holding such beliefs and church attendance. Of the range of beliefs shown, a belief in God and in heaven are the most highly correlated with attendance.

TABLE 5.1

TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN BELIEFS

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Belief in:				
- God	51	96	61	0.62*
- life after death	42	87	52	0.45*
- heaven	40	90	51	0.54*
- hell	22	66	32	0.43*
- the devil	21	68	32	0.44*
- religious miracles	29	81	41	0.49*

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

While there is a high correlation between assenting to traditional Christian beliefs and attendance, Table 5.1 also shows that not all frequent church attenders accept the full range of these beliefs. In fact only 55% of frequent attenders agree with all six propositions, though just 11% of infrequent and non-attenders agree with all six propositions. A similar pattern was detected in the 1983 Australian Values Study Survey (AVSS) where 60% of frequent attenders accepted the full range of beliefs covered in that survey, including belief in God, sin, life after death, a soul, the devil, heaven and hell (Kaldor, 1987: 33).

CHANGES IN PATTERNS OF BELIEF

The strong relationship between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance raises the question as to whether declines in churchgoing are a result in part from declines in the level of acceptance of such beliefs in the wider community. Table 5.2 shows that there have been substantial declines in the acceptance of some traditional Christian beliefs. Belief in a personal God has declined markedly since the mid-1960s, with increases in the

percentage of those affirming merely a belief in a higher power, or professing to be agnostic or atheist. Similarly, belief in the existence of heaven has declined. By comparison, other Christian beliefs have remained at stable levels. Levels of belief in hell and the devil have hardly shifted, despite significant declines in church attendance over the same period.

TABLE 5.2

CHANGE TO LEVELS OF TRADITIONAL CHRISTIAN BELIEF

	Belief in a personal God (%)	Belief in heaven (%)	Belief in life after death (%)	Belief in hell (%)	Belief in the devil (%)
1947			63		
1966	78				
1968		65	47	35	33
1975		58		43	
1983 NSSS	71				
1983 AVSS		57	49	35	36
1989/90	66	47	48	30	29
1993	61				
1998		52	45	31	32
Percent change 1968-1998	-17%*	-13%	-2%	-4%	-1%

Sources: 1947, 1968 and 1975 Gallup polls; 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1983, 1989/90 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys; 1983 Australian Values Study Survey; 1998 Australian Community Survey.
Note: * Percent change from 1966 to 1993

Sigelman (1977: 291) notes that belief in God tends to be higher in countries where belief in the devil and in hell are also relatively high, and that a strong relationship exists between these variables. Declines in belief in God and heaven at a time when belief in hell and the devil have remained stable suggests a change to this relationship in Australia at least. The decline in belief in God and heaven may also point to a decline in a customary approach to

the Christian religion, since the holding of such 'positive' beliefs is a hallmark of such an approach, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Table 5.3 shows that declines in belief have been matched by declines in explicit disbelief. In other words, while fewer people accept traditional Christian beliefs, this has not been accompanied by increases in the outright rejection of belief. Rather, there has been an increase in those who are simply unsure or don't know what they think about each of these beliefs.

TABLE 5.3
CHANGE TO LEVELS OF DISBELIEF

	Disbelief in God or a higher power (%)	Disbelief in heaven (%)	Disbelief in life after death (%)	Disbelief in hell (%)	Disbelief in the devil (%)
1947			20		
1966	2				
1968	7	26	34	55	57
1975	12	28		43	
1983	7	32	34	52	51
1989/90	7	29	29	47	51
1993	9				
1998	9	25	18	43	47
Percent change 1968-1998	+2%	-1%	-16%	-12%	-10%

Sources: 1947, 1968 and 1975 Gallup polls; 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1989/90 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys; 1983 Australian Values Study Survey; 1998 Australian Community Survey.

In a recent analysis of longitudinal data in the United Kingdom, Gill *et al.* (1998) arrived at the conclusion that the evidence supports both the theorists who see religion as being in decline (eg. Wilson, 1966) and those who see religion as persisting (eg. Stark and Iannacone, 1994). A similar conclusion can be reached from the data in Tables 5.2 and 5.3

– there is evidence here both of decline in some Christian beliefs and of the persistence of belief. What most characterises the Australian data is the large number of people who currently neither accept nor reject traditional Christian beliefs when compared to the 1960s

WHY BELIEFS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

It is highly likely that people's beliefs and their church participation are causally related. People who hold Christian beliefs gather together with others who do so, to worship God and grow together in faith. On the other hand, those for whom faith is more 'customary' (Towler, 1974) or who do not hold their beliefs as strongly, are less likely to attend church frequently, except perhaps for religious festivals or special events.

While an association between factors can be readily established, causality is more difficult to establish. It could be that beliefs cause church attendance or that church strengthens belief. Or it could be that some third set of factors causes both and that beliefs and church attendance are causally unrelated. Some overseas studies have sought to establish the direction of causality, but the applicability of their findings to Australia needs to be tested.

Work carried out in the United States on this issue found that beliefs and attendance are directly related and not the result of a third set of factors. Gaede (1977) carried out multiple regression on a set of variables including education, economic status, belief-orthodoxy, demographic variables, urbanism and church participation variables. He found that even controlling for other factors, the relationship between beliefs-orthodoxy and church participation remained strong. This suggests that this relationship is not a spurious by-product of other factors, pointing to a likely causal relationship. Gaede (1977) further argued that belief is more likely to be the causal variable rather than church attendance. Within the Christian community, religious participation is:

primarily an affirmation and celebration of faith which is grounded in its beliefs. Rather than viewing ritual participation as a means of effecting transcendent and/or cognitive states, Christians more generally see religious participation as a celebration of that which they already believe (Gaede, 1977: 251).

Hoge and Carroll (1978) carried out a study of the determinants of church participation among members of Protestant churches. The results of their study showed that there is warrant for speaking of the causal impact of doctrinal beliefs on church participation; multiple partial correlations suggest that causation is more from beliefs to participation than vice versa. Hoge and Carroll (1978) hypothesized two models, Model A and Model B, shown below. In Model A, the background and family variables (termed 'social variables') are causal for doctrinal beliefs and beliefs are in turn causal for participation in church. In Model B the social variables are causal for church participation, which is in turn causal for beliefs.

FIGURE 5.1

MODELLING THE DIRECTION OF CAUSALITY BETWEEN CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND BELIEFS
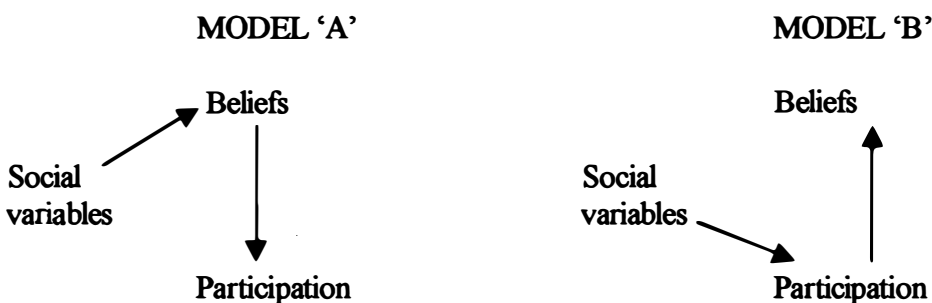
MODEL 'A'   MODEL 'B'

Source: Hoge and Carroll, 1978

In Model A, the multiple correlation between social variables and beliefs is 0.34 and the correlation between beliefs and participation is 0.26. In Model B the multiple correlation between social variables and participation is 0.15 and the correlation between participation and beliefs is 0.26. Following Goldberg (1971) the test of each model is the partial correlation between the social variables and the final dependant variable while

partialing out all in the causal linkage. In a good model it should approximate zero (Hoge and Carroll, 1978: 120). In Model A, the partial correlation between the social variables and participation controlling for beliefs is 0.08. In Model B it is 0.33. Therefore Model A is stronger and probable causation is more from beliefs to participation than vice versa. Hoge and Carroll conclude that there is warrant for speaking of the causal impact of beliefs on participation.

Replication of this procedure was carried out using the Western Sydney Survey database. Instead of social variables, the initial variable in this case was a scale formed from religious upbringing variables (eg. parents' church attendance when the respondent was a child). Neither Model A nor Model B appears to be better in explaining the direction of causality. The correlation between beliefs and church attendance is strong (0.63). In Model A, the partial correlation between religious upbringing and participation controlling for beliefs is 0.13. In Model B, the partial correlation between religious upbringing and beliefs controlling for church participation is also 0.13. However when the database is split into two groups, respondents under 50 years of age and respondents aged 50 years or over, Model A begins to emerge as the better model for those aged over 50 years. The partial correlation for Model A decreases to 0.06, while Model B remains steady at 0.12. For those aged under 50 years, the partial correlations for Models A and B are 0.15 and 0.13 respectively.

Analysis on a larger database, the 1998 Australian Community Survey, suggests that Model B is a slightly better model for those aged under 30 years. This is consistent with notions of faith development. It would be expected that among those who are younger, church attendance is more likely to be causal on beliefs as conviction of beliefs emerges from a childhood involvement in church.

Nevertheless, the likely direction of causality between beliefs and church attendance does not emerge empirically overall. It could be that attenders are motivated by commonly held beliefs to meet together to celebrate those beliefs, as Gaede and others have found. It could also be that the relationship is reciprocal; attending church could also be affirming

of peoples' beliefs and necessary for the maintenance of those beliefs, as described by Berger's notion of plausibility structures (Berger, 1970).

Involvement in church life at an early age and the cultural and religious background of one's family are clearly influential in shaping a person's adult religious commitment. A lack of an active church involvement by one's parents is an important variable in explaining non-participation. This is further explored in the next chapter.

Another consideration is the processes behind adult religious conversion. Religious conversion has been explained in terms of a number of different factors including the content of belief, social factors and psychological factors. However, in the first instance, most potential converts experience the religious group prior to adopting its beliefs. In addition, prior friendships or kinship ties that the potential convert has with members of the religious group assist in convincing the potential convert of the plausibility of beliefs and the attractiveness of belonging. It is within the context of group or church involvement that the process of conversion often occurs (McGuire, 1981: 66-70).

There is some empirical evidence to suggest that the process of joining a church may happen in parallel with a process of conversion. The 1991 National Church Life Survey found that 48% of newcomers to church life who had joined a congregation within the past year also claimed to have had a distinct conversion experience. For some this conversion experience may have occurred a long time prior to their joining the congregation; however, for most of this 48%, the conversion experience occurred in the same year that they joined their present congregation (Kaldor *et al.*, 1995b: 132).

This evidence does not show at what point Christian beliefs are adopted. For many, conversion could simply be a stronger commitment to beliefs already held.

OTHER ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT

There are other aspects to religious commitment apart from assenting to belief. Two further aspects have been examined in the Western Sydney Survey which bear upon the issue of non-participation:

- the degree of certainty with which beliefs are held,
- the importance or salience of religion.

Certainty of Belief

The 1966 Religion in Australia Survey, the 1983 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys and 1993 Western Sydney Survey all contained measures of the degree of certainty about belief in God. From these surveys, the level of certainty of belief emerges as a strongly distinguishing feature between frequent attenders on the one hand and infrequent or non-attenders on the other. Table 5.4 shows that frequent church attenders are, on the whole, much more certain of their belief in God. Some 73% of frequent attenders believe in God without doubts compared to only 17% of infrequent and non-attenders.

Comparison of results from the 1993 National Social Science Survey with the 1966 Religion in Australia Survey show that there has been a dramatic decrease in certainty of belief in God. While the percentage of Australians assenting to belief in a personal God has shrunk from 78% in 1966 to 61% in 1993, the level of certainty has shrunk even further. In 1966, 52% of Australians believed in God without any doubts; by 1993 only 30% believed without doubts.

TABLE 5.4

BELIEF IN GOD'S EXISTENCE

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Don't believe in God	11	1	9
Don't know	16	1	13
Believe in a higher power	22	2	17
Believe in God sometimes	10	2	8
Believe in God but with doubts	24	21	23
Believe in God without doubts	17	73	30
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma): 0.62*

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

Another issue on which peoples' degree of certainty can be explored is in relation to Jesus' divinity and resurrection. Central to the Christian faith is the belief that Jesus was the Son of God, died and rose again from the dead. Yet questions about Jesus' person, works, divinity and resurrection have been largely omitted from major surveys of religion and opinion polls in Australia.

A question on Jesus' divinity and resurrection was included in the 1993 Western Sydney Survey. As with belief in God's existence, there is a strong correlation (gamma) of 0.71 between church attendance and believing in Jesus' divinity and resurrection. Again the level of certainty with which these beliefs are held strongly differentiates frequent attenders from most infrequent and non-attenders. Among frequent attenders, 88% believe in Jesus' divinity and resurrection without doubt. Among infrequent and non-attenders, 25% believe in the divinity and resurrection of Christ without any doubts and a further 15% admit to having minor doubts. About a third do not believe it or have serious

doubts, while another 28% are undecided. Again, while there is a significant minority of infrequent and non-attenders who believe in Jesus' divinity and resurrection, the proportion who believe with certainty is far lower than among frequent attenders.

Salience of Religion

In understanding why people are not involved in churches, the salience of their religion becomes a further important issue to consider. It could be that many who profess belief do not see the practice of their religion as being particularly important; this may help to explain why they are not sufficiently motivated towards a more frequent church involvement.

The Western Sydney Survey sought to explore the connection between church attendance and the relative importance placed upon religion. In other surveys, such as the 1983 AVSS and 1993 NSSS, a global assessment of the importance of religion has been obtained by asking respondents to nominate the importance of God in their lives. The Western Sydney Survey instead explored the issue by asking respondents how important the following practices are to them:

- obeying God's commands,
- trusting God in everyday situations,
- prayer,
- Bible reading.

Table 5.5 shows a high correlation between each salience item and church attendance. Obedience, prayer and trusting God in daily life are all considered very important by more than 80% of frequent attenders. Reading the Bible is less highly regarded, being considered very important by 55% of frequent attenders. This difference is related to denominational background; only 33% of Catholic church attenders consider that reading the Bible is very important compared to 71% of Anglican/ Protestant attenders.

Among infrequent and non-attenders, obedience and trusting God in daily life are considered very important by 28% and 27% of respondents respectively. By comparison, devotional practices such as prayer (17%) and reading the Bible (6%) are considered very important by a smaller proportion.

TABLE 5.5
RELIGIOUS PRACTICES CONSIDERED TO BE VERY IMPORTANT
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Obeying God's commands	28	86	42	0.78*
Trusting God in everyday situations	27	89	42	0.80*
Prayer	17	81	34	0.79*
Reading the Bible	6	55	18	0.75*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on the complete data for every question.
* significant at p<0.05 level

It should be noted that the correlations between salience and church attendance, as shown in Table 5.5, are higher than the correlations between traditional Christian beliefs and church attendance, depicted in Table 5.1. This suggests that the salience of religion is more critical in understanding the lack of participation in churches than is assent to beliefs.

In summary, there are high levels of correlation between holding Christian beliefs and church attendance. However, the level of certainty with which beliefs are held and the salience of religion are even more important in understanding non-participation. Although this is not surprising, it provides support for the notion that church attendance levels have been affected by secularisation processes. As certainty of belief is shaken, people become less disposed towards involvement in churches, whatever social or other benefits church

involvement may be able to confer on an individual. Though they may retain their beliefs, their religion is no longer relevant or potent enough to sustain a regular church involvement.

CHRISTIAN RELIGIOSITY AMONG INFREQUENT AND NON-ATTENDERS

It appears that the certainty with which beliefs are held and the importance placed upon religious practice are of greater significance in understanding non-participation than is assenting to beliefs. This conclusion is highlighted still further by considering certainty of belief and salience not as individual items but as a scale. Six questions from the Western Sydney Survey were combined into a scale of Christian religiosity, using the following questions:

- Certainty of belief in the existence of God,
- Certainty of belief in the divinity and resurrection of Christ,
- Importance of obeying God's commands,
- Importance of trusting God in daily life,
- Importance of prayer,
- Importance of reading the Bible.

The items together form a scale with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91.

Each respondent was given a total score out of 12 for the six items covered, resulting in a single score of religiosity. Scores of 10 or above, which approximate the top quartile of all respondents, have been designated as 'highly religious', scores of 7 to 9 as 'quite religious', 3 to 6 as having 'some religion' and 0 to 2 as 'not religious'.

TABLE 5.6

LEVEL OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOSITY

by Church Attendance

Scale of Christian religiosity	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Not religious	38	0	28
Some religion	33	5	25
Quite religious	18	20	19
Highly religious	11	75	28
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.81*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

Most frequent church attenders (75%) are 'highly religious' on this scale, underlining the correlation between church attendance on the one hand and strongly holding to the set of Christian beliefs and practices on the other hand. At least 70% of attenders in each of the major denominational groups (Catholic, Anglican and Protestant) are highly religious, confirming that the score is also representative across traditions.

By comparison, only 11% of infrequent and non-attenders are 'highly religious', strongly holding to the set of Christian beliefs and practices covered here. This is a smaller proportion than might have been suggested by some of the statistics for individual items examined earlier.

Faith without the Church

That 75% of frequent attenders are highly religious compared to only 11% of infrequent and non-attenders suggests that the privatisation of Christian belief and practice is generally accompanied by a loss of intensity and declining importance

attached to traditional belief and practice. Some evidence to support this idea emerges by examining the church attendance history of the more religious non-attenders.

Most of the infrequent and non-attenders that are highly religious tend to be people who were once frequently involved in church life. Among non-attenders, some 67% who are highly religious and 40% who are religious also say that they once attended church as adults on a regular basis. Many also attended church as a child or had churchgoing parents. This suggests that privately held beliefs with no corporate expression are more often the result of people giving up church attendance rather than developing a Christian faith independently of the churches. Consequently, the future levels of the more intense forms of privately held faith may well depend on the levels of church attendance in the community. The importance of involvement in a church for faith development, and indeed for maintaining an intensity of Christian faith, cannot be overlooked.

CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND DECLINING RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

As discussed in Chapter 2, some secularisation theorists define secularisation in terms of declining religious authority rather than a decline in religion per se. From this perspective, the loss of ability by the church to influence other institutions and individual beliefs and behaviour is seen as a primary manifestation of secularisation.

Changes to religious authority for traditional Protestants meant a breakdown in the authority of the Bible itself. It is for this reason that Phillips (1977) suggests that the religious ferment about the authority of the Bible in Protestant circles at the end of the nineteenth century was the catalyst for a long decline in church attendance in Australia stretching into the twentieth century. By contrast, Catholic religious authority remained relatively untouched by the impact of theological modernism. The changes wrought by the Vatican II Council in 1965 led to changes in many long held

beliefs, heralding a decline in Catholic attendance in many countries (Breward, 1993). If, as Phillips maintains, declines in church attendance in the first half of the twentieth century are explained by declines in Protestant attendance, a similar phenomenon appears to have occurred among Catholics in the second half of the twentieth century.

Is there any evidence that there have been such fundamental changes in the way Australians regard religious authority? After all, Australians see the most important role of the church as encouraging decency and morality in society (Hughes *et al.*, 1995: 80). Presumably Australians would be prepared to look to the churches for a lead in this area.

The Western Sydney Survey included a question as to whether the respondent believed that morals and values are better decided on one's own, without relying on books such as the Bible. This question tries to get to the centre of the authority issue, given the importance of the Bible. There is strong polarisation on this issue. Among frequent church attenders, only 22% agreed that morals are best decided yourself, compared with 75% of infrequent and non-attenders. Again, the correlation with attendance was strong, with gamma being -0.71. Some 90% of people who are not religious agree that morals are best decided yourself. This compares to 77% of those with some religion, 53% of those who are quite religious and only 21% of the highly religious. This result is not surprising, but the strength of this trend underlines the low level of confidence in the wider community about using the Bible as an arbiter of values. It also reflects the individualism currently present in society.

TABLE 5.7

'MORALS AND VALUES ARE BEST DECIDED YOURSELF, NOT BY RELYING ON BOOKS LIKE THE BIBLE'

by Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Disagree	14	71	28
Unsure	11	7	10
Agree	75	22	62
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = -0.71*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

CONCLUSION

As expected, a strong relationship exists between church attendance and holding traditional Christian beliefs. Those who are infrequent or non-attenders are much less likely to hold such beliefs; even where they do, there is a tendency to reject key religious practices and to be uncertain about central beliefs.

There is evidence that the levels of some Christian beliefs, such as belief in a personal God and in heaven, have declined in the last 25 years while other beliefs, such as belief in the after-life or the devil, have remained fairly stable. Such declines would conform to those versions of secularisation theory that see religion as being in decline.

However, as discussed in Chapter 4, there are many religious expressions beyond traditional Christian beliefs. There is evidence of growth in non-Christian beliefs and

practices. The declines in traditional Christian belief do not mean that all religions or levels of religious belief are in decline.

What has been shown is that most of the *virtuoso* adherents - those who hold a wide range of Christian beliefs and for whom such beliefs are both certain and have salience - are mostly to be found in churches. This suggests that the Christian faith is not easily maintained without a church involvement. Where Christian beliefs are held among infrequent or non-attenders, it is more likely to be found among those who are also former church attenders. It is seemingly not well fostered outside of a church involvement.

The definition of secularisation used in this thesis entails a decline in religious thinking among the general population. If such secularisation lies behind declines in church attendance since the 1950s, it would be expected that traditional Christian beliefs would also be declining among those outside of church life. In other words, declining participation in churches would be accompanied by declining levels of belief. By contrast, the transformation of religion implies that religious beliefs will continue to be held irrespective of the level of church attendance. If such transformation is a key trend, it would be expected that levels of such belief might not necessarily decline as church attendance declined.

But as can be seen in the evidence that has been presented in this chapter, changes to the levels of belief within the community have as much to do with the quality of belief, such as salience and certainty of belief, as with the proportions of the population who affirm particular beliefs. Certainty of belief, its importance and attitudes to religious authority strongly distinguish attenders from most non-attenders. Some versions of secularisation theory hold that church-oriented religion has moved to the margins of everyday life. This does not necessarily mean that individuals have rejected religion outright, but rather that it has become rhetorical, because it is incongruent with the demands and priorities of everyday life (Luckmann, 1967: 100). The results examined here suggest that, for many people, religious beliefs may well have been reduced to rhetoric, lacking real connections with the way they live.

Non-participation in church has been said to be the result of apathy rather than hostility towards the churches (Kaldor *et al*, 1999: 10-12). The evidence presented here suggests that it is not a simple case of apathy. Many people have rejected some of the basic assumptions connected with religious authority. While the Bible may continue to be among the highest selling books in Australia, most infrequent and non-attenders no longer see it as authoritative for developing morals and values.

The presence of a strong relationship between beliefs and church attendance points to issues to do with the socialisation of church attenders compared to non-attenders. Are Australians simply 'brought up' to religion? If this is so, then declines in attendance now do not augur well for future church attendance levels. This issue is further examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: A RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING

Religious involvement may, in principle, be viewed as purely the result of personal choice. But what may seem to be the product of personal choice is to some extent shaped by a variety of social influences, including the choices of others. Research has shown that a person's gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, education and religious upbringing are all predictors of a person's current religious involvement (Batson *et al.*, 1993: 32-33; Sherkat and Wilson, 1995: 1013-1017).

Perhaps the most powerful social background predictor of a person's religious involvement is the religious involvement of her or his parents (Batson *et al.*, 1993: 43). Parents are strongly influential on their children; patterns of behaviour and belief that are formed early in life while a person is under parental control may continue later in life well beyond the time when the person has left home. Parents initially get children to attend church, which has been shown to significantly influence children's religious choices later in life (Sherkat and Wilson, 1995).

A person's religious background, however, is not simply limited to her or his upbringing. There are many in the wider community who have also been church attenders as adults and have since dropped out of church life. These people may have very different reasons for not participating in church compared to those who have never been involved in it as adults. This chapter then considers these two aspects of a person's religious background:

• upbringing,

• experience of church as an adult.

Hoge and Petrillo (1978) hypothesised that four sets of factors influence children's participation in church: family factors, peer group factors, programme factors and belief factors. Hoge and Petrillo found that, of these, family factors were the most important in predicting the church attendance of young people. The religion of the parents was the

most important family factor. Parental religion included both the mother's and father's patterns of church attendance, the salience of their faith and whether the mother's religion was the same as the father's. Other family factors that were of less importance were the frequency that parents discussed the faith with their children; the extent to which parents supervised the faith exploration of their children and the degree of harmony between children and parents.

The 1993 National Social Science Survey showed that 73% of the mothers of frequent church attenders were themselves frequent attenders, as compared to 40% of infrequent and non-attenders. A similar picture emerges in relation to the fathers of frequent attenders; 54% of the fathers of frequent attenders were also regular attenders compared to 23% of the fathers of infrequent and non-attenders.

The 1993 Western Sydney Survey also shows a similar relationship. Table 6.1 below summarises the relationship between church attendance and various aspects of childhood contact with the church, including having one or more parents who were church attenders. Church attenders are more than twice as likely to have had church-going parents during childhood. Some 66% of frequent attenders said that one or both of their parents often went to church compared to just 29% of infrequent and non-attenders.

Table 6.1 shows that having one or both parents who were church attenders appears to be the most important of these background variables. It is important to note that the church attendance patterns of the parents would also tend to be temporally if not causally prior to other aspects. Involvement in church services as a child or, for Catholics, attendance at a church run school would tend to be a consequence of their parents' religious commitment.

TABLE 6.1

CONTACT WITH THE CHURCH AS A CHILD

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
When respondent was a child:				
One/both parents attended church	29	66	38	0.56*
Did scripture at school	54	53	54	-0.03
Attended a church-run school	20	36	24	0.31*
Attended Sunday school	47	42	46	-0.05
Attended church services	42	70	49	0.42*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

The 1991 National Church Life Survey of Anglican and Protestant church attenders has highlighted the importance of the role of parents in children's coming to faith. Some 57% of church attenders cite their parents or other family members as being their first contact with the Christian faith, followed by Sunday School (20%). Of perhaps greater significance is the fact that 41% of attenders cite their parents as the most significant people to help them to find faith. More than 60% of attenders who nominate parents or family as their first contact with faith also cite parents as the most significant people in showing them what faith is about (Kaldor et al., 1995: 114-119).

The relationship between a child's church attendance pattern and that of the child's parents can also continue once the child has reached adulthood. There is empirical evidence that shows this to be the case. The National Church Life Survey found that more than 60% of attenders whose children had left home reported that their children were still attending church (Kaldor et al., 1995: 120).

Attending church services as a child is most closely related to attending church services as an adult. Table 6.1 shows that nearly half of respondents to the Western Sydney Survey said that they had regularly attended church services as a child. These figures are surpassed by the 1993 National Social Science Survey which reports that 74% of infrequent and non-attenders and 89% of frequent attenders claimed to have attended church services once per month or more often when they were children.

Attendance at a church run school is also positively related to attendance at church as an adult. The Western Sydney Study found that 36% of frequent attenders said that they had attended a church-run school compared to 20% of infrequent and non-attenders. Catholics (52%) are much more likely to have attended a church-run school than Anglicans or Protestants (8%). Yet there is a positive relationship within both denominational groupings. Among Catholics, 63% of frequent attenders went to a church-run school compared with 46% of infrequent and non-attenders. Among Anglicans and Protestants, 11% of frequent attenders went to a church-run school, compared with 7% of infrequent and non-attenders.

How contact as a child with other forms of church life is related to adult church attendance is not as clear. Table 6.1 shows that there were no statistically significant relationships between doing scripture at school or attending Sunday school and adult church attendance patterns. Catholics, however, are much less likely to have attended Sunday school than Anglicans and Protestants. Yet there is no relationship for Anglican and Protestants; some 73% of frequent attenders went to Sunday school as a child compared with 71% of infrequent and non-attenders.

As will be discussed in chapter 7, older adults are more likely to attend church than younger adults. Similarly older adults are more likely to have had a church involvement as children. Females too are more likely to have attended church services or Sunday school as children. Further analysis shows that this greater tendency among women to have had a childhood church involvement is not simply a function of age.

CHANGES OVER TIME

Comparison of Mol's 1966 study and the 1993 National Social Science Survey shows that there is less chance today that people will have had church going parents than in 1966. This is consistent with the decline in church attendance levels generally since that period. Interestingly the correlation between parents' attendance patterns and the attendance of the respondents has not altered in the 30 years between the two surveys. While the proportion of infrequent and non-attenders who had church attending parents has declined, so too has the proportion among frequent church attenders. Some 81% of frequent attenders in 1966 said that their mother regularly attended church compared to 73% in 1993. Similarly 69% of frequent attenders said that their father attended church compared to 54% in 1993. This suggests that among church attenders today there are now higher proportions of people whose parents were not churchgoers than there were in the mid-1960s.

TABLE 6.2

CONTACT WITH THE CHURCH AS A CHILD, 1966 AND 1993

By Church Attendance

	1966		1993	
	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)
When respondent was a child:				
- Father attended church	34	69	23	54
- Mother attended church	45	81	40	73
- Went to a church-run school	20	46	23*	38*

Source: 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1993 National Social Science Survey
* Secondary school only

Despite there being less chance now of having church attending parents than was the case in 1966, there appears to have been little change in the proportions of infrequent and non-attenders who went to a church school. This could be as a result of private schools

increasingly being seen as providing an alternative 'quality' form of education compared to public schools. The religious stance of such schools may be of less importance to parents in deciding whether to send their children to a church-run school.

WHY UPBRINGING MAKES A DIFFERENCE

There are many theories as to how and why these variables are important. One theory suggests that each of us has social roles which define behaviour patterns and that are expected of people who occupy some position in society. Such roles could include Catholic, son, university student, fiance, part-time shop assistant, etc. Each one of these roles has its own set of norms or expectations (Batson *et al.*, 1993: 28).

Much of the pressure to conform to these roles and norms comes from other people. At least until the age of about 12 years, a child's immediate family usually forms the primary reference group; the child seeks parental approval. As children grow older and make contacts beyond the home, they then seek the approval of other groups as well, especially those formed by their peers. Teenagers often want to be seen with the 'in crowd' and to gain the approval of their peers (Batson *et al.*, 1993: 29-30).

Overseas studies have found that the influence of parents' religion is stronger the more important religion is for the parents, the more both parents share the same religious beliefs, and the more the child likes, identifies with and has a close relationship with the parent (Batson *et al.*, 1993: 43). There is some Australian evidence too from the 1991 National Church Life Survey of the relationship between the intensity of the parents' church involvement and the retention of children in church life. The children of highly involved attenders are more likely to attend church than the children of less involved attenders. Among highly involved attenders with secondary and post-school children still living at home, some 83% report that their children still attend church, compared with 60% of infrequent worshippers.

It could be argued that this retention rate is because highly involved attenders are more insistent that their children attend church activities. Whatever the reason, attendance patterns amongst children who have left home show a similar trend that suggests that church attendance is not only taught but caught as well. Among highly involved attenders whose children have left home, 68% report that their children still attend church, compared with 57% of infrequent worshippers (Kaldor *et al.*, 1995: 125).

In summary, there is a clear relationship between the religious background of a person and the person's current church attendance levels. The most important of these variables appears to be the church involvement of the person's parents. The correlation between these two variables has remained undiminished over the years despite the enormous changes to the level of church attendance that have taken place in Australia.

As with beliefs, it appears as though the *intensity* of the parents' involvement in church also has an impact. The more intense their involvement, the greater the likelihood that their children will still be involved in church as adults. Parents clearly can and do have an important formative role in their child's coming to faith and remaining a regular church attender. This does not mean that all people who have highly religious parents will themselves remain regular churchgoers. In considering the reasons why people are not involved in church life now, it seems important to sort these people into two categories: those who previously attended church regularly at some stage during adulthood, and those who have never attended church as an adult.

ATTENDANCE AS AN ADULT

The steep declines in churchgoing from the early 1960s to the 1980s suggest that there would be many people in the community who are former church attenders. Their reasons for non-participation may be very different from those held by people who have never been involved in the churches, except perhaps as children. It could be that those who dropped out did so for very clear reasons. By comparison, those who have never

frequently participated may simply never have thought about involvement, never developed a churchgoing habit or lacked personal support networks likely to promote attendance.

In a study of the reasons for non-participation in church, there is merit in treating these two groups separately. This is clearly demonstrated when looking at the church background of those who are former frequent attenders compared to those who have never attended frequently as an adult. Here the impact of socialisation is seen in a clearer light. Table 6.3 compares current frequent attenders, former frequent attenders and those who never attended frequently as an adult. The table shows that current frequent attenders and former frequent attenders have fairly similar histories on average. One exception would appear to be that former attenders are somewhat less likely to have had one or both parents regularly attend church. This may point towards reasons why some people dropped out of church life. Perhaps regular attendance was something that was not modelled for them to the extent that it was modelled for those who are currently attending. As mentioned previously, there is evidence that a greater involvement in church life by parents is more likely to result in their offspring also staying in church life.

Table 6.3 reveals the very different socialisation of those who never attended frequently as adults. While they are just as likely as frequent attenders to have attended Sunday school or done scripture at school, they are much less likely to have had a parent regularly attending church; in fact only 1 in 5 of those who never attended as adults are in this situation. They are less likely to have attended a church-run school or to have attended church services as a child than either current frequent attenders or former frequent attenders.

Clearly the socialisation of former frequent attenders appears similar to that of current frequent attenders, except that they were slightly less likely to have had church attending parents. On this basis there is no apparent 'defect' in their socialisation. Yet this is an area for greater exploration, beyond the databases that are at hand. Issues such as the degree of conflict between former attenders and their parents, the extent to which faith

was discussed in the home, the intensity and commitment of the parent's own religious faith and the experience of former attenders of the programmatic aspects of the church are all areas which demand more research.

TABLE 6.3

CONTACT WITH THE CHURCH AS A CHILD

By Attendance Background in Adulthood

	Never attended frequently (%)	Former frequent attenders (%)	Current frequent attenders (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
When respondent was a child:				
- One/both parents attended church	19	51	66	0.65*
- Did scripture at school	57	54	53	-0.05
- Attended church-run school	15	32	36	0.40*
- Attended Sunday school	44	56	42	0.03
- Attended church services	33	67	70	0.55*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

The current variables which are limited to the involvement patterns of their parents and their own involvement as children, are of limited value in helping to understand why former attenders do not attend as often now. However, the same variables are of greater value in helping us to understand why those who have never been involved as adults do not go to church frequently. Many of these claim to have had a regular Sunday school involvement, even though their parents were much less likely to have been regular attenders. This suggests that the pattern whereby some parents have treated the Sunday school as a form of child-minding, with children being left there while adults did something other than attend church, has been unhelpful in developing adult church attendance patterns. The lack of a churchgoing adult role model may well have proved critical in such cases.

Faith among Former Attenders

While the socialisation experience of former frequent attenders and current frequent attenders appears to be similar at one level, no such similarity exists in relation to their current stance on faith. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, some 75% of frequent attenders can be described as highly religious, using the combined measure of belief and salience which was described in that chapter. A further 20% can be described as quite religious. These two categories account for nearly all current frequent attenders. By comparison only 24% of former frequent attenders can still be described as highly religious and a further 23% as quite religious. In other words more than half of the former frequent attenders do not hold religious beliefs with substantial levels of certainty or intensity.

TABLE 6.4
LEVEL OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOSITY
By Attendance Background in Adulthood

Scale of Christian religiosity	Never attended frequently (%)	Former frequent attenders (%)	Current frequent attenders (%)
Not religious	49	18	0
Some religion	31	35	5
Quite religious	15	23	20
Highly religious	5	24	75
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.79

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

As would be expected with increasing distance from the church, those who were never involved frequently as adults are much less likely to be quite religious or highly religious.

Only 5% of people who have never been involved as adults could be described as highly religious.

These statistics serve to highlight the weakness of a private faith without a public expression. Those who leave church life are much less likely to retain an intense form of Christian faith compared to those who attend frequently. Even more so, those who never had a frequent adult involvement in church tend not to develop the same intensity of Christian belief and practice as those who attend frequently.

Among former frequent attenders, however, few give the main reason for their non-involvement in church life as being to do with a loss of faith or a weak faith. Only 14% give this as one of their two primary reasons for non-involvement in church, compared to 77% of those who claim to have no religion. Yet it is clear from Table 6.4 that former frequent attenders are much less likely than current frequent attenders to hold Christian beliefs and practices with any intensity. The issue could well be one of perception; those who are former attenders may have experienced a religious upringing where beliefs and practices were not particularly of an intense form. There is evidence in the National Church Life Survey that mainstream denominations have been losing the children of attenders at a greater rate than other denominations (Kaldor *et al.*, 1995: 121). Mainstream denominations also have lower than average levels of involvement among attenders as well as a greater theological diversity.

CONCLUSION

The evidence presented here confirms that people's religious upbringing is significant in predicting whether they are currently involved in a church or not. As *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Adele Horin recently observed, Christian parents often do their utmost to encourage their children to embrace the faith, whether that be in involving them in the local church and its activities such as Sunday school and church services, whether it be in enrolling a child in a church-related school or whether it be in family devotional activities

and talking about the faith with the child. She goes on to observe that non-believing parents on the other hand tend to leave religious matters up to the child (Horin, 1998: 33).

Yet as this chapter also demonstrates, a religious upbringing by no means guarantees that people will continue to participate in church life once they reach adulthood. Some 25% of respondents to the Western Sydney Survey claim to be former frequent attenders: ie. those who once attended church monthly or more often as adults. In trying to understand the reasons for their non-involvement in church life, the religious upbringing examined in the Western Sydney Survey and other studies appears to throw little light on this matter. Former attenders appear to be just as likely as current attenders to have gone to Sunday school, attended a church school or been involved in church services as a child. They are slightly less likely to have had church attending parents but this relationship is relatively weak.

It could be that the answer lies in the intensity with which parents have lived out their faith or been involved in their church. It seems that those who attend church occasionally are less likely to influence their children to be involved in church life compared to those who not only go to church on Sunday but are also involved in other activities of the church or have leadership roles. There is certainly some evidence in the National Church Life Survey results to suggest that this is indeed a factor.

There is further research that needs to be carried out to explore the impact of parents' church involvement on their children. The results discussed in this chapter suggest that, as was noted in the previous chapter on beliefs, the salience of faith and the intensity of religious commitment are of greater influence than simply whether a person's parents attended church or not.

Finally there is evidence here of the relative weakness of Christian belief among those who have reduced their attendance or never been involved in church. It is likely that these forms of private belief will not be sustainable into the future, further removing the middle

ground that currently exists between those who have never been involved with churches and those who are church attenders.

CHAPTER 7: AGE EFFECTS

This chapter examines the relationship between the age of people and levels of church participation. Surveys of Australian adults generally show that the younger age groups are under-represented among frequent church attenders. This relationship is important in understanding the reasons behind non-participation in church and has great implications for the future of the churches in this country.

The presence of age differences in levels of participation in church life may point to the presence of other factors beyond the secularisation process. Lower levels of participation may be linked to a person's stage in the lifecycle. Lower levels of participation may also be the result of a common set of socialisation experiences of a particular age cohort, which may be reversed with succeeding age cohorts.

Secularisation theory links religious changes with relatively continuous processes of modernisation. The processes associated with modernisation, such as urbanisation, industrialisation and the diffusion of scientific knowledge, exert a continuous influence across the nation, providing an environment that is correspondingly less conducive to religious beliefs and practices. Yet while secularisation implies long-term changes to a society, this does not necessarily mean that its impact will be the same on all people within society. The lower levels of church participation among younger age cohorts may herald a long-term period shift, with each successive age cohort having the same or lower levels of church participation than the previous age cohort (Bouma and Mason, 1995: 51).

CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND AGE

Church leaders in Australia sometimes talk about people aged in their 20s and 30s as the 'missing generation' in church life. Table 7.1 shows that age is positively correlated with church attendance. People in older age groups are more likely to attend church frequently.

Similar relationships have been observed in other Western countries, such as the United States (Greeley, 1989: 10- 11).

TABLE 7.1

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

By Age at Time of Survey

	Attend infrequently or not at all (%)	Attend frequently (%)	Total (%)
Age group:			
20-29 years	84	16	100
30-39 years	82	18	100
40-49 years	79	21	100
50-59 years	73	27	100
60-69 years	71	29	100
70+ years	68	32	100
OVERALL	76	24	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.07*

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level.

Other surveys paint a similar picture. According to the 1996 Census, among Australians aged 15 years or over, 48% are aged 15-39 years. By comparison, only 33% of Anglican and Protestant church attenders are in this age bracket, according to the 1996 National Church Life Survey. While 21% of the wider community is aged over 60 years according to the 1996 Census, 33% of Anglican and Protestant attenders are in that age category (Kaldor et al., 1999b: 15). Among Catholic church attenders, the picture is little different. According to the 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey, among Catholic attenders aged 15 years and over, 27% are aged 15-39 years and 34% are over 60 years of age (Kaldor et al., 1999b: 15).

HAS IT ALWAYS BEEN THIS WAY?

While studies in the United States show that younger adults have been under-represented in church life at least since the 1940s, this has not necessarily been the case in Australia. The 1966 Religion in Australia Survey showed that there were no differences in the level of church attendance reported among younger people compared to older people. The Survey showed that around 33% of respondents aged 20 years or more went to church regularly, irrespective of their age. In addition, replies to the question 'Did you go to a church service or mass last Sunday?' also showed little difference by age group (Mol, 1971: 35-36). Similar results were found in the 1967 Australian Political Attitudes Survey. In this survey, some 37% of adult respondents claimed to attend church at least monthly. Again, there was little difference between age groups, except that 44% of respondents aged over 70 years were church attenders.

Yet not all of the earlier polls show the same relationship. The *1951 Report on the Decline of Church Going*, carried out for the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle, found that 27% of respondents aged over 35 were regular churchgoers, compared with 22% of respondents aged 18 to 35 years. Similarly, a 1947 Gallup Poll found that 29% of those aged in their 20s were regular church attenders compared to 38% of those aged in their 50s (Mol, 1971: 34).

Mol concluded that age only makes a difference in denominations and countries where church attendance is already at a low ebb, but that age makes little difference where church attendance is very strong within denominations, such as Catholicism in Australia, or in countries such as the United States, where church attendance is very strong (Mol, 1971: 40). Mol's conclusion is borne out by changes to the age profile of church attenders between 1960 and the mid-1980s. This was a major period of decline in church attendance within Australia, from 44% of the population attending at least monthly in the early 1960s to 27% by the early 1980s. Peter Kaldor has documented the widening age gap that occurred in parallel with this decline in attendance. Respondents to social surveys since the 1960s who were aged 18 to 29 years were much less likely to attend church than

those in their 30s, 40s or 50s, who in turn were less likely to attend than those aged over 60 (Kaldor, 1987: 161).

REASONS FOR AGE DIFFERENCES

The age differences shown in Table 7.1 in relation to church attendance may be due to two different age effects (Firebaugh and Harley, 1993: 270-271):

- *Ageing or lifestage effects* - this refers to the effect of chronological ageing and movement through different phases of the lifecycle.
- *Cohort effects* - this is the impact on one age grouping of having grown up at a certain time in history.

A *period effect* occurs where social factors and events have an influence on *all* age groups during a particular period of history. Period effects may, however, affect some age groups more than others.

Ageing or Lifestage Effects

As people pass through lifestages, their church attendance patterns appear to change. In the United States, several studies done in the mid 1940s to mid 1950s showed a decline in religious activity between the ages of 18 and 30, followed by an increase from age 30 onwards. This pattern became known as the 'traditional' church attendance pattern and was associated with lifestage changes (Hoge and Roozen, 1979a: 45).

At around 18 years of age, virtually all people have left secondary school, which is a significant change heralding a different stage in life. People at this age gain the right to vote. Many have greater freedoms associated with having a driver's licence and their first car. Many will be entering the workforce, have left home or moved into tertiary education. In Australia, many teenagers have also ceased attending church by this stage.

Another lifestage commences with partnering and the birth of children. Nash and Berger (1962) theorised that as couples begin to have children of school age they are more likely to attend church for the sake of their children. For many Australian couples, the birth of children now occurs in their late 20s and 30s, the median age of first marriages being 27 for men and 25 for women (Bentley and Hughes, 1998: 36). The impact of this lifestage change on church attendance is discussed below.

Further changes can occur in old age. People may be more likely to adopt religious practices as they get older, because of the increasing imminence of death (Firebaugh and Harley, 1993: 270). On the other hand, people may give up church attendance due to ill health or infirmity (Ainlay *et al.*, 1992).

The 1991 National Church Life Survey provides some evidence that adults are more likely to return to church life if they have young children. The survey covered major Anglican and Protestant denominations in Australia and allows the identification of two different kinds of newcomers to church life: first timers (those who did not have a church background prior to joining there current congregation) and returnees (those who were once involved in church but have not been involved for several years prior to joining their current congregation). The survey found that newcomers to church life were more likely to have young children living at home. Some 29% of newcomers had pre-school or primary school children living at home compared with 18% of attenders generally. Nearly a third of returnees were in this situation. By contrast, first timers and returnees were less likely to have secondary school children living at home than for attenders generally.

While this provides some evidence for the child-rearing effect, the effect appears to be fairly weak. It needs to be remembered that only 8% of Anglican and Protestant attenders were newcomers in the last five years. As a group, returnees to church life can barely be detected in more broadly based community surveys. For instance, the Western Sydney Survey found that those with school aged children were only slightly more likely to have a church involvement, while those with pre-school children were no different from the adult population as a whole.

Cohort Effects

Cohort effects result from people born in the same period being socialised under the same general conditions. This common experience affects the opportunities and outlooks of this generation. For instance, people who grew up during the Great Depression and Second World War have had very different experiences to those who grew up during the economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s.

The largest age cohort in the Australian population is the so-called 'baby boom' generation. While definitions vary, this cohort has been defined as those born immediately after the Second World War (in 1946) through to the mid 1960s (1964). This age cohort grew up during a period of relative economic prosperity and security, and a time of cultural and social upheaval during the 1960s and 1970s. These cultural changes included an increase in individualism, a greater priority placed on individual needs, and liberalisation of morality and social standards, while economic security and prosperity were taken for granted (Inglehart, 1979).

Cohort effects can have a long-term impact, with each successive cohort entering young adulthood at a lower church attendance level (Hoge and Roozen, 1979: 45). Sasaki and Suzuki (1987: 1057) observe that progressive cohort effects will persist because they remain influential throughout an individual's life. They further note that progressive cohort effects are some of the best evidence in support of secularisation theory.

In Australia, Kaldor concluded that there had been a period shift that took place among church attenders since 1960. This shift was most pronounced among younger people, but affected all age groups (Kaldor, 1987: 161). But as Table 7.2 shows, this conclusion may be premature. Church attendance levels have remained unaltered among the cohort born before 1924, despite a decline in adult church attendance levels over this period.

TABLE 7.2

CHURCH ATTENDANCE

By Age Cohort

	Before 1904	1904 - 1923	YEAR OF BIRTH 1924 - 1943	1944 - 1963	1964 - 1973
Percent who were frequent attenders in:					
1966	34	33	33		
1967	38	34	35		
1983	29	32	30	21	
1993		33	28	19	16
1998		37	25	19	14

Source: 1966 Religion in Australia Survey; 1967 Australian Political Attitudes Survey; 1983 and 1993 National Social Science Surveys; 1998 Australian Community Survey.

The most striking difference in Table 7.2 is between the pre- and post-Second World War age cohorts. While the differences between attenders born before the Second World War are relatively minor, attendance levels are significantly lower for those born after the War. Church attendance levels among those born in 1964-73 are the lowest of any cohort, and by 1998 did not appear to be a short-term effect associated with disruptive changes such as leaving home or starting a career.

Regarding the impact of child-rearing, there is no evidence of a generalised return to church as the whole cohort passes through the main child-bearing years. For instance, those who were born in 1944-63 were aged 20-39 years at the time of the 1983 National Social Science Survey. According to this survey, some 21% of this age group were frequent church attenders. However, 10 years later only 19% claimed to be frequent attenders, when they were aged 30-49 years. While there may be an increase in attendance associated with child-rearing, it is also clear that any increases are not sufficient to outweigh the losses due to other factors.

Table 7.2 also shows some erosion in attendance among those born in 1924-43, who were aged 50-69 years in the 1993 National Social Science Survey. This erosion in attendance suggests it is unlikely that, as people grow older and become more conscious of their mortality, they become more likely to go to church. Old age probably militates against increased attendance. The decline among those born before 1904 is most likely due to declining health or infirmity preventing a more regular attendance (Ainlay *et al.*, 1992). The Western Sydney Survey provides similar evidence: among infrequent and non-attenders aged over 70 years, 5% said that the main reason they were not involved in church was because of health problems, compared to 2% on average. At this stage, however, there is no evidence of such a decline in attendance levels among those born in 1904-23, who at the time of the 1998 Australian Community Survey, were aged 75 to 94 years.

A WEAKENING OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

The cohort effect is revealed in other religious variables apart from attendance. There is a strong relationship between church attendance and having Christian beliefs and practices, as discussed in Chapter 5. While one may lead to the development of the other, often they reinforce one another; frequent church attendance serves to remind and reassure the attender of key beliefs, while holding Christian beliefs provides motivation to meet with others who do likewise.

Young adults are often seen as less religious than their older counterparts. There is some evidence for this in Australia. For instance, Peter Kaldor (1987: 158-165; 1999b: 13-16) documented the under-representation of 20-40 year olds in church life and 'Tricia Blombery (1989: 1-16) the broader lack of interest in Christianity among young people. Bentley and Hughes (1998: 21-25) have documented the decrease in identification with a Christian denomination among young adults. It would therefore be expected that lower levels of church attendance among the young would be paralleled by lower levels of Christian belief and practice. This is indeed the case, but the relationships are not uniform.

Table 7.3 shows that, in the Western Sydney Survey, younger adults are almost as likely as those over 50 years to believe in God's existence without doubt. However, prayer, reading the Bible, obeying and trusting God are all seen as very important by a much greater proportion of the over 50s. In terms of the index of Christian religiosity discussed in chapter 5, only 21% of 18-29 year olds and 23% of 30-49 year olds are highly religious, compared with 42% of people aged over 50 years.

This suggests that among the over 50s there is greater congruence between belief and practice, than among the under 50s. This is consistent with aspects of the secularisation thesis, in that belief is increasingly becoming rhetorical; young people may believe in the existence of God as much as older people, but are less likely to adopt religious practices.

TABLE 7.3
BELIEF AND PRACTICE
By Age Group

	18-29 yrs (%)	30-49 yrs (%)	50+ yrs (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Believe in a personal God, without doubts	45	45	51	0.06
Believe in Christ's divinity, without doubts	38	37	48	0.04
See obeying God as very important	34	39	57	0.24*
See prayer as very important	27	28	48	0.20*
See trusting God as very important	39	38	52	0.15*
See reading Bible as very important	16	14	27	0.15*
Highly religious overall	21	23	42	0.18*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on the complete data for every question.
* significant at p<0.05 level

It should also be noted that while 18-29 year olds are less likely than those aged over 30 years to believe without doubt in the divinity and resurrection of Christ, many 18-29 year olds are simply undecided about Christian beliefs. Only 19% of 18-29 year olds say that they don't believe or have serious doubts about the divinity and resurrection of Christ, compared to 27% of 30-49 year olds and 25% of the over 50s. Many 18-29 year olds simply have not made up their minds either way or express minor doubts.

This finding parallels that of the National Church Life Survey, which highlighted that 15-19 year old Protestant church attenders are more uncertain about beliefs and attitudes to church life than all other age groups. This reflects their stage in life, as teenagers make significant life choices and changes (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 293-296). Consequently, some drop out of church at that time. Nevertheless, the teenage years and 20s may also be a time when people undergo conversion experiences or to join the church for the first time (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 212-224).

REASONS FOR COHORT EFFECT

Breakdowns in Religious Socialisation

One of the main factors in explaining current patterns of religious belief and practice is, as discussed in chapter 6, the religious upbringing received by the younger age cohorts of Australians. Overseas research has concentrated on three agents of religious socialisation: the church, peer groups and the family. Of these, the family has generally been found to be the key agent of religious socialisation (Cornwall, 1989: 577). If religion and family have been relegated to the private sphere, as argued by Berger (1967) and others, it would be expected that family and religion would continue to remain strongly linked (Thomas and Cornwall, 1990: 988).

As discussed in chapter 6, religiously devout parents seek to pass on their beliefs to their children. But inevitably some children break with their parents' beliefs, especially as children begin to move in wider circles such as school, tertiary

institutions, and the workplace. As Kelley and de Graaf note (1997: 640), if there were no influences other than the family to inculcate belief, even a small loss in each cohort would eventually produce a secular society.

It has been shown that people born into strongly religious nations will, in proportion to the orthodoxy of their fellow citizens, acquire more orthodox beliefs than otherwise similar people born into less religious nations (Kelley and de Graaf, 1997: 641). Religious belief depends not only on parents' religiosity, but also on the wider 'religious environment', including government, churches, media, schools, teachers, friends and potential marriage partners.

Therefore, the patterns in Table 7.2 could reflect the impact of increasing uncertainty of religious belief among the preceding age cohorts on the one that follows. As parents within an age cohort begin to doubt religious beliefs or attend church less often, so they are less effective in passing on religious beliefs to their children. Perhaps more importantly, they are less likely to channel their children into groups and relationships which in turn would help to maintain their children's religious beliefs and practices (Cornwall, 1989: 577), or to screen the effects of secularising influences such as the mass media, school education and peer groups (Kelley and de Graaf, 1997: 640-641).

But since declining church attendance is more pronounced among those born since the Second World War, how likely is it to be linked with a more long-term process of industrialisation and modernisation? Based on research across 15 nations including Australia, Kelley and de Graaf (1986: 656) argue that once social forces such as modernisation begin to appreciably erode the average levels of belief in a nation, then levels of religious belief decline rapidly, not slowly. Religious beliefs can decline in the course of a few generations, after many generations of stability.

The pattern of cohort change in levels of belief is thus consistent with secularisation theory that sees modernisation as the primary cause of this chain of events. While

modernisation processes may be relatively weak in directly explaining current levels of church attendance, when linked with socialisation processes, these can have a powerful effect on the levels of church attendance over time.

Social and Cultural Upheaval

An alternative theory sees the first cause of declining attendances not in modernisation but in changing social values. Robert Wuthnow provided empirical evidence that the decline of church attendance among young adults during the 1960s was linked to the acceptance of counter-culture values (Wuthnow, 1976). The social conditions of these times that have been identified as sources of the counter-culture include the Vietnam War, the growth of mass communication, sustained affluence, upgrading of educational requirements and the radicalising of the Universities. All of these affected the younger generation more than older generations, leading to young people being more conscious of their own difference from the rest of society. Terms commonly used at the time such as 'flower children' attest to the self-consciousness of the younger generation of this time (Wuthnow, 1976: 853).

Using statistical data collected in the Bay area of San Francisco, Wuthnow grouped data into five categories to test the importance of counter-culture values. These categories were the age of the respondent, life cycle variables (eg marital status), religious upbringing variables, current religious commitment variables and counter- culture value variables. The five counter-culture values measured were:

- the respondent favoured legalising marijuana,
- whether they had ever been 'high' on drugs,
- approval of unmarried couples living together,
- favouring more freedom for homosexuals,
- whether they had taken part in a demonstration.

Wuthnow (1976: 860) found that counter-cultural involvement was the chief link between age and religious commitment, taking into account the effects of life cycle and religious

background variables. Virtually all the age effects on religious commitment were mediated by counter-cultural involvement. Wuthnow provided further support for the impact of counter-cultural variables by examining the relationship between religious indicators such as the sale of religious books and church membership verses counter-cultural involvement variables, such as the number of demonstrations and drug citations.

The identification of counter-cultural values as a mediating factor in church attendance suggests that declining church attendance cannot be fully understood in terms of secularisation theory, which links religious trends to the relatively continuous modernising processes, such as industrial expansion, increasing education and urbanisation (Wuthnow, 1976: 853; Roof, 1985: 79).

As shown previously in Tables 7.1 and 7.2, Australians born since the Second World War are less likely to attend church frequently than those born before the War. Is there evidence that the counter-cultural values described by Wuthnow are a mediating influence between age and church attendance in Australia? Some of the values described by Wuthnow are no longer relevant today: the involvement of young people in mass demonstrations was most closely associated with the Vietnam War. Since this war finished in the middle of the 1970s, there have not been demonstrations of anywhere near the same scale. However some of the other values identified by Wuthnow are available within studies carried out in Australia. The following variables appear in the 1993 National Social Science Survey:

- attitude to sex outside marriage,
- attitude to sex before marriage,
- attitude towards homosexuality.

These three items form a scale with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.64. Increasing age (in years) is negatively related to scores on this scale (Pearson's r correlation = -0.27). Similarly the scale of sexual attitudes is negatively related to church attendance (correlation = -0.42). Increasing age and church attendance, as discussed earlier, are positively correlated (correlation = 0.13). The partial correlation between church attendance and sexual

attitudes, controlling for age, shows that the relationship between church attendance and sexual attitudes is virtually undiminished (partial correlation = -0.41), indicating that age is not the explanation for this relationship. By contrast, when one controls for sexual attitudes, the partial correlation between age and church attendance becomes insignificant (partial correlation = 0.01).

Figure 7.1

AGE, CHURCH ATTENDANCE AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUALITY: ZERO ORDER CORRELATIONS

Permissive
attitudes to sexuality

-0.27   -0.42

Age ————0.13————→ Church attendance
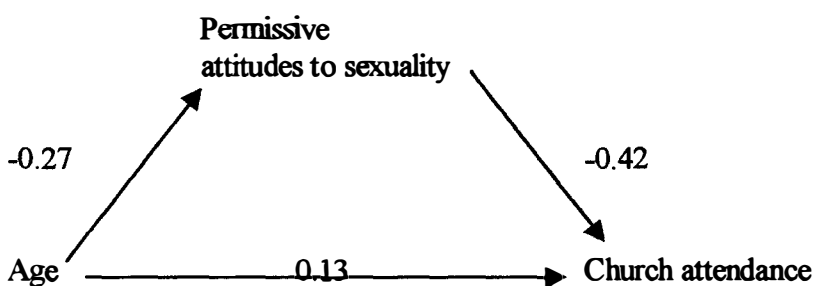
Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey
Note: Pearson's r correlations significant at p<0.05 level

As Wuthnow found, broader permissiveness, which has succeeded counter-culture values, provides an explanation of the age cohort differences in church attendance. It can be demonstrated that there has been a growing acceptance in the community of both sexual relations before marriage and homosexual sexual relations. In 1966, the Religion in Australia Survey found that 64% of Australians disapproved of people having sexual relations before marriage, compared with only 19% who said that premarital sex was 'always wrong' or 'almost always wrong' in response to the 1993 National Social Science Survey. This suggests that the growing climate of permissiveness in society may be linked to declining church attendance levels, though the precise nature of the link needs further examination.

Declining Religious Authority

Some secularisation theorists have sought to define secularisation in terms of the declining religious authority of churches and their leaders (Chaves, 1994). The 1993 National Social Science Survey afforded the opportunity to test the relationship between age and aspects of religious authority. The following pairs of items were used to create three scales:

- 'religious leaders should not try to influence how people vote' and 'religious leaders should not try to influence government decisions';
- 'it would be better for Australia if more people with strong religious beliefs held public office' and a question as to whether churches should have more power;
- 'right and wrong should be decided by society' (reverse coded) and 'right and wrong should be based on God's laws'.

Each of the scales was in fact related to increasing age and to church attendance. Partial correlations between age and church attendance, controlling for each of the three scales in turn, found that the latter scale accounted for most of the relationship between age and attendance (partial correlation = 0.03).

CONCLUSION

The age of Australians has become an increasingly important factor in their likely church attendance. Since the mid 1960s, the younger age groups have become less likely than older age groups to be church attenders.

It is difficult to separate the relative impact of age, cohort and period effects on church attendance. Some overseas studies have found the ageing effect to be the weakest and the period effect to be the strongest on church attendance levels among middle class Americans (Wingrove and Alston, 1974; Carroll and Roozen, 1975; Hoge and Roozen, 1979a: 45). Others have argued in favour of cohort effects (eg. Chaves, 1990) while

others argue in favour of lifestage effects over period and cohort effects (eg. Hout and Greeley, 1987).

In Australia, declines in church attendance appear to be more a function of cohort differences than lifestage effects; some of the greatest differences are to be found in the church attendance levels of pre- and post-Second World War cohorts. There is no evidence that lifestage processes are reinforcing cohort differences to any great extent; church participation appears to be decreasing as post-war age cohorts move into middle age. Among pre-war age cohorts, the level of participation appears steady until such time as the onset of old age forces an overall reduction of church attendance levels.

As Sasaki and Suzuki (1987: 1057) note, progressive cohort effects have a greater impact on secularisation than do either ageing or period effects. When combined with a decreasing likelihood that adults will give their children a church upbringing, as discussed in chapter 6, the impact of these progressive cohort changes in levels of church attendance would be expected to have a powerful negative influence on future church attendances in Australia.

The large differences in church attendance levels between the post-war and pre-war age cohorts suggest an abrupt change has taken place rather than a slow decline. As discussed in this chapter, this is not inconsistent with theories that see modernisation, increasing education or the rise of science as primary causes of secularisation. A decline in religious socialisation through families can bring about the kind of rapid change in levels of religious belief and practice seen in Australia since the 1950s.

However, an alternative interpretation sees the primary cause as a significant change in social values embodied in an increase in permissiveness beginning in the 1960s. This too is perpetuated by socialisation of a different kind as children adopt values from their peers that are in opposition to those held by the churches and also by their parents. This too could also account for the patterns of cohort difference seen in this chapter. There is

strong evidence that differences in church attendance among different age cohorts in Australia have their origin in the adoption of permissive moral values.

CHAPTER 8: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

At the end of the nineteenth century, Australian church leaders, particularly among the Anglican and Protestant churches, noted the relative absence of the working class from the churches. In 1906, a Presbyterian newspaper observed that, '[church] membership is mainly confined to the middle classes...the church has practically lost whatever hold it ever had on the masses of our industrial population' (Broome, 1980: 8). Similar observations were made by Anglican, Baptist and Methodist sources (Kaldor, 1983: 22-24, 42-47).

Consequently, the Anglican and Protestant churches set out to reach the working classes more effectively. Missions to the urban poor were established, such as the Sydney City Mission and Central Methodist Mission. The Salvation Army arrived in Sydney with the aim of reaching the working classes. The inner city areas of Sydney were declared a 'mission zone' by the Anglican Church. Yet despite these efforts, the working class remained under-represented in Anglican and Protestant churches (Kaldor, 1983: 25-33).

The inability of the churches to reach the working class in Australia reflected the situation in Great Britain. In an historical study of industrial Sheffield, E.R. Wickham traced the alienation of the working classes from the churches during the period of the Industrial Revolution. In Greater London, every Census from 1851 showed great disparities of attendance depending upon place of residence, from better than 1 in 2 people being church attenders in the best areas to as few as 1 in 6 in the worst areas. The differences in attendance rates reflected the socio-economic status of the population in each area (Wickham, 1957: 173).

In 1904, Charles Masterman, Fellow of Christ's College at Cambridge, observed that,

> The Anglican Church represents the ideals of the upper classes, of the universities...the large non-conformist bodies represent the ideals of the middle classes...the working man does not come to church (cited in Wickham, 1957: 173-174).

Australia's situation not only paralleled that in Great Britain, but was probably an inherited one. It was not so much that the churches had lost the working class in Australia but that they never had them. The working class had been lost to church life in Britain even before the initial British settlement in Australia (Kaldor, 1987: 134).

AUSTRALIAN SURVEY EVIDENCE

Are there differences in socio-economic status between frequent church attenders and infrequent and non-attenders in Australia today? The survey evidence suggests that there are some differences, both at the community level and individual level. The differences are, however, not as straight-forward as the historical situation discussed above might suggest.

Socio-economic Status of Communities

At the community level, areas with higher socio-economic status tend to have higher Anglican and Protestant church attendance levels. Kaldor and Castle (1995) have documented regional differences in weekly attendance rates for Anglican and Protestant denominations across Australia. On Sydney's affluent north shore, attendance rates were as high as 72 people per 1000 in the total population, compared to as few as 18 per 1000 in the lower socio-economic areas of Fairfield and Liverpool. Inner eastern Melbourne had levels as high as 64 people per 1000, whereas just 13 people per 1000 attended in outer western Melbourne. In general, 'blue-collar' areas, 'transient' areas and 'ethnic communities' had lower levels of attendance at Anglican and Protestant congregations than did stable 'white-collar' areas.

By contrast, the Catholic Church was found to have similar attendance levels in both white-collar and blue-collar areas - about 75 attenders per 1000 in the population. However Kaldor (1987: 74) has argued that since a higher proportion of people in lower socio-economic areas identify themselves in the national census as Catholic, Catholic attendance rates tend to be lower in low socio-economic areas than in high socio-economic areas.

Education Level

Among individual survey respondents, the 1996 National Church Life Survey showed that Anglican and Protestant church attenders are more likely to have a university qualification (19%) than the general population, as measured by the national census (10%). Similar patterns have been found among Catholic attenders through the 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey, with 19% having a university degree (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999b: 18).

Community-based surveys also reveal a relationship between higher education and church attendance. The 1995 World Values Study showed that 20% of frequent church attenders had a degree or higher degree, compared with 15% of infrequent and non-attenders. The 1993 National Social Science Survey revealed a somewhat weaker relationship, with 18% of frequent attenders holding a university degree, compared with 16% of infrequent and non-attenders. The differences between the two surveys may be partly due to differences in methodology, as the former used face-to-face interviews whereas the latter was a postal survey.

Stronger differences were found between frequent attenders and infrequent and non-attenders responding to the 1993 Western Sydney Survey. Table 8.1 shows that some 22% of frequent attenders in that Survey claim to have a university degree compared with just 8% of infrequent and non-attenders.

TABLE 8.1

HIGHEST EDUCATION LEVEL

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non- attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Primary school	2	3	3
Some Secondary school	23	14	21
Completed Secondary sch.	33	26	31
Trade or Tech. College	22	18	21
Diploma from CAE	8	9	8
University degree	8	22	11
Other	3	8	5
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) excluding 'Other' category = 0.19*

SOURCE: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at $p < 0.05$ level

Analysis of the 1983 Australian Values Study Survey showed that, while higher education was predictive of church attendance, the opposite was true in relation to acceptance of orthodox Christian beliefs. The more highly educated were less likely to affirm such beliefs than the less educated (Kaldor, 1987: 126-127). However, once salience and certainty of belief are also taken into account, as in the 1993 Western Sydney Survey, the more highly educated are also more likely to believe. More than 60% of university graduates are quite religious or highly religious according to data collected for the Western Sydney Survey, compared to an average of 46% for the wider community.

Contrary to what might be expected under some versions of secularisation theory, a higher education through a secular educational institution does not necessarily

increase the likelihood of non-attendance at church. Indeed, the opposite appears to be true: the more highly educated the person, the more likely is he or she to attend church.

It should be noted, however, that among infrequent and non-attenders in the Western Sydney Survey, those who profess to have no religion are also more likely to be highly educated; some 16% of those with no religion have a university degree, compared with 8% of infrequent and non-attenders more generally. This suggests that the relationship between religion and a university education is not linear. Those with a university education are more likely to have made up their minds about religion: either to be a frequent church attender or to have rejected religion altogether.

Housing tenure

Further differences between frequent attenders and infrequent or non-attenders can be observed according to housing tenure. The Western Sydney Survey shows that frequent attenders are more likely to own their own homes, which is in part a function of the higher proportion of older people among the ranks of attenders. However, frequent attenders (7%) are only half as likely to be renting privately or from a public housing authority as are infrequent and non-attenders (12%).

These statistics also reflect national trends. The 1993 National Social Science Survey shows that frequent attenders (8%) are less likely to rent privately than infrequent and non-attenders (13%).

TABLE 8.2

HOUSING TENURE

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Owned, fully paid off	39	50	42
Owned, being paid off	48	42	46
Rented, public housing	8	4	7
Rented privately	4	3	4
Provided with job	0	0	0
Don't know	1	2	1
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Cramers V) = -0.09*

SOURCE: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at the p<0.05 level

Income

In view of the relationships between education, housing tenure and church attendance, it would be expected that income would also be positively related to church attendance. Analysis of the 1993 National Social Science Survey shows the opposite relationship to be true: frequent church attenders (49%) were less likely than infrequent and non-attenders (55%) to be earning more than $20,000 per annum in income. The 1993 Western Sydney Survey did not include an income variable. Table 8.3 below shows the relationship between income and church attendance, as shown by the 1993 National Social Science Survey.

TABLE 8.3

PERSONAL INCOME

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
No income	4	5	4
$5000 or less	9	14	10
$5001 - $20000	32	32	32
$20001 - $50000	43	36	41
$50001 or more	12	13	13
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = -0.04*

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey
* significant at $p < 0.05$ level

To some extent, such a relationship will be a function of the age of the respondent. People aged over 60 years, who are over-represented among frequent church attenders, may be more likely to own their own homes, but are less likely to be in paid employment. Many will be dependent upon superannuation or social security payments as their primary form of income. They can thus be said to be 'asset rich but cash poor'.

Self-reported Social Class

Both the 1993 National Social Science Survey and 1995 World Values Study asked respondents to nominate their social class. While the National Social Science Survey showed little relationship between church attendance and self-reported social class, the World Values Study showed that frequent church attenders are more likely to nominate their social class as upper, upper-middle or lower-middle (68%) than

infrequent and non-attenders (57%). Further analysis of the World Values Study by occupation showed that frequent church attenders tended to be under-represented among occupations associated with the working class: there were less attenders among foremen (13%), skilled manual workers (16%) and unskilled workers (20%) than average (25%).

While the National Social Science Survey did not detect differences overall, there were differences among respondents according to denominational identification. Among Catholics, there is little relationship between church attendance and self-reported social class. But among Anglicans, frequent church attenders (71%) are also more likely to see themselves as middle or upper class than are infrequent and non-attenders (57%). Similar trends appear among people identifying with the Uniting Church.

In summary, most variables that measure socio-economic status are positively if weakly correlated with church attendance. Education level, however, provides a more complex relationship, being positively associated both with church attendance and with an identification of 'no religion'.

INVOLVEMENT IN VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

One starting point for understanding why socio-economic status is related to church participation is to place it in the context of involvement in voluntary organisations of all kinds. It is not just churches in which people of higher socio-economic status are more likely to be involved; such people are more likely to be involved in other kinds of voluntary organisations as well.

Overseas studies have generally shown that working class participation in formal community groups and organisations is usually lower than that of other classes. Lower socio-economic status, whether measured by education, income, occupation, a

subjective assessment by individuals of their own status, or by some combination of these factors, has been found to be correlated with low rates of participation and even lower rates of holding leadership positions in organisations (Hausknecht, 1955; Wright and Hyman, 1958; Hyman and Wright, 1971).

Similar trends have been observed in voluntary organisations in Australia. Bryson and Thompson (1972: 178-179) found that attendance at a Protestant or Anglican church was correlated with higher levels of involvement in other community organisations. However, these differences disappeared among Protestants and Catholics in lower socio-economic groups, suggesting that religious background is less predictive of participation in community organisations among groups of lower socio-economic status.

Dempsey's study of *Smalltown* (1990: 199-205), a small rural town, showed that working and middle class people interacted in sporting organisations, school councils and women's auxiliaries. But working class people were under-represented in the town's Protestant churches, men's service clubs and the more expensive sporting clubs.

Brennan's study of Green Valley in Sydney (1973: 119-122) found that factors such as income were associated with levels of participation in community organisations, as too were other factors such as car ownership and suburb satisfaction. Working women were also found to have lower levels of participation than other women.

Data from the Western Sydney Survey depicted in Table 8.4 show that church attenders are indeed more likely to be active members of some but not all kinds of voluntary organisations. First and foremost of such organisations are charities. The attraction of frequent church attenders to these organisations may well reflect their goals and aims, which accord with Christian teaching to love your neighbour. Furthermore such organisations are sometimes run by churches, in which case they would be more likely to involve frequent church attenders. But frequent church

attenders are also more likely to be involved in service organisations such as Rotary, suggesting that direct church sponsorship is not the only reason for frequent attenders' participation in voluntary organisations.

TABLE 8.4
ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP OF VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Service organisations	2	5	3	0.32*
Resident committees	8	9	8	-0.02
Schools organisations	10	12	10	0.13
Charitable organisations	6	13	8	0.32*
Sporting/recreation clubs	35	30	34	-0.05
Unions/professional assoc.	10	14	11	0.12

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p< 0.05 level

Church attenders are not only more likely to be drawn from highly educated groups, but are more likely to be 'joiners' of other organisations as well. But church attenders are clearly drawn to some organisations more than others. This suggests that rates of participation are influenced not only by the socio-economic status of the individual but also by the nature of the organisation.

WHY DOES SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Deprivation Theory

One of the main theories which has been advanced to explain socio-economic variations in involvement in voluntary organisations is 'deprivation theory' (Hoge and Roozen, 1979: 48; Glock and Stark, 1965: 265). In short, this theory suggests that

the most deprived in society will band together into voluntary organisations to achieve a degree of social status, power and fulfilment beyond their social rank. Black Americans, for instance, are highly involved in churches, despite being poor and educationally disadvantaged. Deprivation theory has also been advanced to explain the higher levels of involvement of women in churches.

However, deprivation theory is not generally confirmed by the Australian statistical evidence presented so far. While frequent church attenders are more likely to have lower incomes, they are more likely to have a higher education, to own their own home or to identify with the middle and upper classes. While deprivation theory may help to explain the higher levels of participation among children, older people and women, the socio-economic aspects of the theory are perhaps less convincing in the Australian context. The sources of deprivation that may encourage church attendance appear to be something other than economic deprivation.

The Purpose of Community Organisations

Another explanation suggests that socio-economic differences in church participation are a function of the primary purpose of each organisation.

Herbert Gans carried out a study of the first two years of Levittown, a new suburb on the outskirts of Philadelphia, which provided some evidence for this theory. Gans observed that the development of relationships in the community moved through four stages (Wild, 1981: 77-78):
1. Family life.
2. Development of wider social relations, based on shared interests rather than proximity.
3. Development of informal clubs or cliques.
4. Setting up of formal voluntary associations.

Gans found that as people developed relationships in the community, the working class tended towards 'social' centred clubs, while the middle class tended towards 'activity' or 'community' centred clubs. The former primarily existed to facilitate social interaction while the latter primarily existed to achieve community goals. Since churches exist for the purpose of public worship, they would tend to be perceived as 'activity' centred organisations.

In Australia, Dempsey's *Smalltown* study also revealed that there was not a lot of class interaction in the town's many voluntary organisations, suggesting that people in different classes do gravitate towards different community organisations. Of 130 organisations identified in Dempsey's study, only 20 had a high degree of inter-class mixing. These tended to be the more popular and relatively cheap sporting organisations, women's fundraising auxiliaries, brass and pipe bands, Returned Services League, two school councils, two charities and a women's social group (Dempsey, 1990: 199).

The greater involvement of frequent church attenders in 'activity' or 'community' centred organisations such as service organisations and charities, as shown in Table 8.4, is also consistent with the explanation given above.

Personal Resources for Involvement in Community Organisations

Another explanation centres on the cumulative effect of the greater personal resources available to those with a higher social status.

Research has generally found positive relationships between most measures of socio-economic status - whether these be education, income, occupation or some combination - and participation in voluntary organisations (Smith and Freedman, 1972: 154). This suggests a cumulative effect; those with higher income and education would be expected to be more confident, to believe in their own efficacy,

read more, travel more and be more informed on a variety of subjects. They are thus better placed for involvement in structured organisations such as churches.

In Australia, Kaldor (1987: 140-141) has argued along similar lines that working class people are disadvantaged by the group processes of church life. Lower levels of education, a preference for concrete rather than abstract forms of thinking and a lack of familiarity with the formal proceedings of voluntary organisations, places the person from a lower socio-economic background at a distinct disadvantage compared to someone of higher socio-economic status.

Some of these ideas have been tested in the Western Sydney Survey. The items selected reflect some of the personal resources which have been hypothesised to make a difference to church participation. Of the aspects tested, speaking to a large group, doing a lot of reading, and talking about complex ideas were all found to be positively and significantly related to education level. However, as Table 8.5 shows, there are no statistically significant associations between these capacities and frequency of church attendance.

The 1993 National Social Science Survey also contained a number of questions about access to different kinds of books and about levels of reading, both now and when the respondent was growing up. Additionally, the survey contained questions about how much they had enjoyed school, not simply what level of education they had attained. The NSSS does provide some evidence of a relationship between these variables and current church attendance. Frequent attenders are more likely than infrequent and non-attenders to own books of a serious or practical nature. Although the correlation is statistically significant, it is weak (gamma = 0.05). Frequent church attenders are somewhat more likely to have enjoyed school both at age 14 and in the final year at school, at around age 18. The correlation with each of these variables is also statistically significant (gamma = 0.13 and 0.15 respectively).

TABLE 8.5

ASPECTS OF GROUP PROCESSES

By Church Attendance

Respondent finds this mostly hard:	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Speaking to a large group	22	26	23	0.07
Doing a lot of reading	14	11	13	-0.03
Talking about feelings	27	23	26	-0.08
Talk about complex ideas	14	14	14	0.06
Saying 'no' to friends	15	16	15	0.05
Making new friends	11	8	10	0.01

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey

Note: There were no statistically significant correlations. Correlations based on complete data for every question.

While education has a bearing on the way people respond to these issues, it is not clear that these represent the strong barrier to church participation that they have been made out to be.

CONSUMERISM AND MATERIAL SUCCESS

Another way in which the impact of socio-economic issues can be considered is by examining the relationship between greater prosperity more generally in Australia and the levels of church attendance. Prior to the Second World War, personal consumption per head of population in Australia was little different from what it had been in 1901. This was due in no small measure to the impact of the Great Depression that began in 1929. Then personal consumption doubled between 1947 and 1974 (Shergold, 1987: 226). This was also a period of steeply declining church attendance in Australia. Is there a relationship between the two?

Much has been said about the development of a 'consumer culture' in the post-war period. Higher levels of disposable income combined with technological advances on a range of fronts have led to widespread purchasing of products designed to make life easier, from vacuum cleaners to television sets to motor cars. Improvements in air travel and relative reductions in the price of overseas travel have brought the option of overseas holidays more within reach of the average Australian.

In order to explore this issue, respondents to the Western Sydney Survey were asked how important various material goals were to them. The focus was not on the attainment of the goals but on the presence of such goals irrespective of actual attainment. The results are shown in Table 8.6.

TABLE 8.6
IMPORTANCE OF MATERIAL GOALS
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Things that are **very** important:				
A high income job	31	21	29	-0.28*
An expensive car	6	3	5	-0.15*
Overseas travel	18	11	16	-0.07
Good house in a good area	40	30	38	-0.19*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on the complete data for every question.
* significant at p< 0.05 level

On most of these measures, significant differences were found to exist between frequent attenders and infrequent or non-attenders. Infrequent and non-attenders are

more likely to feel that a high paying job is particularly important. A good house in a good area is also more important to infrequent and non-attenders.

Yet it should be noted that most respondents, whether church attenders or not, thought that a high paying job, having enough money for overseas travel and a good house in a good area are of at least some importance.

Respondents were also asked whether they thought the main goal in life is happiness. Most agree that it is. Again, significant differences exist between frequent church attenders and infrequent or non-attenders; the latter are much more likely to say that the main goal in life is to be happy. Some 84% of infrequent and non-attenders believe that the main goal in life is to be happy, compared to 56% of frequent attenders. The correlation coefficient (gamma = -0.50) is even stronger than for the relationship between attendance and material goals. This suggests that, among many church attenders, happiness in life is secondary to some other, possibly more religious, goal. Alternatively, pursuit of happiness in life provides meaning for infrequent and non-attenders in a way that it does not for frequent attenders.

CONCLUSION

There are some significant socio-economic differences between frequent church attenders and infrequent or non-attenders. The well-educated and those who own their home are more likely to be church attenders than those who are not. The theories examined here suggest that a lack of resources, whether educational, psychological, financial or social, serves to erect barriers to lower-socio-economic groups' participation in churches. The purpose of the organisation is also another variable that may cause some voluntary organisations to be more attractive to the people of one socio-economic grouping than another. However, the data examined from the Western Sydney Survey and other databases do not provide strong support for these theories. While it can be argued that lower socio-economic groups are less

likely to be 'joiners' of voluntary organisations, it is not clear why they are less likely to join some organisations than others. Further empirical work beyond the data at hand is necessary to provide a comprehensive test of these theories.

Another direction that emerges from data analysed here has to do not so much with people's socio-economic status as with their goals and ambitions in relation to material things. There is a negative relationship between having such goals and church attendance. Likewise, the degree of importance placed upon one's own happiness is negatively correlated with church attendance. From the viewpoint of secularisation theory, such measures can be seen as being indicators of the effects of secularisation. The link between these indicators and church attendance suggests that increasing general prosperity in Australia has been corrosive of church attendance, if only because it encourages those attitudes towards personal happiness and material goals described here, at the expense of religious notions of stewardship, giving to others and being satisfied with what you have.

While a church involvement may confer particular benefits, these benefits are not as attractive for some people as the pursuit of other goals. A church involvement may simply be a distraction from pursuing these goals or may even bring the importance of such goals into question. Certainly religious collectivities have been classified according to church-sect theory in terms of their orientation to 'the world'. This issue is further addressed in Chapter 10.

CHAPTER 9: WORK AND LEISURE

Secularisation theorists have linked industrialisation with the decline of religion. Life seemed much less precarious as new technologies associated with industrialisation brought improvements to health, improved living conditions and greater cultural awareness (Acquaviva, 1979: 197-198). The plethora of invention and industry provided the means of transforming life for the better. These led to new assumptions about life, assumptions that eroded religion and the authority of the church (Wickham, 1957: 182).

It has been theorised that the specialisation of roles connected with industrialisation eroded the authority of the church. Within each specialisation came an agreed set of values and norms developed without reference to church values, and the development of institutions beyond the control or influence of religious authorities. Meaning could then become attached to separate domains without reference to religion (Luckmann, 1967: 39, 96).

The greatest impacts of industrialisation have been associated with living standards and the nature of work. The twentieth century has also witnessed remarkable changes in the area of leisure. Labour saving devices, television, computer technology and telecommunications have expanded the scope of leisure. The new technology has increased access to sporting events and entertainment on a global scale. This chapter looks at the fruits of industrialisation from the viewpoint both of work and of leisure, and the relationship of each to church attendance.

WORK

The nature of work has continued to change beyond the initial waves of industrialisation. Technological innovation and the ushering in of the computer age have brought further

change. To what extent does involvement in the modern workforce explain a lack of involvement with churches?

A starting point for considering this issue is the relationship between hours worked and church attendance. The 1993 Western Sydney Survey included a question on hours worked in paid employment, along with hours worked by the respondent's spouse. In the Western Sydney Survey, virtually equal proportions of frequent attenders and infrequent and non-attenders worked more than 35 hours per week, although 12% of infrequent and non-attenders worked 51 hours or more compared to 6% of frequent attenders. This difference is statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level. A similar question in relation to the hours of work performed by the spouses of respondents did not reveal any statistically significant differences according to church attendance level.

TABLE 9.1
HOURS WORKED PER WEEK IN PAID EMPLOYMENT
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Hours worked per week:			
None	25	27	26
1-15 hours	7	10	8
16-24 hours	6	4	5
25-34 hours	6	5	6
35-40 hours	27	32	29
41-50 hours	17	17	17
51 or more hours	12	6	10
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma = -0.10*)

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at $p<0.05$ level

By comparison, the 1993 National Social Science Survey revealed a somewhat stronger relationship between church attendance and hours of work. This study showed that infrequent and non-attenders (54%) were more likely to be working 35 hours or more per week than frequent attenders (42%). The correlation between hours worked and church attendance was -0.18.

While hours worked do not appear to be highly predictive of church participation in the Western Sydney Survey, they do appear to be so of religious beliefs. The less religious generally work longer hours than the highly religious. Some 37% of people who are not religious work more than 40 hours per week, compared to 27% of those with some religion, 28% of the quite religious and only 21% of the highly religious. This relationship appears to be only partly the result of the older average age of the highly religious group.

Gender, Work and Church Attendance

It has been generally observed that women are more likely to attend church and more likely to be religious than men. The Western Sydney Survey results are typical of the broader picture: some 27% of women in the Survey are frequent church attenders compared with 21% of men.

Age differences account for part of this variation, since women tend to live longer than men, and as discussed in Chapter 7, older people are more likely to attend church. Other explanations focus on the socialisation of women for obedience, dependence and the responsibility of child-rearing, compared to the socialisation of men towards independence (Mol, 1971: 31; Lazerwitz, 1961), and on the characteristics of religion itself, such as the doctrine of the fatherhood of God (Argyle, 1975).

The role of work in decreasing religious involvement has been advanced as a reason for the higher levels of church attendance generally observed among women. De Vaus (1984; 1985a) has demonstrated that involvement in the workforce is an important factor in

explaining differences in church attendance among men and women in Australia. Females who work full-time have church attendance levels that are the same as males who work full-time, but which are much less than females who do not work full-time. De Vaus and McAllister (1987) tested explanations connected with women's child-rearing role, their lower workforce participation and the relative importance placed by women on the family compared to workforce involvement. Again, their findings support the importance of lower workforce participation among women in explaining higher levels of religiosity. Yet such a relationship has not been observed in American data.

This relationship can be seen in Australian data from the 1993 National Social Science Survey, shown in Table 9.2. While women who are not working are much more likely to attend church frequently than men who are not working, such differences disappear among men and women engaged in the workforce. The table also shows that as women work more hours, they are less likely to attend church frequently.

TABLE 9.2
MALE AND FEMALE DIFFERENCES IN CHURCH ATTENDANCE
By Involvement in the Workforce

	Attend infrequently or not at all (%)	Attend frequently (%)	Total (%)
Not working:			
Males	78	22	100
Females	69	31	100
Part-time work:			
Males	71	29	100
Females	73	27	100
Full-time work:			
Males	81	19	100
Females	81	19	100

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey

In view of the increasing numbers of women entering the workforce, it can be postulated that male-female differences in church attendance levels will begin to disappear, based on the results examined here.

Why Does Work Reduce Church Attendance?

The impact of work on church attendance has sometimes been explained in terms of deprivation theory: people outside of the workforce seek alternative sources of fulfilment through involvement in organisations such as churches. But De Vaus (1994) suggests two further possibilities: a displacement explanation and a conformity explanation.

Under the displacement explanation, work provides a substitute for what some people gain from religion and church involvement. Work competes for a person's time but, more importantly, can provide an alternative source of values, identity and social relationships. In view of the value placed on work by society, occupation often becomes an important part of a person's identity.

According to the conformity explanation, women's participation in the workforce does not occur on an equal footing with men's. Women often occupy subordinate positions whereas men are more likely to occupy positions of authority. Due to these unequal relationships, women are under more pressure to modify their views, including their views on religion, to be more like those of men.

Another possibility is that those who work are more likely to pursue materialistic goals to the exclusion of more religious goals. According to Wickham (1957), modern work is accompanied by a 'preoccupation with the material affairs of living'. Work provides income, which opens up greater possibilities in the pursuit of leisure, overseas travel, the buying of consumer goods and greater social and geographical mobility. As discussed in Chapter 8, respondents to the Western Sydney Survey were asked how much importance they placed on particular material goals. As noted in that chapter, there is a negative

relationship between church attendance and having such goals. Is there also a relationship between having such goals and involvement in the workforce?

Table 9.3 shows that there is some relationship between having material goals and involvement in the workforce. Not surprisingly, having a high income job is seen as more important to those still in the workforce; this result would be partly driven by retirees placing little or no importance on this aspect. Nevertheless, owning an expensive car and having money for overseas travel are seen as more important with increasing workforce involvement, particularly among the 18 to 29 year age grouping. While these are not strong relationships overall, those who are most involved in the workforce are also more likely to be concerned with such 'material affairs of living', particularly when they are young adults.

TABLE 9.3
IMPORTANCE OF MATERIAL GOALS
By Involvement in the Workforce

	Not working (%)	Work part-time (%)	Work full-time (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Things that are **very** important:				
A high income job	22	23	33	0.28*
An expensive car	5	3	6	0.23*
Overseas travel	16	9	19	0.15*
Good house in a good area	44	29	37	0.04

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on the complete data for every question
* significant at p< 0.05 level

THE LEISURE REVOLUTION

As discussed in Chapter 3, Australia has witnessed something of a leisure revolution during the twentieth century. The Saturday half-holiday became part of Australian life at the turn of the century, although Sabbath laws hindered the growth of some leisure pursuits.

Technology was to play an important role in the growth of leisure. Mass sporting events of many kinds such as football, cricket and boxing became progressively more popular as technology brought both access and immediacy to greater numbers of people. Overseas sporting fixtures were closely followed, firstly by radio and then by television.

Another important technological advance that aided the growth of leisure was the private motor vehicle. Although cars had been available since the turn of the century, the number of cars per head of population increased only slightly from 1 per 15 persons in the population around the time of the Great Depression (1933), to 1 per 14 immediately after the Second World War. The largest increases in car ownership occurred in the 1950s, with car ownership rising from 1 per 14 in 1947 to 1 car per 5 people in the population by 1961 (Vamplew and McLean, 1987: 171).

The car extended the reach of the population to various tourist destinations. A case in point is the Blue Mountains just outside of Sydney. In the 1850s horse drawn coaches traversed the Blue Mountains in just under 2 days (Wylie and Singleton, 1982: 79). By 1905, a trip by 'motorised coaches' from the top of the Blue Mountains to Jenolan Caves on the western side could be undertaken in half a day (Trickett, 1905). Nowadays, the Blue Mountains can be completely traversed from Sydney to Lithgow in the west in just a few hours.

Church attendance appears to have declined in parallel with the growth of leisure. Some, such as Glasner, argue that leisure generally and sport in particular act as a surrogate for religion in Australian society:

> Along with mateship and beer, it [sport] forms the basis of Australia's cultural lifestyle. Little wonder therefore, that the combination of all three ... results in an experience which even non-sociologists would describe as religious (Glasner, 1983: 178).

But is there any evidence that frequent church attenders are any less engaged in such leisure pursuits than infrequent and non-attenders? Do churches really compete with a range of other activities for potential participants?

Different Leisure Pursuits

There is some evidence that church attendance is negatively related to involvement in particular leisure activities. As shown in Table 9.4, the Western Sydney Survey provides evidence that church attenders are less likely to go to hotels, licensed clubs, football or other sports. These relationships are still evident after controlling for the gender of respondents.

It is not surprising that those who are more religious are less likely to be involved in some of these activities. Certainly a likely reason for these differences is the antipathy that many church people have traditionally felt towards activities involving the consumption of alcohol and gambling (Dunstan, 1968; Raftery, 1991). Church attenders may feel that involvement in these activities would compromise their faith. The 1991 National Church Life Survey, a major survey of Anglican and Protestant church attenders, also found a relationship between the denomination of church attenders and their levels of involvement in a range of leisure activities and community groups (Kaldor et al., 1995).

TABLE 9.4

FACILITIES TO WHICH RESPONDENTS GO OFTEN

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Hotel or licensed club	38	25	35	-0.23*
Major shopping centre	68	76	70	0.13*
Football or other sport	30	19	27	-0.11*
Theatre or cinema	28	32	29	0.09
Disco	8	6	7	-0.14
Concert venue	10	10	10	0.03
Private parties	35	32	34	-0.02

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p< 0.05 level

The Recreation Experience - Differences by Church Attendance

Another possible explanation lies in the nature of the recreational experience itself as a source of satisfaction. Bechtel (1977: 8) noted that very little research had been done into the link between major motivating forces (such as satisfaction seeking or the quest for happiness) and the built environment.

People associate particular places with positive experiences. Shelly (1969) identified two major categories of such places: those that increase arousal and those that foster relaxation and decrease arousal. Arousal sites are often places where social interaction takes place. Shelly and Adelberg (1969) analysed 82 sites in terms of lighting, size, presence of food, music, noise level, number of persons, and time spent there. The research confirmed the two basic types of arousal and relaxation sites.

In view of the differing levels of involvement in recreation exhibited by frequent church attenders compared with infrequent and non-attenders, does each group seek different

outcomes from recreation? Do frequent church attenders find a quiet contemplative atmosphere more attractive than do infrequent and non-attenders? Conversely do infrequent and non-attenders find places with a noisy, vibrant atmosphere more attractive than do frequent church attenders?

In order to begin to answer these questions, respondents were asked to nominate a recreational facility to which they most enjoy going (not a church). They were then asked which aspects are important in making leisure time enjoyable at that place. Table 9.5 shows that infrequent and non-attenders generally place greater emphasis on the importance of most aspects to their recreational experience, although the correlations are not strong.

TABLE 9.5

ASPECTS WHICH ARE VERY IMPORTANT IN MAKING LEISURE ENJOYABLE

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
New building/venue	7	8	8	0.04
Presence of a crowd	19	8	16	-0.23*
Food that I like	31	21	29	-0.02
Family or friends	69	64	68	-0.13*
Familiarity with the place	29	35	30	0.02
Music that I like	28	26	27	-0.12*
Able to meet new people	22	17	21	-0.12*
Quiet atmosphere	38	29	36	-0.07
Freedom to do what I like	38	34	37	-0.13*
Alcoholic drinks	12	1	9	-0.31*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on complete data for every question.
* significant at p< 0.05 level

Rather than frequent attenders preferring different recreational outcomes, the results suggest that infrequent and non-attenders want more out of their recreational experience than frequent attenders, irrespective of whether it is associated with arousal or relaxation. The age or education level of respondents does not generally account for these relationships.

In particular, infrequent and non-attenders are more likely to place great importance on the presence of a crowd and alcoholic drinks. Interestingly, factor analysis reveals a relationship between many of the aspects shown in Table 9.5 and the expectations of infrequent and non-attenders when they visit church, dealt with in Chapter 11. Infrequent and non-attenders with greater expectations of church also tend to have greater expectations of their recreational experience.

The notion that church services are unattractive because they are neither sufficiently arousing nor relaxing may help to explain why, of a list of twenty factors, the most frequently selected factor which discourages church attendance among non-attending Australians is the perception that church services are boring or unfulfilling (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 49). Part of the explanation that many Australians are not involved in churches is that they may see the experience of the church service as mediocre at best.

CONCLUSION

Some versions of secularisation theory posit that one way in which modernity is disruptive of church attendance is through the multiplication of institutions and activities. As Berger (1979: 18) observed, everyday life has been transformed into one that is full of choices from trivial choices to far-reaching lifestyle choices. Modern people are confronted with an array of leisure opportunities that present an attractive alternative to a church involvement.

The evidence presented here shows that infrequent and non-attenders are more likely to pursue particular forms of leisure, such as attending sport or licensed clubs, and to place greater importance on aspects of their recreation than do frequent church attenders. The fact that there are significant differences according to church attendance level in relation to the type of leisure pursued and the relative importance placed on various aspects of leisure, suggests that non-participation in church is explained in part by the wide range of lifestyle choices available in contemporary societies. Positive experiences associated with leisure compared to more negative experiences of church worship appear to have a role to play in explaining why people are less likely to have a church involvement.

CHAPTER 10: THE EFFECT OF CHURCH LIFE

When asked why they are not involved in churches, people often cite some deficiency in the churches themselves. Responses such as 'worship is boring', 'church people are hypocrites' or the 'churches are outdated' are some of the reasons people give for non-participation. Such responses raise the issue as to how much of the patterns of non-participation can be explained in terms of the life of the churches themselves. Do the declines in the numbers attending churches reflect a failure on the part of churches to make the necessary changes to retain their relevance to a greater proportion of the population? Are there styles of church life which are more appealing to a broader cross-section of Australians than others?

A cursory examination of church life in Australia shows a great deal of diversity in styles of church life. The contemporary and informal style of most Pentecostal worship services is very different to the formality of an Anglican, Lutheran or Catholic service. The lack of symbolism and the absence of highly formalised ritual present in most Baptist or Churches of Christ meetings contrasts with the ritual and colour of Orthodox gatherings.

Although there are sometimes differences in style and emphasis within a particular religious denomination, each denomination tends to be characterised by a particular combination of theological characteristics, approaches to liturgy and church governance. For instance, Catholic churches are organised on an episcopal basis, with an emphasis on the centrality of the sacraments, particularly the Mass. Anglican churches are also organised on an episcopal basis, but with a house of laity as well as clergy in their form of synodical church government. The use of prayer books is a defining characteristic of Anglican worship. By contrast Baptist and Churches of Christ congregations typically have a considerable degree of autonomy but place a particular emphasis on adult baptism and conversion and have a less formal approach to worship. Churches within the

Pentecostal stream are also unions of independent congregations, but place an even greater emphasis on contemporary and informal worship.

Since most people identify with a denomination in Australia's five-yearly census, the styles of church life commonly pursued within each denomination and the expectations of church leaders regarding attendance at church become factors to consider in understanding non-participation among Australians.

VARIATIONS IN ATTENDANCE BY DENOMINATION

The denominational identification of Australians is, in and of itself, an important indicator of likely church attendance levels. Table 10.1 shows weekly church attendance levels, estimated through the 1996 National Church Life and Catholic Church Life Surveys, as a proportion of people identifying with each denomination in the 1996 Census of Population and Housing. Table 10.1 shows that there is significant variation among mainstream denominations. The Catholic Church is the biggest denomination in Australia both in terms of people identifying and in attendance. Catholics are three times as likely to be in church in any given week as Anglicans and Presbyterians and almost twice as likely as people identifying with the Uniting Church. Lutherans have similar attendance rates to Catholics.

However, people identifying with smaller denominations are much more likely to attend church than are people identifying with mainstream denominations. Baptist and Salvation Army are twice as likely to attend as Catholics. People identifying with Seventh-day Adventist or Churches of Christ are three times more likely to attend than Catholics. Pentecostal churches have the highest rates of attendance: attendances at Pentecostal churches approximate the number identifying with them in the Census.

TABLE 10.1

CHURCH ATTENDANCE LEVELS

By Denominational Identification

	No. of people identifying (1996 Census)	Percent attending each week (1996 NCLS/CCLS)
Catholic	4 798 950	18
Anglican	3 903 324	5
Uniting	1 334 917	11
Presbyterian & Reformed	675 534	6
Orthodox	497 015	n.a.
Baptist	295 178	35
Lutheran	249 989	18
Pentecostal	174 720	105
Churches of Christ	75 023	56
Salvation Army	74 145	41
Seventh-day Adventist	52 655	67

Source: Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 17
Note: Figures include both adults and children

Over time, there have been significant changes in the proportion of the population identifying with each denomination, as shown by Table 10.2. Catholics have increased as a proportion of the population since the end of the Second World War, while mainstream Protestant denominations have declined significantly since then.

In view of the differing levels of attendance by denomination, it would be expected that changes in the proportion of people identifying with each denomination would affect overall levels of church attendance. The typical church attender is now much more likely than in the past to belong to a small denomination, most of which can be classified as Protestant. In 1960, some 40% of church attenders were Catholic, 26% Anglican, 21% Methodist or Presbyterian and only 13% attended other denominations. By 1998, this latter group had increased to 30%, largely at the expense of the Anglican, Uniting (formerly Methodist) and Presbyterian churches (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 23). Many Protestant denominations have small numbers of people identifying with them, but large

proportions attending. By contrast, the Anglican and mainstream Protestant denominations have large numbers of people identifying with them but lower rates of attendance now than previously. As a result attenders are less likely to be found in such churches than at previous times in our history. The Catholic Church retains roughly the same proportion of attenders, with declines in the rate of attendance among Catholics being offset to some extent by increases in the number of people identifying, as shown in Table 10.2.

TABLE 10.2
DENOMINATIONAL IDENTIFICATION:
Change over Time

	1911	1933	1947	1971	1996
Catholic	22.5	19.6	20.9	27.0	27.0
Anglican	38.4	38.7	39.0	31.0	22.0
Uniting/Meth./Presb./Cong.	26.5	22.1	22.1	17.2	11.3
Orthodox	-	-	0.2	2.7	2.8
Baptist	2.2	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.7
Lutheran	1.6	0.9	0.9	1.5	1.4
Pentecostal	-	-	-	-	1.0
Other Protestant*	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.8	1.3
Jehovah's Witnesses	-	-	-	-	0.5
Latter-day Saints	-	-	-	-	0.3

Source: Commonwealth Census statistics in Hughes, 1993; Bentley and Hughes, 1998.
* 'Other Protestant' here includes Brethren, Churches of Christ, Salvation Army, and
    Seventh-day Adventist.

There are denominational differences not only in the rates of attendance, but also in patterns of attendance change. Table 10.3 shows that mainstream denominations all experienced declines in attendance between 1991 and 1996. By contrast, Baptist, Salvation Army and Pentecostal denominations increased in size. As a general rule, those denominations that experienced attendance growth over the five year period, also have high rates of attendance among people identifying with them.

TABLE 10.3

ATTENDANCE CHANGE, 1991 - 1996

By Denomination

	No. of attenders each week (1996 NCLS/CCLS)	Percent change since 1991
Catholic	875 000	-10
Pentecostal	183 000	+10*
Anglican	181 500	-5
Uniting	142 900	-12
Baptist	103 800	+1
Lutheran	44 100	-11
Churches of Christ	42 000	-4
Seventh-day Adventist	35 500	-3
Salvation Army	30 100	+9

Source: 1996 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) and 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS), cited in Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 15, 24.
Note: The NCLS and CCLS do not include Eastern Orthodox or non-trinitarian groups such as Latter-day Saints or Jehovah's Witnesses.
* Percent change is only for those Pentecostal denominations that took part in the 1991 and 1996 National Church Life Surveys.

While it is tempting theologically to think of 'the Church' as a single organisation, in reality each denomination exhibits very different patterns of attendance change. The survival and growth of conservative Protestant denominations represents an important challenge to secularisation theory and may point to some limitations to the theory. It could also be that while such denominations continue to grow in size, secularisation is occuring in more subtle ways within conservative religious groups, such as through the accommodation of cultural trends (Hunter, 1985: 150-166).

WHY DOES DENOMINATION MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

The Impact of Immigration

The religious background of immigrants has played a major role in the overall religious mix of Australians. Most of the mainstream groupings can trace their ethnic roots: the Anglican Church has its roots in England, the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, the Lutheran Church in Northern Europe and the Reformed Church in Holland. The Catholic Church in Australia was initially predominantly Irish in its social composition, but since the Second World War it has received a boost through immigration from Southern European and Asian countries. The growth of people identifying with the Orthodox churches from 0.2% of the population in 1947 to 2.8% in 1996 can be attributed almost entirely to the effects of immigration.

The size and distribution of these mainstream denominations in Australia owes much to the original patterns of immigration and settlement (Batrouney, 1996: 11-27; Hughes, 1993: 68). This is further demonstrated when one considers denominational identification by state. Anglicans constitute a higher proportion (34%) of the population of Tasmania than of any other state. Tasmania also has the lowest percentage of people born overseas (11%) of any state (Dept of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, 1999: 69). Anglicans (16%) and Catholics (21%) constitute relatively low proportions of the population of South Australia, reflecting the historical foundation of that colony as a haven for non-conformists and free settlers. The highest proportions of people identifying with Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are to be found in Sydney, where they constitute 5.6% of that city's population, reflecting more recent patterns of immigration.

There is some historical evidence that immigration has also had an effect on church attendance levels as well as on religious identification. Phillips (1972: 389) suggests that immigration had an impact on church attendance levels in NSW in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The second half of the nineteenth century was characterised by rapid population increases to 3.75 million by 1900. Phillips points to the fact that declines in

church attendance in NSW between 1870 and 1890 were almost wholly felt in the city; attendance levels dropped by over a third in metropolitan areas but were stable in the country. At the same time, the metropolitan population increased from 26.7 to 34.3% of the population of the whole state, an increase composed mainly of English working class, most of whom were indifferent to religion.

Similarly, Jackson (1987: 120) attributes the rise in Catholic church attendance over the same period in part to the slowing of immigration from Ireland from the 1860s. By 1890, the flow of new immigrants from Ireland had all but ceased. As the Catholic population stabilised so the supply of priests was able to catch up with demand; by contrast Protestants were hard pressed to find clergy to meet the demands created through increased immigration from England and Scotland from 1905 onwards.

The evidence of the era since the Second World War, however, is that immigration tends to boost attendance at religious services, particularly where the immigrants are from non-English speaking backgrounds. The 1998 Australian Community Survey found that 31% of people born in a non-English speaking country claim to attend religious services monthly or more often. By comparison, only 19% of Australian born and 17% of people born overseas in an English-speaking country attend church monthly or more often (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999b: 22). Yet the proportion of immigrants finding their way into the churches is probably decreasing, since immigrants with a Christian heritage now make up only 48% of all immigrants, compared with 74% before 1981 (Bentley and Hughes, 1998: 18).

The Catholic Church provides an example of how immigration can affect attendance levels. Apart from being Australia's largest denomination, the Catholic Church has some of the highest levels of those born overseas of any denomination. It is estimated that 31% of attenders in any given week were born overseas, mostly in non-English speaking countries (R.Dixon, private communications).

TABLE 10.4

CATHOLIC IDENTIFICATION AND ATTENDANCE

By Country of Birth

	Identify as Catholic (No.)	Catholic Attenders (No.)	Percent of those identifying (%)
Australia	3580 016	599 660	16.8
Italy	221 880	40 504	18.3
United Kingdom & Ireland	166 709	48 357	29.0
Philippines	76 439	28 120	36.8
Poland	49 469	10 795	21.8
Malta	47 228	15 551	32.9
New Zealand	44 787	6 427	14.4
Croatia	43 076	4 090	9.5
Viet Nam	33 985	17 489	51.5
Germany	32 279	4 654	14.4
Other	503 082	99 353	19.7
TOTAL	4798 950	875 000	18.2

Source: 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey and 1996 Census of Population and Housing, cited in Hughes, 1997: 21.

Analysis of a 1981 survey among Catholics in Western Sydney found evidence that Italian, Spanish and Yugoslav Catholics were less likely to be church attenders than Maltese, Poles, South Asians and South-east Asians (Kaldor, 1987). Analysis of unpublished 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey data shows that similar patterns can be detected among Catholic church attenders nationally. Table 10.4 shows that most European migrant groups have attendance rates which are little different from those of Catholics born in Australia. However, higher rates can be observed among immigrants from the United Kingdom and Ireland, Malta, the Philippines and Vietnam. The net effect of migration at the present time has been to provide a small boost to Catholic attendance rates overall, from 16.8 among Australian-born Catholics to 18.2 among Catholics overall.

But it needs to be recognised that although the base proportion of Australians identifying with the Catholic Church has widened from 21% in 1947 to 27% in 1996, this has been accompanied by falling rates of attendance. The influx of migrants into the church in the post-war period, while greatly increasing the Catholic proportion of the population, has only slowed the rate of decline in attendance rates over the period.

By contrast, there is evidence that Anglicans born in the United Kingdom and New Zealand are less likely to be church attenders than are Australian-born Anglicans. These two English-speaking countries have been major sources of migration to Australia. But according to the 1998 Australian Community Survey, only 9% of Anglicans born overseas in an English-speaking country say that they attend church monthly or more often, compared with 11% of Anglicans born in Australia.

However, there are instances among Protestants of higher rates of church attendance arising from migrants joining the churches. For instance, both the Baptist and Wesleyan Methodist churches have increased in attendances in recent years, a growth which is partly attributable to the incorporation of migrant groups. Gil Soo Han (1994) has shown that there are much higher-than-expected rates of church attendance among migrants from particular East Asian countries. The provision of a common social forum for people in a new land, as well as the practical help provided by churches in dealing with immigration procedures were significant factors in explaining the higher levels of attendance. There is also evidence that, after 10 years, many migrants will have left church life (Hughes, 1996a: 117).

In summary, immigration has played a defining role in the size and distribution of denominations in Australia. It plays a lesser role in boosting or eroding church attendance rates within each denominational grouping, depending to some extent upon countries from which immigrants have arrived.

Rational Choice Theory

While past waves of immigration have had a major bearing on the present size of many denominations, they only partly explain the wide variations between denominations in attendance rates, as shown in Table 10.1. Pentecostal denominations have the highest rates of attendance of any of the denominations. As Hughes (1996b: 99) has observed, the Pentecostal denominations are one of few religious groups whose major growth cannot be attributed to immigration. To what then can the growth of these denominations be attributed? A theory originating in the United States, known as 'rational choice' theory, appears to provide a better understanding of the different patterns of denominational growth.

In 1972, Dean Kelley published a book called *Why Conservative Churches Are Growing*. Statistics provided by Kelley demonstrated that while mainstream denominations in the United States were in decline, the more theologically conservative denominations were growing. Kelley argued that this had to do with the greater ability of conservative churches to meet the ultimate meaning needs of attenders. By providing clear-cut standards and high behavioural expectations for attenders to meet, attenders are also 'rewarded' with an assurance that their ultimate meaning needs are being met.

The themes outlined by Kelley have been taken up by other authors. Finke and Stark saw the weakness of mainstream churches being at their boundaries with 'the world'. Mainstream denominations are often more accessible to those who are not regular attenders, by providing services for the community such as weddings, christenings and funerals. The central message and standards of the organisations themselves have become less clear-cut in order to accommodate a variety of views from the wider secular environment. Lower levels of commitment among attenders tend to be seen as being acceptable by leaders and constituents alike. In this way, the religion itself loses its potency and the churches head for the sidelines (Finke and Stark, 1992: 253, 275).

These ideas, grouped under the title 'rational choice' theory, suggest that churches that expect more from their members are also able to offer higher rewards for their involvement. People then make choices whether to become involved by weighing up both the costs and the benefits of involvement. According to the theory, the future of religious groups depends upon the value that they offer to 'consumers'.

Finke and Stark provide an alternative to the secularisation thesis in explaining the decline of churches. In their view, the decline of churches has more to do with the internal life of the churches than the impact of wider community trends. In terms of this current thesis, rational choice theory has some importance, because it suggests that some religious groups will be better placed to succeed in drawing people from the wider community into their ranks, while others may be repelling potential participants. According to the theory, the more effective groups will tend to be those that:

- Have a clear-cut message and offer a sense of ultimate meaning,
- Make higher demands on their members in terms of involvement,
- Exhibit a greater willingness to conduct evangelism and outreach to the community.

Rational choice theory contains elements of church-sect theory. 'Sects' are groups which emphasise personal inward perfection, requiring a detachment from the world. Sect membership is voluntary, involving conversion and a commitment to personal holiness (Troeltsch, 1931: 331-339). Sects are world rejecting with membership limited to those who produce the right beliefs and behaviour (Bouma, 1992: 93).

By contrast, 'churches' are defined as groups that seek to embrace both the world and its people. The ministry emphasis of churches is on administration of the sacraments (Troeltsch, 1931: 331-339). The church end of the spectrum has minimal membership requirements (Bouma, 1992: 93). Churches tend to accept the social environment in which they are placed (Scanzoni, 1965: 320).

Sects tend to become more church-like as they recognise the equality of other religious groups, a process which is assisted by the gradual replacement of foundation members with the members of new generations (Niebuhr, 1929: 19-20). However, rational choice theory suggests that the stronger boundaries of the more sect-like groups mean that they are better placed to succeed in the current social climate. Such an argument has been made in Australia for the relative effectiveness of sect-like groups over church-like groups (eg. Emerson, 1998).

SURVEY EVIDENCE FROM AUSTRALIA

The National Church Life Survey (NCLS) provides some evidence in support of rational choice theory. Analysis at a congregational level among Anglican and Protestant churches shows that the more theologically conservative congregations tend to be more attractive to those who are newcomers to church life. Analysis of the 1991 National Church Life Survey data found that a more conservative theological orientation explained some 11% of the variance in the proportion of newcomers in congregations (Kaldor et al., 1997: 209). Analysis of the 1996 NCLS found that conservative theology combined with denomination accounted for 17% of the variance in the proportion of newcomers and 12% of the variance in attendance growth and decline (Kaldor et al., 1999a, 70).

Further analysis showed that congregations with a stronger orientation to evangelism and which demanded higher levels of involvement were also more likely to attract newcomers and to be growing numerically. These particular aspects of church life had even greater explanatory power than the theological variables that had been included in the analysis (Kaldor et al., 1997: 218).

The National Church Life Survey has also shown that, in addition to being more attractive to newcomers, the more conservative religious groups are better at retaining their young people. Retention of secondary and post-school age children still living at home was lower among Anglicans (2.0 to 1) and Uniting Church (1.7 to 1) compared with Pentecostal

(5.0 to 1) or Baptists (4.1 to 1). This pattern varied according to the broader theological orientation of the denominations concerned. Attenders from the more conservative denominations tended to report higher levels of retention of their children than those from the more theologically diverse denominations (Kaldor *et al.*, 1995: 121). Further analysis at the congregational level also found that theological orientation of the congregation accounted for some 8% of the variance in the retention of their children reported by adult attenders (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 219).

Regarding declines in attendance in the Catholic Church, one line of argument has sought to explain this phenomenon in terms of a relaxation of demands placed on attenders following changes made to church life in the wake of Vatican II. Historically, presence at Mass was more spiritually necessary for Catholics than church attendance was for Protestants (Inglis, 1965: 44). The Mass has traditionally been central to Catholic experience; however, the sanctions associated with absence from the Mass have changed over time. According to the catechism used in the early 1900s, absence from Mass was seen as a mortal sin. And according to the same catechism, a person dying in a state of mortal sin was condemned to hell (Jackson, 1987: 120). The downplaying of such sanctions in the latter part of this century has been accompanied by attendance declines among Catholics in Australia.

A 'Circulation of the Saints'?

Critics of rational choice theory suggest that the real reason that conservative churches are growing is that they take members away from the more theologically diverse denominations. In other words the growth of the conservative denominations is fuelled by the movement of attenders from other religious groups rather than from the wider community (Bibby, 1978; Bruce, 1983).

This criticism is relevant to the current thesis because it suggests that although some churches are doing better, it is largely at the expense of other churches. If this is the case,

then the theory does not really offer a new way forward in understanding the phenomenon of *non-participation* in churches. The churches will have an ever decreasing pool of attenders, though the distribution of these attenders between denominations may continue to shift.

The National Church Life Survey provides evidence that a great deal of numerical church growth is indeed composed of a 'circulation of the saints' rather than a drawing in of new members from the wider community. Some 12% of Anglican and Protestant attenders claimed to have switched denominations in the last five years. The proportion of attenders who had 'switched in' to a denomination tended to be much higher among the more theologically conservative denominations, particularly Pentecostals. Almost a third (30%) of attenders in Pentecostal denominations were switchers, compared with just 7% of attenders in mainstream denominations such as Anglican, Uniting, Presbyterian and Lutheran (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 226).

By comparison, 8% of all attenders were newcomers to church life. Again Pentecostal denominations were more attractive to newcomers to church life; some 12% of all Pentecostal attenders were newcomers into the life of the church in the last five years. Some 8% of attenders at mainstream and other large Protestant denominations were newcomers to church life (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 214).

The National Church Life Survey provides evidence that congregations which are more effective in drawing in newcomers also have characteristics that would be predicted by rational choice theory. The theological orientation, levels of involvement of attenders and willingness to conduct evangelism and outreach all have significant explanatory power in relation to church growth.

But despite the presence of churches that are growing, church attendance overall continues to decline in Australia. While it is possible that a rigorous application of principles arising from rational choice theory may reverse this trend, the presence of

'strict' churches has not halted this decline so far. Declining church attendance may only partly be explained in terms of rational choice theory.

OTHER FACTORS BEHIND CHURCH GROWTH

There are other theories regarding the growth and decline of churches apart from rational choice theory. Without dismissing rational choice theory entirely, Sherkat and Wilson (1995: 993-1026) argue that an adequate assessment of the impact of choice can only be made by accounting for factors that influence religious preferences, such as a person's religious upbringing, social relations and status. They recognise that religious choices are constrained by others, such as parents and peers, and that our choices are not completely free of these influences. They also recognise the importance of previous patterns of religious involvement, such as in childhood, as being influential on current religious choices. Their analysis of the importance of social influences on religious preferences also provides an account of the different switching patterns between denominations.

Another theory developed to explain the patterns of growth and composition of voluntary organisations also has application to understanding various patterns of church growth. This ecological theory asserts that organisations compete for members of the same socio-demographic characteristics, as well as losing members whose socio-demographic characteristics are different from those of the rest of the members (Popielarz and McPherson, 1995; McPherson, Popielarz and Drobnic, 1992). Voluntary organisations thus tend towards homogeneity, which acts as a filter on potential joiners. The homogenous demographic composition of many congregations and some denominations, whether large congregations essentially composed of young adults or smaller congregations composed of older people, can be explained in terms of this theory.

The more homogenous voluntary organisations and groups become, the less likely they are to overlap with other social organisations. The more heterogeneous groups and

organisations become, the more likely they are to overlap with other groups and to assist in the integration of society (McPherson and Rotolo, 1996: 185-186). These observations have echoes of church-sect theory, which sees churches as more integrated into the surrounding society than the more sect-like groups.

A major edited publication from the United States, *Understanding Church Growth and Decline 1950-1978* (Hoge and Roozen, 1979b), argued that local contextual factors, such as the demographics of the community, are more important than congregational characteristics in determining the growth of congregations. For instance, Walrath (1979: 268) found that demographic changes in the local area had a significant impact on levels of attendance; the internal qualities of congregational life then determined whether a congregation performed at the top or the bottom of its particular context group. Other contributors to the book such as Dean Kelley and Peter Wagner felt that internal congregational factors were more important. Some writers have been critical of studies that overemphasized the importance of the local context, due to the relative weakness of the internal congregational measures used in such studies (eg. Iannaccone, 1996: 197).

In Australia, the National Church Life Survey has come down firmly on the side of the internal life of the congregation as being more important than the local community context in the overall understanding of patterns of participation and church growth. The survey evidence suggests that internal factors such as the style of leadership of the congregation, its theological orientation, communication issues, group life and worship style together account for nearly half (47%) of the variation in the flow of newcomers and a third (33%) of the variation in numerical growth of congregations. By comparison, the demographic composition of the local community accounts for 11% and 4% of the variation respectively (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 70).

Like rational choice theory, the implication of the National Church life Survey research is that the involvement of people from the wider community in the life of the church is not simply dependent upon changes in the wider society. Churches that are able to adapt their ministries to meet new and changing circumstances, without losing the essence of their

heritage and theological orientation, appear more successful in attracting newcomers into the life of the church than congregations which do not (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 70-71).

Furthermore, the National Church Life Survey identifies other characteristics of congregations that go beyond rational choice theory. Aspects such as a visionary leadership, conflict avoidance, and a leadership that builds the gifts and skills of the congregation are key characteristics of effective congregations apart from clear boundaries and high membership requirements (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 34).

CONCLUSION

Rational choice theory has been used to provide an alternative explanation for church decline than that provided by secularisation theory. According to rational choice theory, where churches make high demands on members and offer clear-cut rewards they continue to grow, while the less demanding mainstream churches will continue to decline. The growth of Pentecostal and some other churches in Australia appears to conform with rational choice theory. Their growth can only be partly explained in terms of switching between denominations, since growth also involves a component of people who are rejoining a church or joining for the first time.

However, determining the role of the less demanding churches versus the more demanding churches in the phenomenom of non-participation and the relative importance of this factor against other factors is difficult. The denominational identification of each respondent provides a partial measure of the impact of the churches, since those respondents who identify with the more demanding churches such as Pentecostal, Baptist or Churches of Christ will be much more likely to be church attenders than those who identify with the less demanding churches such as Anglican or Presbyterian. The relative importance of denominational identification compared to other factors such as age, gender and socio-economic status is explored later in this thesis.

Denominational identification provides only part of the picture regarding the impact of different forms of church life on non-participation. For instance, it does not reveal a person's history of contact with various types of churches, whether demanding or not, nor does it reveal anything of their preferences regarding churches. These issues can only ever be explored in a limited way through sample surveys, since they require some experience of churches among respondents and an ability to recognise differences in styles of approach to church life. The following chapter attempts to take these issues further.

CHAPTER 11: THE IMAGE OF THE CHURCH

'Church' can mean different things to different people. For some, the word evokes negative emotions because of past bad experiences of church life. For others, there are positive feelings as they recall supportive friendships and moments of spiritual communion.

The image of the church in the minds of individuals is in part an outcome of direct experience. As observed in Chapter 6, most Australians claim to have had direct experience of church life, particularly as children. Apart from direct experiences, people receive secondary information about churches through the mass media, the arts and interaction with others. Often the image of church conveyed through these secondary sources is of a decaying institution, cloaked in formality and losing touch with modern life.

This chapter will explore:

- whether there is a relationship between attitudes towards the churches and non-attendance at churches;
- the expectations people have in visiting churches and the relationship of these expectations to attendance;
- the relationship between the built form of the church and non-attendance.

CONFIDENCE IN THE CHURCH

A common question that is asked in social surveys is the degree of confidence that respondents have in particular institutions, including the churches. Results from the 1993 National Social Science Survey are shown in Table 11.1.

TABLE 11.1

CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Respondents with a great deal or complete confidence in:			
- The federal parliament	21	20	21
- Business and industry	37	38	38
- The public service	20	24	21
- Churches and religious organisations	23	67	33
- Courts and the legal system	24	33	26
- Schools and the educational system	41	44	42

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey

Certainly among infrequent and non-attenders, churches seem to be invested with no less confidence than the federal parliament, the public service and the courts and the legal system. In fact only 11% of infrequent and non-attenders said that they had absolutely no confidence in churches at all.

There have, however, been changes in the level of confidence that people have in many institutions, including the churches. A comparison of results from the 1983 Australian Values Study Survey and the Australian component of the 1995 World Values Survey shows that the proportion of Australians expressing a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in churches declined from 56% to 42%. Declines in confidence were also experienced by all institutions included in the two surveys, including the federal government (down from 56% to 26%), the public service (down from 47% to 37%) and the legal system (down from 62% to 34%) (Hughes *et al.*, 1998: 7).

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND ATTENDANCE

Analysis has been carried out in Australia regarding the relationship between general attitudes towards the churches and church attendance. Hughes *et al.* (1995: 96) found that attitudes towards the clergy had a significant independent impact on church attendance, although feelings about church services and sermons did not. In unpublished analysis of the 1998 Australian Community Survey, the level of confidence in churches accounts for some additional variance in the frequency of church attendance, after controlling for a range of variables such as the religious upbringing, demographics and beliefs of the respondents.

Further analysis of the Australian Community Survey shows that a positive general feeling towards the churches can be disaggregated into a range of separate attitudes. Attitudes on some eighteen separate issues were tested, the following issues accounting for much of the variance in overall feelings about the churches:

- disagreeing that most church services are boring;
- disagreeing that cases of sexual abuse among clergy have damaged the respondent's confidence in the churches;
- agreeing that church is a place where a warm sense of community and acceptance are found;
- agreeing that most churches use their resources wisely for the benefit of many people;
- agreeing that most churches today are clear about what they stand for;
- agreeing that most churches today are effective in helping people find meaning in life.

Attitudes Towards Churches: Western Sydney Survey

The 1993 Western Sydney Survey also included a selection of attitudinal questions towards the church. These differ from those in other studies and provide additional data on the way respondents see church life. Results are shown in Table 11.2.

TABLE 11.2

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CHURCHES

By Church Attendance

Percent of respondents agreeing that:	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Churches should have a lot less money	25	8	21	-0.51*
More people would go to church if the buildings were more modern	4	10	5	0.10
Church teaching is very useful for daily living	39	90	52	0.76*
You have to get dressed up to go to most churches	32	25	30	-0.15*
People sit on hard wooden seats in most churches	66	51	63	-0.26*
It is hard to feel on an equal level with a minister/priest	29	15	26	-0.29*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on the complete data for every question.
* significant at p<0.05 level

Money and Churches

The relationship between the church and wealth has been a source of debate over the years. On the one hand, churches hold large amounts of property and enjoy tax concessions. On the other hand, churches are major providers of social welfare in Australia. Do people think churches should have less money and is this related to attendance? Respondents were asked whether they tended to agree or disagree with the statement that the church should have a lot less money. Many are undecided about this issue; 46% of infrequent and non-attenders are unsure whether the church

should have less money, while 25% agree and 29% disagree. By comparison, frequent church attenders are much more certain; only 8% agree that the church should have less money, while 72% disagree.

Among infrequent and non-attenders, uncertainty about this issue decreases with age; 36% of over 50s are unsure compared to 43% of 30-49 year olds and 57% of 18-29 year olds. Previous church experience is also related, with those who have reduced their attendance during adulthood being more likely to agree (40%) than those who have never regularly attended as adults (24%). Denominational identification is less significant.

The Value of Church Teaching

Christian teaching on values and morals has influenced both civil codes and personal values in Australian society. How then is church teaching regarded in the wider community? There is a large difference of opinion between frequent attenders and infrequent and non-attenders on this issue. Frequent attenders are almost unanimous on the usefulness of church teaching for daily living (90%). By comparison, infrequent and non-attenders are more divided; 39% agree that church teaching is useful, 29% disagree and 32% are unsure.

Among infrequent and non-attenders, the perceived value of church teaching varies greatly depending upon the background of the respondent. As would be expected, those respondents who claim to have no religion are the least likely to agree (11%), while Protestants are the most likely to agree (54%). Catholics (44%) and Anglicans (38%) are closer to the average.

Previous church experience is also related, with those who have stopped attending frequently as adults (64%) being much more likely to agree that church teaching is useful than those who have never attended church regularly as adults (28%). Most of

those who have reduced their attendance still hold church teaching in high regard, although they see no need to attend church services frequently.

Young adults are less convinced about the value of church teaching than are the older age groups. Among infrequent and non-attenders, only 23% of 18-29 year olds agree that church teaching is useful for daily living, compared to 40% of 30-49 year olds and 55% of over 50s. This wide difference may be due to rejection of the faith or uncertainty about key beliefs.

Comfort at Church

It might be expected that the way people perceive the actual experience of attendance would be related to their current patterns of participation. A number of issues were explored in this regard, including whether modernising church buildings would affect attendance, comfort in seating at services and how dressed up people need to be when they attend.

Of these three, the issues of comfortable seating and getting dressed up for church appeared to be significantly related to non-attendance. Some 66% of infrequent and non-attenders agreed that most people sit on hard wooden seats at church, compared with 51% of frequent attenders. Some 32% of infrequent and non-attenders agreed that you have to get dressed up to go to most churches, compared with 25% of frequent attenders.

Feelings about Clergy

In many mainline churches, priests are set apart to minister the sacraments to the congregation. The image of separation and authority surrounding the special role of the clergy is often reinforced by the layout of the church, as well as by the use of robes and religious accoutrements. Does this mean that some people feel distanced

from or even intimidated by the clergy? Infrequent and non-attenders (29%) are about twice as likely as frequent attenders (15%) to agree that it is hard to feel on an equal level with a priest or minister. There are some mild differences depending upon the respondent's denominational identification and previous experience of church. Among infrequent and non-attenders, higher proportions of Catholics (33%) and of Anglicans (30%) than of Protestants (26%) or those of no religion (24%) consider that it is hard to feel on an equal level with a priest or minister. Likewise a disproportionate percentage (32%) of 18-29 year olds among infrequent and non-attenders hold this opinion. This may point to a reason why young adults are under-represented in church life.

DO ATTITUDES CAUSE ATTENDANCE OR VICE VERSA?

It is one thing to show an association between attitudes towards churches and attendance, but another to be certain that such attitudes affect attendance. Indeed, it is much more probable that church attenders will have positive images of church life, that are an outcome of their church involvement rather than leading to their church involvement in the first place.

A similar method was employed to that used in Chapter 5 in testing the likely direction of causality between beliefs and church attendance. Once again, two models are proposed. In Model A, having a church upbringing is causal for attitudes towards churches, which are in turn causal for participation in church. In Model B, church upbringing is causal for church participation, which is in turn causal for attitudes towards church.

In Model A, the partial correlation between the upbringing variables and participation controlling for image is 0.28. In Model B the partial correlation is 0.03. In a good model the partial correlation should approximate zero (Hoge and Carroll, 1978: 120). Therefore Model B is the stronger model. It is probable that the direction of

causation is more from church attendance to attitudes held of the church rather than vice versa. There is some warrant for speaking of the causal impact of church attendance on attitudes towards the churches.

Each separate attitude was also tested using the same approach. In every case the result was the same, except for that of the usefulness of church teaching, where the partial correlation for Model B (0.14) approached that of Model A (0.23). This suggests that there are two-way causal relationships between church attendance or non-attendance on the one hand and peoples' views on the usefulness of church teaching on the other.

In summary, there are differences in the perceptions that frequent attenders and infrequent and non-attenders have of churches. Frequent attenders generally have more positive attitudes and perceptions of church than do infrequent and non-attenders, the gap between the two being quite large for some of the statements examined here. In addition, some attitudes vary according to the demographics or prior experience of the respondents.

This suggests that the church may well have an 'image problem' in that people are unfamiliar with church life or have skewed impressions of the churches today. Contrary to what might otherwise be thought by commentators on church life, the analysis presented here cautions against concluding that such attitudes cause people to stay away from churches. It would generally appear that negative attitudes towards churches are the result of non-attendance or a lack of involvement in churches during childhood, rather than the reverse.

In the book *Unknown Gods* (1993), Reginald Bibby reported that the Church in Canada had experienced a significant decline in confidence levels between 1985 and 1990. However Bibby (1993: 74-75) concluded that people were not staying away from churches because of waning confidence. This conclusion was based on the fact

that while confidence levels had fallen significantly, attendance levels were down only slightly over the same period.

In Australia, confidence levels in the churches also declined between 1983 and 1995, as discussed earlier. Yet over the same period, church attendances have been relatively stable. This is further evidence of the need to be cautious about concluding that general attitudes towards churches are, for many people, at the heart of why they stay away from or leave the churches.

EXPECTATIONS OF CHURCH WORSHIP SERVICES

While general attitudes towards churches appear to be an outcome rather than a cause of church participation, one could hypothesise that the meeting of people's expectations of church would have some impact on their involvement.

Much has been written about the need to make the church more attractive to infrequent and non-attenders (eg. Wagner, 1984 and 1986; Schaller, 1988). The use of contemporary music, preaching which touches human needs, and church services held on 'neutral territory' such as school halls and community centres, have all been suggested. Special church services, known as 'seeker services', have been commenced at some churches and are specifically designed for non-attenders.

All of these innovations make assumptions about what is really important to infrequent and non-attenders and what represents a barrier to attendance. But which factors are really important? Respondents were asked if any of a list of aspects would be important to them if they were going to a church service. Respondents could indicate whether such aspects were 'very important', 'of some importance' or 'not important' to them. Seven such aspects of going to church were listed; many more aspects could potentially be added to such a list. However the aspects listed here are

representative of the kinds of concerns which are commonly seen as potential barriers to infrequent and non-attenders.

TABLE 11.3

IMPORTANCE OF VARIOUS ASPECTS IF ONE WERE GOING TO A CHURCH SERVICE

By Church Attendance

Percent of respondents indicating aspect is very important	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
10 minute journey to church	12	13	12	0.08
Off-street parking at church	22	16	20	-0.03
Going with a friend	18	19	18	0.05
'Upbeat' songs in worship	13	9	12	0.01
Service lasts one hour or less	46	23	40	-0.35*
No reading to do in service	14	7	12	-0.22*
Short, simple sermon	38	21	34	-0.26*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlations based on the complete data for every question.
* significant at the p<0.05 level

The length of the church service is important to the majority of infrequent and non-attenders. Some 78% of infrequent and non-attenders say that it is important that the service go no longer than an hour; 46% rate a short service as very important to them. This is a higher proportion than among frequent attenders, where 52% think that a one-hour service is important, and 23% think it is very important.

A *short simple sermon* is very important to many infrequent and non-attenders (38%), again more so than among frequent attenders (21%). Similarly, *having little or no reading to do* in the service is very important to more infrequent and non-attenders (14%) than it is to frequent attenders (7%), though both these percentages are relatively low.

Interestingly, the *presence of off-street parking* is considered very important (22%) or of some importance (41%) by more infrequent and non-attenders than are other factors such as going with a friend, upbeat songs, and having little or no reading to do in the service. This suggests that the facilities provided by the church are not unimportant to people who attend less frequently. Parking is also considered very important or of some importance by most frequent attenders (57%).

Age and Other Factors

It does need to be recognised, however, that each of these aspects is more important to some people than to others. Churches may well need to make significant changes if they are to reach their target audience. Among infrequent and non-attenders:

- Off-street parking at the church is more of an issue to those aged 30-49 years (65%) or over 50 years (67%), than those aged 18-29 years (52%).

- Going to church with a close friend or relative is very important or of some importance to only 43% of Catholics compared to 53% of Anglicans and 63% of Protestants.

- Upbeat songs are very important or of some importance to more infrequent and non-attenders aged 18-29 years (39%) or 30-49 years (42%), than the over 50s (25%).

- Having little or no reading to do in the service is considered very important by 18% of men compared to 10% of women.

Effect of Previous Church Involvement

For most infrequent and non-attenders, their expectations of churches may be a hypothetical issue, since they would never go to a church except on formal occasions such as a wedding or funeral. To strengthen conclusions from this analysis, it is useful to examine the responses of those who previously attended church on a

frequent basis. It would be expected that they would have more clearly formed expectations of church.

For most of the above aspects, there are no statistically significant differences between infrequent and non-attenders on the basis of previous church involvement as an adult. No differences are found in relation to the importance of a short trip from home to church, off-street parking at church, going with a friend or the presence of upbeat songs.

However, a service of less than one hour is very important to those who have never attended church frequently as an adult (50%), compared to those who once attended frequently, but have since reduced their attendance (39%). Furthermore, having no reading to do in the services and having a short sermon are also more likely to be very important to those who have never attended frequently.

THE IMPACT OF CHURCH BUILDINGS

A related issue is the impact of the local church building on the likelihood of attendance. Most Australians would be familiar with church buildings that are to be found in virtually every suburb and town across Australia. These buildings usually have a distinctive architecture and often serve just one purpose: the accommodation of worship services.

Robin Gill (1993) argues that the very physicality of largely empty churches in Britain plays a powerful role in popular perceptions of religion. As Gill notes, when journalists write about religious decline they characteristically cite empty churches as the primary evidence of this decline. Half-empty worship services convey an image of a population which at one time must have filled such spaces, but which now prefers to do other activities on a Sunday.

The Significance of Places

The significance of local church buildings, however, extends beyond their contribution to the image of the churches. Different spaces do not have equal significance. The most obvious example is the home environment, which is often endowed with more significance to an individual than any other place.

Kevin Lynch, in his work *The Image of the City*, demonstrated that some features more than others in the urban environment have significance in assisting people to visualise their environments (Lynch, 1960: 2). The ability to do so enables people to find their way around the urban environment as well as forming the basis of their memories of the city.

Lynch's research involved the asking of people to draw simple sketch maps of their urban area. He then designated places of significance by identifying the common elements that repeatedly occurred in the maps. This, however, is only a first step towards identifying the true significance or meaning of places to individuals. Later researchers using Lynch's techniques sought to supplement his mapping techniques with questions about the reasons why places are significant to individuals. They found that the significance of places not only stemmed from the appearance of the building or its location within the general urban structure, but also from the social, political, ethnic or historical meanings attached to the building (Walmsley, 1988: 50).

Symbolic Meaning

Church buildings may be significant to people because of what they symbolise. A symbol may be defined as follows:

> A symbol is something that stands for something else... A symbol is the result of a cognitive process whereby an object acquires a connotation beyond its instrumental use (Lang, 1988: 13).

The object referred to here may be an artefact, person or place. For example, a crown and sceptre symbolise royal authority. The Berlin Wall came to symbolise a sharp divide between the East and West.

The use of different building materials, spatial layouts, lighting and colours are commonly used by architects to convey symbolic meaning. For example, the use of marble in certain contexts can symbolise wealth and power. The occupants of large offices have higher status than the occupants of smaller ones (Lang, 1988: 17-19). The use of neo-Gothic architecture in churches with its high ceilings and steeples serves to inspire awe of the God being worshipped, while the layout focuses the congregation on the activities of the priest or minister.

But symbolic meaning in the built environment goes well beyond architectural devices. Buildings can be symbolic of events. For example, the prisons on Norfolk Island and Port Arthur symbolise the cruel reality of life in early Australia. Buildings can also symbolise systems of thought; religious buildings are a key example.

CHANGING THE FORM OF CHURCH

In view of the symbolic associations connected with church buildings, it can be hypothesised that relocating church congregations into non-church buildings could dilute these associations and perhaps invest the church with some of the symbolic associations of the non-church building.

Some have argued that congregations would be better off meeting in school buildings, community centres, shopping centres or cinemas in order to create a type of 'neutral territory' for those outside of church life. Indeed there is some empirical evidence that Anglican or Protestant congregations which make use of non-church buildings are a little more likely to be growing numerically, even after controlling for

the effects of the demography of local populations and the diverse theological orientations of congregations (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 178-180).

When the issue was put to respondents in the Western Sydney Survey, 65% of respondents agreed with the statement that it doesn't matter what type of buildings church services are held in, suggesting that there is some degree of openess in the community to the concept of church congregations meeting in non-church buildings.

Subsequent questions in the Survey posed five different models of church life, three of which involved congregations meeting in non-church buildings. The reaction of respondents to each of these models was sought, in terms of whether they would be prepared to go to a church meeting in:

- a large regional church building with its own carpark,
- a typical church building, but providing counselling, welfare and childcare services for attenders,
- a private home,
- a hotel or club,
- a school hall or community centre.

Each of these models has been attempted in Australia, though the first two church-based models would be more common than the non-church models. Examples of each model have been found at different times within the Western Sydney Survey area.

Regional Churches

Widespread private ownership of motor vehicles has facilitated the establishment of regionally-based churches within metropolitan areas. Churches in mainstream denominations have a nominal catchment within a parish area; however there are many examples of mainstream churches which draw their members from across a number of parish areas. Churches in smaller Protestant denominations are not

constrained by the parish system and consequently have a nominally regional catchment.

The 1991 National Church Life Survey, however, has shown that even the smallest Anglican or Protestant church, on average, has a catchment that extends beyond 20 minutes of driving time. Some 90% of church attenders rely upon the motor vehicle to get to church (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 93-103).

While most churches do not provide off-street parking, only 16% of Anglican and Protestant church leaders say that people have difficulty finding parking at their church (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 182). Many large congregations do have a plentiful supply of parking. Examples in the Western Sydney Survey area include the Penrith Fellowship Centre (Assemblies of God) and most of the Catholic parishes.

Church providing Social Services

Most denominations do provide welfare and other social services. However, the point of delivery is often through separate agencies rather than at the local church level. This is probably more true of Anglican and Protestant than of Catholic churches; the Catholic parish often provides a range of social services, including schools and welfare services. An extensive network of child-care operates through many Uniting Church parishes and the local Salvation Army citadel operates as a point of delivery of welfare services.

Church in a Hotel or Club

The church and the hotel have been seen as opposites or even rivals for people's souls. Protestant clergy were among the leading figures in the temperance movement, which saw 293 hotels lose their licences in 1907 and the introduction of six o'clock closing at the end of World War I (Hogan, 1987: 152-153).

To establish a church in a hotel could be seen as creating associations that would be unacceptable to most church attenders as well as many non-attenders. Others see it as a way of bridging the gap between church and hotel cultures. Such a church was established in a hotel in Adelaide in recent years (Hannaford, 1985). The Uniting Church also met in a hotel at Bidwill in the Western Sydney Survey area for a period prior to the erection of a permanent church structure.

House Church

The house church is an expression of church life stretching back to apostolic times. More recently, a model of church life has been proposed based around a network of small groups meeting in private homes as a new way forward for churches in the United States (George, 1991).

At present there are a number of independent house churches operating in Sydney, as well as large numbers of home groups associated with local churches.

Church in a Community Centre or School Hall

The use of community centres or school halls for church services has become more common in Australia in recent years. In the Western Sydney Survey area there are a number of examples, including Plumpton Presbyterian Church and Nepean Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Survey Results

Among non-attenders and infrequent attenders, a *church offering counselling, welfare and childcare services* was the most attractive. Some 45% of infrequent and

non-attenders indicated that they would be prepared to go to such a church, either with a view to joining or just to see what it is like.

In a review of Bryson and Thompson's *Newtown* study, Wild (1981: 119-121) considers that one of the key failures of the Protestant clergy in Newtown was in neither supporting nor seeking to improve the physical facilities and economic conditions of the working class. Instead the clergy sought to establish counselling or formal groups directed towards improving individual competencies. Working class people felt a lack of control, and were more concerned about the problems of economic survival, the needs of their families and the need for more leisure time away from formal group involvement.

It is therefore not surprising that a model which taps some of these concerns may be more attractive to people in working class areas of Sydney. What is perhaps more interesting is that other options which rely only upon innovation rather than the meeting of needs, are not as attractive.

Of the three options of churches meeting in non-church buildings, the church in a *school hall or community centre* was the most attractive among infrequent and non-attenders (26%), followed by the *house church* (13%) and *hotel church* (11%). None of these models was more attractive than the *large regional church* (34%), which would have been within the ambit of most peoples' experience. Clearly, whatever barrier the current built form of the church may represent, relatively few infrequent and non-attenders find the fairly radical alternatives of a house church or a hotel church attractive. If anything, something similar to the traditional church building appears to be preferred.

This is not to say that churches meeting in non-church buildings would not be more attractive than traditional models to some sections of the population. For instance, a church meeting in a hotel or club is more attractive to young adults than to older people; 20% of non-attenders under 30 years of age indicated that they would be

prepared to go to a hotel church, compared to only 10% of 30-49 year olds and 4% of those aged over 50 years.

TABLE 11.4

WOULD YOU GO TO THESE CHURCHES?

Responses of Infrequent and Non-attenders Only

	No (%)	Unsure (%)	Yes (%)	Total (%)
Regional church	47	18	34	100
Welfare church	34	22	45	100
House church	70	17	13	100
Hotel church	78	11	11	100
School hall church	49	25	26	100

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey

CONCLUSION

The general attitudes which people hold emerge as being strongly related to church attendance patterns. However, it is far from conclusive that such attitudes influence church attendance; it is more likely that differences in attitudes between church attenders and non-attenders are a by-product of their differing levels of experience of and commitment to the churches.

This is not to say that this will be the case for every attitude that people hold. There is evidence within the Western Sydney Survey that the direction of causality between church attendance and attitudes on the usefulness of church teaching is less clear than for other attitudes in the Survey. It could be that further analysis of a wider range of attitudes, such as in the 1998 Australian Community Survey, would reveal other general attitudes which influence church participation.

Another area of concern is the kind of expectations people may have of church worship services. It has been demonstrated that infrequent and non-attenders and frequent attenders have divergent opinions of what is important in a church service; infrequent and non-attenders place greater emphasis on the length of the service and sermon, and how much reading they need to do in the service. This highlights a further area for investigation.

There is also evidence that the type of building a church meets in may also be conducive to attendance. In this respect, variations on the more traditional approach seem to have a greater appeal to a wider section of the population than more radical innovations.

CHAPTER 12: THE IMPACT OF URBANISATION

The land uses that make up the urban tapestry are intimately tied to the needs, aspirations and activity patterns of the population. The pattern of land uses is 'the expression of exceedingly complex forces of demand and supply which have interacted over a long period of settlement by man' (Roberts, 1974: 10). Activity patterns can be defined as behaviour patterns of individuals, families, institutions and firms. Such patterns include manufacturing, service and income-producing activity, human development activities, social and recreational activities and religious activities.

The built environment provides the context for many human activity patterns. Wirth (in Theodorsen, 1961: 76-78) notes that physical factors are 'conditioning factors offering the possibilities and setting the limits for social and psychological existence and development.' People spend significant amounts of time at educational institutions, shopping centres and workplaces, or travelling to and from these places. The distance that people reside from these places can affect their activity patterns.

The built environment can have negative impacts on human activity and well-being. In the nineteenth century, industrialisation was associated with huge population shifts and the growth of large cities. This growth resulted in overcrowding, poor sanitation, low standard housing and the close proximity of industry and residences. Modern town planning arose in response to these conditions.

In the first instance, planning was meant to improve both the health and the safety of the residents. This is a fundamental principle which underlies land use zoning schemes, by the separation of residential and industrial uses, and building regulations to enforce minimum standards in the construction of housing. But it was also believed by the early planners that a planned environment could achieve other social objectives as well, including

improvement to the sense of well-being of the population and a reversal of inequities in land tenure (Wilson, 1980: 174; Bender, 1975: 132).

Planners have successfully intervened in the development of the built environment, particularly through the traditional tools of zoning and building regulations. As a result, neatly segregated land uses and planned neighbourhoods are part of the legacy of twentieth century planning (Relph, 1987: 74). However, it is arguable how far the social reform objectives of planning have been achieved. In fact some planning failures have occurred which demonstrate all too clearly the negative impacts of the built environment on activity patterns and social well-being.

Jane Jacobs (1961) in a celebrated work, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, denounced much of the urban renewal taking place in the post-war United States because of its destructive impacts on the social life of the city. Jacobs opposed the renewal of the older, more densely populated parts of the city on the one hand and the development of low density suburbs on the other. Both actions were seen as reducing the opportunity for social interaction and highlighted a failure among planners to understand the real dynamics of city life (Stretton, 1978: 26-30; Fishman, 1980: 245-246).

URBANISATION AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

As discussed in Chapter 2, urbanisation is seen as being one of the key factors behind secularisation. The dislocation of rural life associated with the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent migration of people to cities and towns, resulted in a breakdown of church participation patterns which were never fully restored in the new urban environments.

It has also been argued that urban life itself leads to secularisation and relativism (Cox, 1965). The persistence of relatively higher church attendance levels in rural areas than in urban areas of modern day Europe has been taken to be evidence of this phenomenon (Luckmann, 1967: 29).

The twentieth century has seen the growth of cities to an unprecedented size, in no small measure due to the development of modern transport infrastructure and communications. This has not been without cost to traditional forms of community. People are now more able to have associational forms of contact rather than being bound to their local community context. For many people, the local community has adopted a dormitory function, rather than as a context for important contacts.

Hughes (1995) has argued that patterns of church participation in Australia have been irrevocably disrupted by the changes that have taken place to community life. Hughes sees such changes as not necessarily being limited to metropolitan areas, though they are typical of such areas. The growth of television and, more recently, the development of the internet, have reduced the amount of face-to-face interaction between people.

EFFECT OF COMMUNITY SIZE

Given these observations, it is appropriate to ask whether different rates of church attendance are found in communities of different types and sizes.

A 1946 Gallup poll in Australia found that church attenders constituted a higher proportion of the rural than of the urban population. However, a 1976 Gallup poll detected only a slight difference: 20.5% regular (weekly) attendance in country areas compared with 19.9% in metropolitan areas (Mol, 1985: 193).

The 1993 National Social Science Survey also found little difference in church attendance levels between urban and rural areas. Levels of attendance among respondents are set out in Table 12.1. No significant relationship by community size was detected.

TABLE 12.1

COMMUNITY SIZE

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Total (%)
Community Size:			
Farm or property	63	37	100
Village (under 1 000 people)	79	21	100
Country town (up to 20 000 people)	76	24	100
Middle sized city (up to 100 000 people)	81	19	100
City (up to 500 000 people)	77	23	100
Metropolitan area (over 500 000 people)	76	24	100
OVERALL	76	24	100

Correlation (Gamma) = -0.01

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey

Nevertheless, the 1991 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) revealed that an average of 41 persons per thousand attend an Anglican or Protestant church during a typical week in urban areas, compared with 57 persons per thousand in rural areas (Kaldor and Castle, 1995). These statistics have been derived from congregational headcounts and not from sample surveys of the population, such as the National Social Science Survey.

Moreover, beyond the simple urban and rural categorisation, the NCLS shows that attendance rates vary significantly depending upon the demographic characteristics of communities within each of these larger categories. For instance, the attendance rate in stable white-collar urban areas is 50 persons per thousand, which is little different from the attendance rate in rural regional centres, tourist towns and small rural communities.

The NCLS (Kaldor and Castle, 1995: 10) shows that:

• The age profile of communities is an important predictor of church participation.

- Church attendance is higher in communities with an older age profile than average.

- Attendance rates in urban areas are significantly higher in older established areas with low levels of population turnover. The same is true in rural areas.

- Attendance rates in rural areas are higher in communities with high levels of involvement with farming, but lower in communities with high levels of involvement in mining.

In a review of studies into urban-rural differences, Poplin (1972: 264) concluded that 'research conducted in recent years suggests that many of the hypothesised relationships between community size and other variables do not exist today.' The assumption that rural and urban people grow up in a vastly different cultural milieu may be on the wane as urban and rural are drawn closer together through improved communications. Even in the European situation, it appears that the gap in participation levels between city and country is narrowing due to the diffusion of urban culture via the mass media and the rationalisation of farming (Luckmann, 1967: 30).

Mol (1985) argued that, while in most countries of the world there are substantial differences in church attendance levels between rural and urban areas, rural Australia provides a very different religious environment. The Australian outback has been so sparsely populated that the traditions of rural Britain could not be readily transferred. In addition there is much evidence to suggest that irreligion had a stronger hold in outback areas in the 19th century, when the provision of churches and clergy lagged well behind the spread of the population in Australia. (Mol, 1985: 192-195).

It therefore appears that the Australian situation is more like the situation in the United States than in Europe. In the United States, research has generally found a weak relationship at best between community size and church attendance (Hoge and Roozen, 1979: 47).

In summary, the survey evidence for Australia suggests a weak relationship does exist between community size and church participation. Where variations exist, they reflect to some extent demographic differences between communities, such as the tendency for many rural communities to have older age profiles than city areas.

RESIDENTIAL MOBILITY

It is a fact of Australian life that most people change residences on a periodic basis. Around 50% of the Australian population change residence every five years. While many people may move only a short distance, the low residential densities of Australian cities such as Sydney increase the likelihood that people will move some distance from their previous residence.

In addition, the housing market is heavily segmented. Some areas, such as Sydney's North Shore and Eastern suburbs, tend to attract high income earners. Some areas that were once working class areas have become middle class areas. Such areas, particularly in the inner city, have been rapidly 'gentrified' since the mid-1960s. The lifting of freeway zonings in the inner city, together with a commitment by the State Government to urban consolidation programmes, has assisted the gentrification process.

Because of the costs involved, many first home buyers are forced to look at the Western and South-western suburbs of Sydney for their first home. These people may well have grown up on the North Shore, Eastern Suburbs or inner city. However, being unable to afford to buy into such areas, or other reasons associated with a new stage in life, forces many people to leave the suburb in which they grew up.

THE EFFECT OF CHANGING RESIDENCE

Length of Residence

Changing residence has also been found to be one of the major reasons why active church attenders in Australia change both congregations and denominations. The 1991 National Church Life Survey found that among those who transferred congregations within the same denomination, 70% did so primarily because they moved house. Among those who switched denomination as well, 40% did so because they moved house (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 202).

Perhaps of greater relevance to this thesis, the NCLS also found that, among those who are returnees to church life after a break of several years, 38% had left their previous congregation because they had moved house (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 203). This suggests that moving house can be very disruptive of established church attendance patterns.

A common way of measuring the impact of moving house is to analyse the length of residence of respondents (Wuthnow and Christiano, 1979; Bibby, 1997). If moving makes such a difference to church attendance patterns, it would be expected that those who have stayed longest in their communities would be most likely to be church attenders.

Wuthnow and Christiano (1979) in the United States and Bibby (1997) in Canada found significant relationships between church participation and residential mobility, as measured by the number of years at current residence. Wuthnow and Christiano (1979: 263) found that among white Catholics, 30% of new residents attended church each week compared with 56% of those who had lived at the same address for over 20 years. A weaker relationship was detected among white Protestants with 17% of new residents attending church each week compared with 26% of those who had lived at the same address for over 20 years. Bibby (1997: 300) found that some 15% of Canadians who had changed residence after 1980 also attended church every week, compared with 33% who had not moved in the same period. Multivariate analysis showed that this relationship was partly

explained by the age of the respondents, with young adults being more likely than older adults to change residences, but less likely to attend church frequently.

In Australia, the 1993 National Social Science Survey shows a mild relationship between length of residence and church participation (see Table 12.2). Some 64% of infrequent and non-attenders had changed residences in the past 15 years compared with 57% of frequent church attenders. As in Bibby's research, further analysis shows that this relationship is partly, but not wholly, explained in terms of the age of respondents. Older people are more likely to be both long term residents and frequent church attenders.

TABLE 12.2
LENGTH OF RESIDENCE
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Length of Residence:			
0-2 years	8	6	8
3-5 years	13	11	13
6-10 years	26	25	26
11-15 years	17	15	16
16-20 years	13	14	13
21-30 years	13	16	13
Over 30 years	10	13	11
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.06*

Source: 1993 National Social Science Survey
* significant at $p < 0.05$ level

By comparison, no relationship was detected between church participation and length of residence in the Western Sydney Survey. Those who had been resident in the area for less than five years were no less likely to attend church than those who had been resident for more than ten years or all of their life.

Moving House and Leaving Church

How many people have dropped out of church as a result of moving house? Overseas studies indicate that this reason is often cited by survey respondents. Moving to a new community was a factor in 22% of cases in which people dropped out of church in the United States (Gallup, 1988: 45), and 24% of over 20 year olds cited it as a reason in the United Kingdom (Richter and Francis, 1998: 74).

In order to explore this issue further, a question was included in the Western Sydney Survey that asked whether the respondent had ceased churchgoing at the time of moving to their current address. As such, the question is limited to their last change of residence and does not attempt to suggest that moving *caused* them to leave church life.

TABLE 12.3
EVENTS THAT OCCURRED AT THE TIME OF CHANGING RESIDENCE
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)	Correlation (Gamma)
Respondent lost contact with:				
- Close family members	5	5	5	0.05
- Close friends	14	12	13	-0.05
Changed jobs or stopped working	9	10	9	0.11
Stopped churchgoing	4	2	3	-0.10

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: No correlations significant at the p<0.05 level

Table 12.3 shows that changing residence can be accompanied by a range of other life changes. Some 4% of infrequent and non-attenders say that they had stopped

churchgoing when they last changed address. Most of these were people who had previously attended church at least once per month as an adult. Since churchgoers are about 20% of the population in the study area, a loss of around 3% of the population is a very significant loss.

LONG DISTANCE COMMUTING

The spread-out nature of Sydney and the operation of the housing market mean that many residents have to commute long distances to work. It can be hypothesised that those who must spend more time commuting will have less discretionary time and, therefore, be less likely to be involved in churches. They may also be more disconnected from their local community, spending more time out of the area. It could be further hypothesised that people working away from the local area are less likely to be involved in local associations such as churches. The Western Sydney Survey included a question that asked how long it takes respondents to travel to work.

Table 12.4 shows that there appears to be little impact associated with the need to commute. Those who do not attend a church frequently are just as likely to travel more than 20 minutes to work (44%) as those who attend church frequently (43%). In fact, frequent attenders in this Survey are more likely to travel for more than one hour (14%) than infrequent and non-attenders (9%).

TABLE 12.4

EFFECT OF LONG DISTANCE COMMUTING

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Journey time to work:			
Don't work	23	25	24
Work at home	4	7	5
1-10 minutes	12	9	11
11-20 minutes	13	13	13
21-30 minutes	15	9	14
31-60 minutes	20	20	20
Over 1 hour	9	14	10
Times vary a lot	4	3	4
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) excluding 'times vary a lot' = -0.05

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Correlation not significant at the $p < 0.05$ level

CONCLUSION

There is some evidence that church participation in Australia is marginally higher in rural areas than in the city. But how much of this is directly due to community size is debatable. Community characteristics related to social class and age appear to have more significance in explaining variations. Indeed, church participation in Anglican and Protestant churches is lowest in low socio-economic areas, and highest in high socio-economic areas. Participation in these latter areas is as high as it is in rural areas.

At first glance, it appears that the size of the community appears to make little difference to church attendance patterns. Yet caution is needed in reaching such a conclusion. A problem in testing for the effect of community size as an independent variable is the need to survey many communities to obtain comparative results.

Another problem is that the pervasiveness of the physical environment means that its effects are difficult to measure empirically. As Fischer (1975: 70) notes,

> As supraindividual contexts, communities' characteristics are unlikely to, and in fact usually do not, explain much of the individual variation in behaviour relative to that accounted for by personal characteristics... an easy conclusion is that community is unimportant.

The observation of various historians regarding the impacts of changing residence on church participation, as outlined in Chapter 3, find some support in the statistics examined here. People who reduced their church attendance or stopped going when they moved to their current address are a relatively large group when compared with the number who currently attend on a frequent basis. The total proportion of such people who stopped churchgoing when they moved to their current residence equates to roughly one sixth of those who claimed to attend church frequently.

Overall, however, the relationships between urbanisation and church participation are currently relatively weak. This must throw some doubt on the continuing importance of these particular aspects of urbanisation in explaining patterns of secularisation today.

There is another level at which this issue can be examined and that is at the neighbourhood or local level. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 13: THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT

This chapter examines how neighbourhood design and the location of churches within neighbourhoods may impact on church participation. The chapter looks at the relationship between church participation and:

- aspects of the physical layout of a suburb and the location of respondents within suburbs,
- the interaction of respondents with other people in their local community,
- overall satisfaction with the local community.

In order to understand behaviour patterns in the urban environment, it is necessary to examine the role of the environment itself in motivation and in fostering activity. There are four main ways in which the built environment may be linked to social behaviour (Gutman, 1966):

- Physical design affecting social interactions,
- Social reform through improved housing,
- Site plan aesthetics,
- The way objects acquire symbolic meaning.

This chapter concentrates on the first of these aspects.

THE PLACE OF CHURCHES IN NEIGHBOURHOODS

Churches are ubiquitous local institutions. The older mainstream denominations in Australia (Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian and Uniting) have divided Australia into a system of parishes, each serving a local area. It is not unusual for churches of the same denomination to be located within half a kilometre of each other, particularly in the more densely populated, inner city areas.

The neighbourhood concept is particularly important in urban geography and planning, being seen as the basic unit in the growth of cities (Walmsley and Lewis, 1984: 91). First proposed by Clarence Perry in 1910, the 'neighbourhood unit' was originally defined as that area within a quarter of a mile radius of a primary school, this being the reasonable distance that a young child could walk. Through traffic was to be excluded and arterial roads would form the boundaries of the neighbourhood. Neighbourhoods were envisaged to contain some 5,000 to 10,000 residents. Schools and 'neighbourhood institutions' such as local churches, were to be located at the centre of the neighbourhood or on 'gateway' sites on main access roads (Relph, 1987: 62- 64).

In Australia, the need to include churches in neighbourhood planning was initially recognised. In the immediate post-war period, F. Oswald Barnett (1948: 87), a former member of the Victorian Housing Commission, wrote of the need for the 'three C's', church, culture and commerce, to be located in the middle of the neighbourhood, in a community centre. Of the three, Barnett considered the school and the church to be the natural pivot where younger people will gather. Furthermore, Barnett envisaged an active role for the church alongside the school and the wider community, in creating a successful community life and in the provision of leisure activities.

Brown and Sherrard's book *Town and Country Planning* (1951), which was an important text used by town planners in Australia from the 1950s onwards, devoted a sub-section to churches in neighbourhood planning practice. The authors recommended that 'sites should be reserved in the neighbourhood plan for [such] church buildings' and that 'the siting of some of the churches at a neighbourhood centre will prove of convenience if it can be arranged, and will provide an opportunity for grouping in conjunction with other community buildings' (Brown and Sherrard, 1951: 251). It should be noted that the timing of this book coincided with historically high levels of church attendance in this country.

However, the declining importance of church attendance was reflected in much planning practice. Writing about the British new towns of Harlow and Letchworth, John Todd

(1954: 53-60) summarised the concerns of the architects of the day that the new towns centres lacked the *raison d'être* of old town centres; that is a church, around which human activities and habitations were gathered. According to Todd (1954: 55), the absence of the church resulted in a vacuum at the centre:

> People flee from the vacuum; if there is no longer a personal presence at the centre, there is still at least such a thing in their homes. It is the lack of belief which is mirrored so coldly, logically and unrelentingly in the new towns.

Unlike the previous era when churches were to be found occupying the high ground close to a town centre, churches are now to be found in almost any location in the neighbourhood. Churches are found on main roads and in cul-de-sacs, in industrial areas and in commercial areas. Although a permissible use in most zones, the siting of some churches would appear to run counter to the principles of good neighbourhood planning enunciated by a previous generation of planners.

THE IMPACT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD LAYOUT

Many theories on human behaviour involve, to varying degrees, the notion that the physical environment influences behaviour. Some early theorists believed that the physical layout of the neighbourhood and the location of institutions within the neighbourhood would determine the activity patterns of the residents. This position became known as 'environmental determinism'.

William Whyte Jnr (1957), observed that it was possible to predict the friendship patterns among residents in small neighbourhoods depending upon the proximity of the dwellings and the location of paths and barriers. Each set of dwellings tended to produce distinctive behaviour patterns. Whyte concluded that 'whether newcomers become civic leaders or bridge fans or churchgoers will be determined to a large extent by the gang to which chance has now joined them.'

Another early study (Tomeh, 1964) found that place of residence influenced social interaction independently of other social variables. Tomeh speculated that the reasons for this phenomenon had to do with the commercial and industrial character of the areas under study, which operated to suppress social interaction.

Research carried out by Roger Barker in the area of environmental design involved the observation of people's behaviour in various settings in order to find common patterns of behaviour irrespective of the individuals involved. The method assumed that the physical environment and behaviour are closely bound together (Bechtel, 1977: 9)

Contrary to stated expectations, Barker found that behaviour could not be predicted by simply having the right environmental factors in place. Barker's research showed that,

> ... the non-social, ecological environment does not demand behaviour, that it enters psychologically only as permissive, supportive or resistive circumstances (Barker, 1968: 149) .

Physical factors were thus found to be less influential than social factors.

Being a community based survey rather than a national sample, the Western Sydney Survey enabled examination of some of the potential relationships between the physical environment and church participation. Two aspects of the physical environment examined were:

- distance the respondent lives from a church of their denomination,
- distance the respondent lives from the town centre.

DISTANCE TO CHURCH

Catholic, Anglican and Uniting church affiliates in the Western Sydney Survey were analysed separately in relation to the impact of the distance from the location of the respondent's home to the nearest church of their denomination.

Such analysis could not take into account individual preferences; it could be that certain respondents would not go to the nearest church of their denomination but would rather go to a church further afield, or perhaps to a church of another denomination. For the purpose of this analysis it has been necessary to assume attendance at the nearest church.

Table 13.1 shows that for each of the three denominations, no statistically significant relationships were found between frequency of attendance and distance to church. A much larger sample would be required to detect relationships that may exist.

TABLE 13.1
DISTANCE FROM RESIDENCE TO CHURCH
By Religious Identification and Church Attendance

	CATHOLIC		ANGLICAN		UNITING		OVERALL	
	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)
<0.5 km	4	10	10	12	12	8	8	10
0.5-2 kms	71	69	69	71	62	70	69	70
2+ kms	25	21	21	17	26	22	23	20
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Correlation (Gamma) =	-0.03		-0.02		-0.04		-0.02	

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: No correlations were found to be statistically significant at the $p<0.05$ level.

Increasing distance to church may reduce the likelihood that a non-attender would visit the local church of their denomination. While most newcomers to Anglican and Protestant church life have been invited to church by another person, there is a significant proportion who first attended simply because the church was the local church of their denomination. Some 16% of newcomers to church life were first prompted to attend their congregation

for this reason (Kaldor *et al.*, 1994: 161). Newcomers attending mainstream churches such as Anglican and Uniting are even more likely to give this as a reason why they first attended.

Awareness of a Local Church

Chapin (1974) noted that awareness of the existence of facilities is an important variable in modelling the activity patterns of the population.

Apart from calculating the actual distance from the residence of the respondent to the nearest church of their denomination, respondents to the Western Sydney Survey were also asked whether there was a church of their denomination nearby. As such, this gives a measure of the awareness of respondents.

TABLE 13.2
AWARENESS OF A NEARBY CHURCH OF YOUR DENOMINATION
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Yes	84	97	87
Don't know	9	0	7
No	7	3	6
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = -0.55

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Table excludes respondents reporting no denomination.
* significant at the p<0.05 level

Awareness of the existence of a church was quite high. Even among infrequent and non-attenders, about 84% knew of a church in their own suburb or a nearby suburb. If infrequent and non-attenders are unaware of the nearest church of their denomination, distance to the church might then play a part in reducing the likelihood of church participation.

DISTANCE TO THE TOWN CENTRE

Town centres traditionally contain not only retail and commercial land uses but also service and government agencies. It is also not unusual to find churches located close to or in town centres as well as schools, clubs, hotels and other recreational facilities.

In view of the theories regarding social interaction resulting from neighbourhood layout, the location of a respondent's residence not only in relation to churches, but also in relation to a range of other facilities, could increase or decrease the potential for social interaction. In this respect location relative to major town centres is an important issue to consider.

The Western Sydney Survey enabled calculation of the distance from the respondent's residence to the main town centre. Table 13.3 shows the overall relationship between these distances and church attendance, as well as for two of the four sub-regions in the Survey.

TABLE 13.3

DISTANCE FROM RESIDENCE TO TOWN CENTRE

By Church Attendance

	PENRITH		MT DRUITT-ST MARYS		OVERALL**	
	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)	Infreq./ non-attender (%)	Freq. attender (%)
< 2 kms	29	47	32	38	24	29
2+ kms	71	53	68	62	76	72
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	100
Correlation (Gamma) =	-0.27*		-0.12		0.04	

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at the p<0.05 level
** includes all four sub-regions in the Survey

Overall, there does not appear to be a linear relationship between these two aspects, though the relationship appears to be affected by the geographical characteristics of the four sub-regions in the Survey. Only Mt Druitt-St Mary's and Penrith sub-regions had major town centres located within their boundaries. The remaining sub-regions were located some distance from major town centres. Further analysis for the Mt Druitt-St Mary's and Penrith sub-regions found a significant relationship in the Penrith region and a non-significant relationship in the Mt Druitt-St Mary's area.

It could be hypothesised that the relationship for Penrith is a function of a concentration of churches in and around the town centre. All of the mainstream denominations have major church buildings located along Penrith's main street. However, in view of the weakness of relationship between attendance/non-attendance and the distance from the respondent's residence to the nearest church, it appears unlikely that the above hypothesis is correct.

THE NON-GEOGRAPHIC COMMUNITY

Another important reason for understanding activity patterns is that, from the viewpoint of residents, a locality or city is not understood purely from a physical viewpoint. It is difficult to separate the physical structure of the locality from the social psychological structure in the minds of residents (King and Golledge, 1978: 248-252).

A geographic component is only part of what constitutes a community. Communities can in fact be associational or non-territorial in nature. A common example of this is the ethnic enclave, formed by overseas migrants, which can completely alter the character of a locality and change community aspirations (Loew, 1979: 117). Another example is the 'gentrified' inner city area, where waves of middle class home-buyers displace the original working class community.

A study of Cambridge, England, found that respondents could identify a neighbourhood area (Lee, 1968). But these areas varied greatly in size and shape, and depended upon factors such as the number of local friends, the number of local clubs to which respondents belonged and which shops individuals used. Individuals appear to define neighbourhood not in terms of population size and numbers of dwellings, but as a changeable space that is affected by the behaviour patterns carried on in that space.

Potentially, some members of the community could be more 'local' in their orientation, spending greater amounts of time in the local community and in locally-based relationships. W.C. Roof (1976) developed a scale to measure the extent to which respondents are local rather than cosmopolitan in their orientation. Alan Black (1991) also explored the application of a similar scale in Australia.

It can be hypothesised that people with a local orientation are more likely to be involved in local churches. However, this may vary by denominational tradition, the mainstream denominations being more locally focused through the Parish system than are Baptist, Pentecostal and other smaller denominations.

The Western Sydney Survey included two questions designed to explore the extent to which respondents relate to their local community and how this, in turn, relates to their church participation:

- the extent to which their close friends live in their suburb;

- how well they know their neighbours, as indicated by their knowledge of their near neighbours' hobbies and interests.

Friends in the Suburb

As shown in Table 13.4, infrequent and non-attenders are a little less likely to have close friends in their suburb than are frequent attenders. Some 44% of infrequent and non-attenders have close friends living in other areas, compared to 36% of frequent church attenders. This relationship, though weak, is statistically significant.

TABLE 13.4
DO MOST OF YOUR CLOSE FRIENDS LIVE LOCALLY?
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
No, live elsewhere	44	36	42
Yes, here & nearby	47	57	49
Yes, in this suburb	10	8	9
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.12*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

Further analysis shows that the relationship is a little stronger for respondents aged over 50 years.

Knowing Neighbours

A slightly stronger relationship was detected on the issue of knowing neighbours. Infrequent and non-attenders were less likely than frequent attenders to say that they know their near neighbours' hobbies and interests.

The Western Sydney Survey found a relationship by age, with 56% of 18-29 year olds knowing at least one neighbour well, compared to 68% of 30-49 year olds and 70% of over 50 year olds. Similarly, the 1991 National Church Life Survey found a strong relationship between the age of church attenders and their responses to this question (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 171-172).

TABLE 13.5

DO YOU KNOW YOUR NEAR NEIGHBOURS' HOBBIES AND INTERESTS?

By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
No	36	31	35
Yes, one or two	52	52	52
Yes, quite a few	12	17	13
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.14*

SOURCE: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p< 0.05 level

Despite the fact that church attenders have an older age profile than the wider community, further analysis indicates that the relationship between church attendance and knowing neighbours is not completely explained in terms of age.

SUBURB SATISFACTION

Feelings of satisfaction regarding different aspects of life have been found to be related to church attendance levels in previous studies. Church attenders tend to have higher levels of satisfaction across a range of life areas (Bentley and Hughes, 1998: 86).

It could be hypothesised that the way respondents view their suburb could be linked to their involvement or otherwise in local churches. This issue was explored in the Western Sydney Survey and the results are shown in Table 13.6.

TABLE 13.6
HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR SUBURB?
By Church Attendance

	Infrequent and non-attenders (%)	Frequent attenders (%)	Overall (%)
Don't like it	6	4	5
Don't mind it	26	18	24
Quite a good place	40	43	40
Great place to live	29	35	30
TOTAL	100	100	100

Correlation (Gamma) = 0.12*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level

Frequent church attenders are more likely to feel good about the suburb in which they live. Some 78% thought their suburb of residence was either a great place to live or quite a good place to live. By comparison, 69% of infrequent and non-attenders thought the same. A similar relationship at the national level was discovered through the 1993 National Social Science Survey (Bentley and Hughes, 1998: 86).

Further analysis shows that this relationship is not simply a function of the age of the respondents.

CONCLUSION

Most churches operate on a local geographic or neighbourhood basis. However, it is likely that, at least in the suburbs of the larger cities, such geographical areas have less significance to people than in rural areas. Many urban dwellers spend time in more than one setting, moving from one locality to another throughout the day.

Unlike commercial and retail land uses, churches are able to locate in just about any part of the urban environment. Since they are not subject to the same planning controls, they have become more randomly scattered throughout the suburbs. While this may give denominational bodies greater freedom in selecting potential sites for churches, the disadvantage is that they are not forced to locate close to neighbourhood facilities such as schools and shops, which generate high levels of pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

There is, however, no firm evidence that a person's location within the neighbourhood relative to the nearest church of their denomination has an impact on the likelihood of church participation.

There is another issue to consider in relation to the location of churches in the urban environment. It could be hypothesised that participation in churches is affected by a combination of church location and the timing of church activities. Few churches provide

activities, such as worship services, welfare or recreation, on weekdays. Furthermore, most are located away from the major areas of pedestrian activity, such as shopping malls or railway stations, and are thus unable to take advantage of the high level of visibility associated with such locations.

There is also some evidence that church attendance within a region attenuates with increasing distance from the major town centre. Again, the relationship is weak and is not consistent. Further research is needed with a larger sample to confirm these relationships.

The degree to which people have close friends in their suburb, how well they know their neighbours and how satisfied they are with that community also are related to their level of involvement in local institutions such as churches. While all of these issues appear to play only a small part of explaining patterns of church participation and non-participation, nevertheless the relationships examined here show that patterns of community interaction at the local level appear to have an independent if mild effect.

It needs to be acknowledged that this is a very limited set of questions from which to draw conclusions regarding the importance or otherwise of non-geographical forms of community on church involvement. A wider range of such questions has been included in the 1998 Australian Community Survey. Issues such as the impact of social fragmentation, declining social trust and differing community contexts are currently being explored in some detail using data from this survey.

CHAPTER 14: STATED REASONS FOR NON-ATTENDANCE AT CHURCH

Different approaches have been used in this thesis in looking at the reasons why people are not involved in churches.

The main approach, which has been used extensively throughout the thesis, is to look for associations between participation in church and the characteristics of the population. Another approach is to ask infrequent and non-attenders directly why they don't go to church more often and to analyse the responses received. This chapter outlines analysis of the stated reasons for non-participation.

STATED REASONS FOR NON-ATTENDANCE

Respondents to the Western Sydney Survey who were infrequent or non-attenders were asked the following question:

> Why don't you go to church services more often? (Please read this list carefully and tick your two main reasons only)
>
> a. Feel uncomfortable with people at church
> b. Don't like church services much
> c. Previous bad experiences of church people
> d. Disagree with church views on morals
> e. Feel uncomfortable in church buildings
> f. Don't like church as an organisation
> g. No church of my denomination nearby
> h. No good churches nearby
> i. My family or friends don't like church
> j. Not a strong believer/ don't believe at all
> k. Not enough time/ work commitments
> l. Don't feel I need to go more often
> m. There are other things I prefer doing
> n. No transport to get to church
> o. Other (please write)

The results for the question, at best, give a broad indication of why people are not involved in church. Many respondents may simply not have any well-formed reasons and would reply that they see 'no need to go' or 'prefer to do other things'. For others, a number of factors could be important. Such respondents may have found it difficult to select their two most important reasons.

There are also different ways in which such a question could be asked. Alternatively, respondents could have been requested to rate the importance of each reason, rather than selecting the main two. Such an approach has been used in the 1998 Australian Community Survey. Or they could have been asked to select their main reason from a long list of possible reasons, as in Richter and Francis's (1998) study. The advantage of the Western Sydney Survey question is that it seeks the main reasons from a diverse yet manageable listing of possibilities.

Table 14.1 summarises responses to the question. The rate of response to the question was excellent; only about 30 out of more than 800 infrequent and non-attenders did not provide an answer. The most popular responses are discussed below.

TABLE 14.1

WHY DON'T YOU GO TO CHURCH SERVICES MORE OFTEN?

Responses from Infrequent and Non-Attenders Only

	(%)
Feel uncomfortable with people at church	7
Don't like church services much	17
Previous bad experiences of church people	9
Disagree with church views on morals	11
Feel uncomfortable in church buildings	1
Don't like church as an organisation	12
No church of my denomination nearby	3
No good churches nearby	1
My family or friends don't like church	5
Not a strong believer/ don't believe at all	33
Not enough time/ work commitments	16
Don't feel I need to go more often	27
There are other things I prefer doing	19
No transport to get to church	2
Other	5

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could select more than one answer.

Lack of Belief

The most popular single reason given for not attending church more often is a lack of belief, with a third of people (33%) responding that they are not a strong believer or don't believe at all. What do people mean when they say they do not attend because of a lack of belief? For a start, they are unlikely to believe in a 'personal' God. Only 7% of those who stay away from church for this reason, also believe in a personal God without any doubt; many believe in a higher power or life-force, while about half are agnostics or atheists. Similarly, only 4% of this group believe in the divinity and physical resurrection of Christ without any doubts; most do not believe it or have serious doubts.

Some belong to a non-Christian religion, such as Buddhism or Islam. However, many more have no religion or do not state a religious affiliation. Others identify with a Christian denomination, but as the above results suggest, feel that they do not have strong Christian beliefs to match their identification.

Lack of Perceived Need

The next single, most common reason for not attending more often is being unable to see the need to go to church (27%). But what do people mean when they say they do not need to go to church? One possibility is that they do not have strong Christian beliefs and therefore feel no need to go. Certainly for some in this group, this is the case. However, the Western Sydney Survey data indicate that people who say they don't need to go to church are more likely than other infrequent and non-attenders to hold orthodox Christian beliefs. Clearly, for most in this group, the reasons for non-attendance stem from something other than an absence of belief.

Another possibility is that, while they may agree with orthodox Christian beliefs, churchgoing is irrelevant to them. The idea that 'you don't need to go to church to be a Christian', might be a common view among this group of respondents. Some may be alive to the notion of a personal faith, but through previous experience of church life or a lack of such experience, question the relevance of church. Others may be apathetic towards the implications of Christian faith, including churchgoing.

Indeed, nearly 8 out of every 10 of respondents who said they do not feel the need to go to church also cite one other major reason for not attending church. Not having enough time was a common second response among this group, along with having other things they prefer doing or a dislike of church services.

Having Other Priorities

The next most common responses are that other things take precedence over church (19%) or the respondents simply do not have time to go to church (16%). These people may feel squeezed between work and family commitments and do not necessarily carry hostile feelings towards church involvement.

Those who say they do not have enough time to go to church are more likely to be working longer hours. Some 38% of these respondents work more than 40 hours per week compared to 27% of other infrequent and non-attenders. Similarly 44% of this group have a spouse who works more than 40 hours per week.

Those who prefer to do other things are more likely to have young children at home. They also often go to the football or some other sport. This may well be a function of Sunday sport for their young children as much as being a spectator at an adult sporting fixture.

However they are no more likely than others to be long distance commuters, to be involved in community organisations, or to participate in other recreational activities. Work involvement and participation in sporting events seem to be the most important 'other priorities'.

Dislike of Church

Dislike of church forms a cluster of stated reasons for non-participation. These reasons include a dislike of church services (17%), dislike of churches as organisations (12%), disagreement with church morality (11%), previous bad experiences of church people (9%) and discomfort with the people at church (7%). More than four out of every 10 infrequent and non-attenders nominated a dislike of some aspect of church as their major reason for not attending more often.

It is food for thought that a dislike of church services is the most prevalent of these responses. What is it about church services that they do not like? Elsewhere in the survey, respondents were asked whether any of a list of aspects would be important to them if they were to go to church. Among those who do not like church services, the length of the service is an important aspect. In fact nearly two-thirds of such respondents say that a service of no more than one hour in length is *very* important to them. Other aspects such as a short sermon, contemporary songs and having to do little or no reading at church also receive above average responses from this group.

Dislike of church services is more prevalent among the young. Some 21% of under 30s say they don't attend because they dislike church services, compared to 11% of over 50s.

Other Reasons

Other, less common reasons for non-attendance include family or friends not going (5%), no churches of the person's denomination nearby (3%) and no transport to get to church (2%). Health reasons, although not listed in the survey question, were mentioned by 1% of respondents. But a lack of access to church facilities appears to be a significant issue for only a small minority.

HAVE REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION CHANGED?

The major reasons given by most respondents have to do with beliefs, a lack of time or a preference for other activities. A significant minority (4 out of 10) cite reasons to do with the churches themselves - a dislike of worship services, bad experiences of church people, dislike of church as an organisation and disagreement with church morality being the most prominent of such reasons. Is there any indication that stated reasons may have altered over time?

Few surveys in Australia have asked people to give reasons for non-participation in church. However, three early Gallup polls, in 1946, 1949 and 1961 did seek answers to this question.

The 1946 poll asked non-churchgoers an open-ended question about their main reason for not going to church. Half of the respondents answered in terms of a lack of interest, being too busy, home ties or a lack of need to go. Issues to do with the church itself such as distance to church, dullness of worship services and hypocrisy among church attenders were reasons given by a smaller group of respondents (Australian Gallup Polls, 1946). This distribution approximates that found in the Western Sydney Survey.

The major difference between the earlier polls and the results obtained from the Western Sydney Survey is that a lack of belief does not figure to the same degree in the earlier polls as a reason for non-participation. Lack of belief was not a major reason given in response to the 1946 poll. In answer to the 1949 question, 'What do you think is the main reason why more people don't go to church regularly?' only 5% mentioned a lack of religious faith specifically, while another 5% cited a lack of religious training (Australian Gallup Polls, 1949). Similarly, few people responding to the 1961 poll said that a lack of spiritual interest was the main reason that people did not go to church regularly (Australian Gallup Polls, 1961). These are smaller proportions than the 33% who mentioned a lack of belief in the Western Sydney Survey.

This suggests that, at least in terms of perception among non-attenders, lack of belief has grown as a reason for non-participation today.

TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF NON-ATTENDERS

The diversity of reasons given for non-participation in church life raises the issue as to whether particular reasons for non-participation are more characteristic of certain groups in the population. Linking stated or felt reasons for non-participation to the characteristics of the population has implications for the way the churches communicate their message to the wider community. If Bibby (1993) and others are right, there is an increasing tendency in the community to treat religion as a consumer product rather than as an intrinsic part of one's identity. Under these new conditions, churches need a greater awareness of how they 'package' their product, how they distribute it and how it is to be communicated to particular 'market segments'. Attempting to segment the large number of non-attenders into discrete groupings would seem to be an issue worth exploring by the churches.

There have been a number of attempts to create typologies of non-attenders (eg. Caplovitz and Sherrow, 1977; Hale, 1977). Most of these studies have sought to categorise those who have dropped out of church life according to their reasons for departing the churches and their attitudes towards churches.

In a review of these studies, Blombery (n.d.) showed that the reasons for disaffection with the churches generally fall into three main groups:
- intellectual dissent - the irrelevance of church doctrine and conflict between secular and religious views;
- institutional dissent - criticism of the church institution or clergy;
- personal dissent - conflict with lifestyle or some kind of personal problem that prevents participation.

A more recent study in the United States of Protestant nominal affiliates (Marler and Hadaway, 1993; Marler, 1994) identified the following eight types of non-attenders.

Among church members:

- *the blocked out* - those who cannot attend because of chronic health problems;

- *the soured out* - those who are critical of the church;

- *the drifted out* - those who grew up on the periphery of the church and left it on maturation;

- *the let out* - those who are prepared to embrace a range of religious views and practices.

Among non-church members:

- *moral idealists* - those for whom the church is not good enough or they are not good enough for the church;

- *religious sceptics* - those who doubt the central beliefs and claims of the faith;

- *secular pragmatists* - those who reject God's authority, may think church is boring and hold liberal beliefs concerning sexuality and other social issues;

- *spiritual seekers* – those who believe God exists in some form but reject the authority of the church.

People in the first four categories are closest to active church involvement in that they hold a congregational membership, while those in the next four categories identify with a denomination, but are not members of a local congregation. Those in the final category have no religious affiliation of any kind.

Thus Marler and Hadaway (1993) argue that people who stay out of church life can be categorised in terms of their reasons for doing so. The 'soured out' would tend to stay away from church because they are critical of the institution whereas for the 'drifted out' the reasons would be more to do with the relevance of the church. The 'blocked out' would say that they do not attend for health reasons whereas the 'let out' feel that the churches are but one spiritual resource among many.

In developing their typologies, Marler and Hadaway (1993) took into account survey data on personal spirituality, traditional religiosity, spiritual seeking, cultural liberalism, attitudes to the churches, childhood involvement in churches and residential mobility. While the Western Sydney Survey does not cover this range of variables sufficiently to test Marler and Hadaway's typologies, the Survey nevertheless provides a good range of other variables sufficient for determining any correlations between stated reasons for non-participation and the characteristics, beliefs and attitudes of the respondents.

It should be noted that the analysis has been limited to those people who are infrequent and non-attenders. Each grouping is thus a subcategory of infrequent and non-attenders, and does not include anyone attending church monthly or more often.

DIFFERENT REASONS FOR DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Do particular demographic characteristics, beliefs or attitudes cluster around particular reasons for non-involvement in church life, as suggested by previously developed typologies? Different categories of people are more likely to give some particular reasons rather than others for not attending church more often. This suggests that it may be possible to develop typologies of non-attendance according to the characteristics of respondents. This would be of considerable help to churches wishing to attempt a 'market segmentation' approach to their ministry and mission

The following sections look at different subcategories of infrequent or non-attenders and the different reasons they give for not attending more often.

Different Types of Religious Identification

Gary Bouma and Beverley Dixon (1986) noted that differences in beliefs and attitudes in the wider community often vary significantly according to religious identification. Religious identification also makes a difference in the kinds of reasons given for not attending church.

Among infrequent and non-attenders who say they have *no religion* or have a *non-Christian religion*, a lack of belief (72%) is by far the major reason they do not attend church. By comparison, this is a much less common reason among those who identify with a Christian denomination. Nevertheless, a lack of belief is more likely to be the main reason given by *Anglicans* (34%) than among either *Catholics* (17%) or *Protestants* (22%) and may well reflect an identification with the Anglican Church as a form of 'default' religious identification among some Australians.

Preferring other activities is also a more prevalent reason for non-participation among Anglicans (23%) and Protestants (24%) than it is among Catholics (9%). It is uncertain why this pattern exists. By contrast, having a problem with church morality is a more prevalent reason for non-participation among Catholics (15%), than either Anglicans (8%) or Protestants (7%).

The differences in reasons given for non-participation according to religious identification, particularly between those who have no religion and those who identify with a Christian denomination, suggests the beginnings of a typology of non-attendance that includes this dimension.

People who once Attended Church Frequently

About 20% of people in the sample say that they used to attend church as an adult at least once per month, but now attend less often or not at all.

Various writers have commented on the exodus of people from church life in the 1960s and 70s, during which period the proportion of the population attending church at least monthly dropped from 44% to just 25%. To a large extent, this exodus is reflected in the proportion of former frequent attenders identified in this survey. Over 40% of former attenders are aged over 50 years compared to less than 20% of those who never attended church frequently as an adult.

The reasons for non-attendance given by those who have never attended frequently as an adult tend to be quite different from those given by people who had some previous church involvement.

TABLE 14.2
WHY DON'T YOU ATTEND MORE OFTEN?
By Previous Church Involvement as Adults

	Former frequent attender (%)	Never attended frequently (%)
Feel uncomfortable with people at church	11	6
Don't like church services much	10	19
Previous bad experiences of church people	19	5
Disagree with church views on morals	10	12
Feel uncomfortable in church buildings	1	1
Don't like church as an organisation	11	13
No church of my denomination nearby	5	1
No good churches nearby	2	0
My family or friends don't like church	9	3
Not a strong believer/ don't believe at all	14	42
Not enough time/ work commitments	24	10
Don't feel I need to go more often	28	27
There are other things I prefer doing	16	21
No transport to get to church	6	0
Other	3	7

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents could select more than one answer.

Among those who have never attended frequently as an adult, a lack of belief (42%) is the dominant reason for non-attendance. However, among those who once attended frequently, lack of belief is much less important (14%); not having enough time (24%) and having had previous bad experiences of church people (19%) are more salient reasons.

It should be noted that the reasons why people actually drop out of church could be very different from the reasons they currently don't go to church. For instance, Richter and Francis (1998) found life changes such as changing residence or getting married were important precipitating circumstances behind people's dropping out of church life. Such events are, however, different from the reasons why people do not currently go and may well be accompanied by other reasons.

Believers who Don't Belong

There are some infrequent or non-attenders who can be termed 'quite religious' (18%) or 'highly religious' (11%) in relation to traditional Christian belief and practice. This grouping also tends to include people who hold positive views of alternative models of church life and who previously attended church frequently as an adult. Indeed their reasons for non-attendance are similar to those of other people who once attended frequently.

Some reasons for non-participation are more common among this group than average. Not feeling the need to go to church more often (37%) and not having enough time (22%) are characteristic reasons given by this group. Such people do not appear to be hostile to the church and they may be positive about accepting invitations to attend church services. Few in this group (5%) say that they do not go to church because their belief is not strong.

Young Adults (20-29 year olds)

Infrequent or non-attenders aged 20-29 years are more likely than others to see happiness as the key goal in life and to have materialistic goals. They more often have friends living in the same suburb and are more likely to go to discos, hotels and clubs.

The reasons for non-participation that are more characteristic of this age group than other age groups are:

- a dislike of church worship services (21%),
- disagreement with church views on morals (16%).

Similarly, those who have never been married (17%) – who mainly consist of people less than 30 years of age – are more likely to cite the morals of the churches as a main reason for non-participation.

The dislike of worship services among young adults may reflect a frustration with the style of worship as much as the content. As discussed in Kaldor *et al.* (1999a: 49), the perception that worship services are boring is the most widespread source of discouragement to church attendance among Australians. Disdain for worship services could also reflect a rejection of Christian beliefs and moral values. As discussed in Chapter 7, a more liberal approach to sexual morality is age related. It is not surprising that young adults are the group most likely to cite difficulties with the moral views of the churches as a main reason for non-participation.

Committed Workers

People in this subcategory tend to be well educated and to work long hours. They tend to have high average commuting times, to be young, male and to see happiness as the key goal in life. They also tend to have materialistic goals in life. They are clearly working hard to fulfil these goals.

TABLE 14.3

KEY STATED REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION IN CHURCH

By Subcategories of Infrequent and Non-Attenders

Subcategory and reason given	Subcategory response (%)	Overall response (%)	Correlation (phi)
People with no religious identification:			
Not a strong believer/ don't believe at all	72	33	0.31*
Catholics:			
Disagree with church views on morals	15	11	0.10*
Former frequent attenders:			
Not enough time/ work commitments	24	16	0.16*
Previous bad experiences of church people	18	9	0.20*
'Highly religious' or 'quite religious' people:			
Don't feel I need to go more often	38	27	0.18*
Not enough time/ work commitments	22	16	0.13*
Young adults (20-29 year olds):			
Don't like church services much	21	17	0.10*
Disagree with church views on morals	16	11	0.09*
People who work more than 50 hours per week:			
Not enough time/ work commitments	24	16	0.09*
People who often attend sporting events:			
There are other things I prefer doing	27	19	0.14*

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
Note: Responses are from infrequent and non-attenders only
* significant at $p<0.05$ level.

A main reason for non-participation among this group is that they simply have no time for church involvement because of their other commitments and their work. Among those who work more than 50 hours per week, 24% say that they have no time for attendance, compared with 14% among those who work less than 40 hours per week.

Nevertheless, the relationship between working hours and the perception of not having enough time is relatively weak. This is also reflected in the multi-variate analysis outlined in Chapter 15.

People Committed to Sport

Infrequent or non-attenders who are members of sporting clubs or who often attend sporting events are less likely to be well educated than other groups, more likely to be male and more likely to have children aged five to eighteen years.

One of the emerging themes of the research in this thesis is that leisure time involvement is of some help in explaining patterns of non-participation in churches. The reasons for non-participation in churches among people in this subcategory do differ in significant ways from those of other non-participants. People who often attend sporting events are *less* likely to nominate a dislike of the church as an organisation as a reason for non-attendance (6%), but they are more likely to cite other preferences as a reason (27%). In this respect they appear to be less hostile towards churches than are some other infrequent or non-attenders.

Other Categories of People

It might be expected that those who are divorced, separated or living in a defacto relationship would cite disagreement with the morals of the churches as a main reason for non-participation. However, no significant differences were detected for those who are currently separated or divorced, or among those who have since remarried. A larger sample would be needed to detect differences between those who are in a defacto relationship and other infrequent or non-attenders.

CONCLUSION

In answer to the question of why people don't go to church, there is a variety of answers. A lack of belief is only one stated reason among many. About a third of infrequent and non-attenders give this as their chief reason for not attending church. Other commonly stated reasons include not seeing a need to go, having other priorities, a lack of time or a specific dislike of churches.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are also those who strongly believe, yet do not attend a church. Yet it goes too far to say that 'believing without belonging' is commonplace among Australians. Only 11% of infrequent and non-attenders in the Survey were found to be 'highly religious' in terms of the Christian faith. The notion of believing without belonging tends to focus the inquiry about non-participation upon the relationship between belief and attendance. While it is an important element, there are many other reasons for non-participation that can be overlooked in such discussions.

Other important reasons for non-participation appear to be linked to lifestyle considerations. Among those who work full-time, a lack of time appears to be an issue. Among those with a commitment to sport, church attendance is lower among their list of preferred activities. Lifestyle considerations also relate to demographic factors, such as age. Such lifestyle considerations have echoes of Luckmann's (1967) notion of invisible religions, discussed in Chapter 4. However, it goes beyond this analysis to show that such lifestyles provide a sense of meaning or fulfil other religious functions. But what is important is that the analysis highlights the inadequacies of categorising the population along purely religious lines or in terms of their stated reasons for non-participation. Other, non-religious variables have a helpful role to play in such an analysis. The relative importance of lifestyle and community variables in modelling non-participation in church life is explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 15: MODELLING CHURCH PARTICIPATION

Up until now this thesis has considered the impact on church attendance levels of each variable or set of variables independently. In this chapter we turn to examine the cumulative effect of all of these variables on church attendance and how the variables inter-relate with one another.

Multiple regression is used to accomplish this. This procedure incorporates multiple independent variables in an equation (or model) that predicts the variation in a dependent variable – in this case, church attendance. The dependent variable ranged in value from 1 to 5, where 1 = hardly ever or never attend, 2 = attend a few times a year, 3 = attend once a month, 4 = attend two or three times a month, and 5 = attend every week or more often. Standardised regression coefficients are calculated, to estimate the unique impact of each independent variable while controlling for all other independent variables (Norusis, 1993: 338-343; de Vaus, 1985b: 171-178).

MODELLING BEHAVIOUR PATTERNS

The relationships between behaviour patterns and other variables have been modelled in various ways, depending upon the type of behaviour in view. F. Stuart Chapin (1974) developed a model in order to explain the broad activity patterns of the population, including participation in churches and other organisations. Chapin noted that to design a model of human activity could conceivably be 'as complex as the metropolitan community itself' and that his model of the behavioural sequence is, of necessity, simple in approach (Chapin, 1974: 32-33). The general model proposed by Chapin comprises four elements:

1. Motivations and thought-ways predisposing action.
2. Roles and person characteristics pre-conditioning action.
3. Perceived availability of a facility or service.

4. Perceived quality of a facility or service.

FIGURE 15.1

DETERMINANTS OF ACTIVITY PATTERNS

Motivations & thoughtways
predisposing action

Propensity to engage
in the activity

Roles & person characteristics
pre-conditioning action

ACTIVITY
PATTERN

Perceived availability of
facility or service

Opportunity to engage
in the activity

Perceived quality of
facility or service
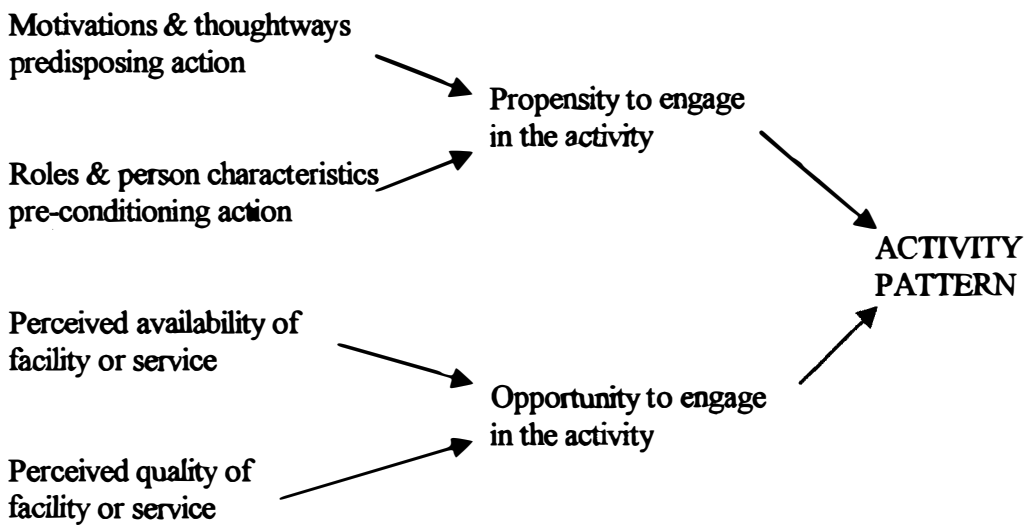
Source: Chapin, 1974

Using Chapin's model as a guide, the Western Sydney Survey has included variables that attempt to measure the perceived availability and quality of the facilities - in this instance, the churches. The *perceived quality of the churches* has been measured by a series of questions about the attitudes that people have towards the churches. This may differ on a case-by-case basis when it comes to a respondent's consideration of an individual church. For instance, a respondent may feel that most church teaching is fairly useless, but there may be a particular minister whose teaching they find useful for everyday living. Particular exceptions such as the latter have not been measured in the present survey.

The *perceived availability of a facility or service* has been covered by a question asking the respondent whether there is a church of their denomination close to where they live. In addition respondents were asked whether they ever noticed church buildings in their

suburb. From these two questions a sense of the respondents' general awareness of churches has been gained.

Further exploration was carried out as to whether distance from the respondent's home to the nearest church of their denomination makes a difference to participation. Analysis found only the weakest relationship between distance travelled and attendance patterns. This reflects the more modern patterns associated with access to private motor vehicles. In previous times people may have walked to church or taken a long journey to get there. Now large distances can be covered relatively quickly so that people can access the church of their choice.

Opportunity is not, however, limited to these issues. Opportunity has also been measured in the survey in terms of how much discretionary time is available to people, reflected in the number of hours spent working and the number of minutes spent commuting. Economic and social constraints are reflected in some of the basic demographic variables included in the survey.

Motivations and thought-ways predisposing action include the range of variables in the survey that gauge a person's religious beliefs. Other questions such as degree of comfort with group processes and material aspirations also shed light upon the motivations and thought-ways that may affect church participation.

Roles and person characteristics preconditioning action include demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, education level and ethnicity, as well as religious upbringing as a child.

FACTORS WHICH EXPLAIN CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Table 15.1 shows the contribution of each of the variables examined in this survey in explaining patterns of participation and non-participation in church life, as found through

multiple regression procedures. All variables were entered together using the standard enter procedure.

Table 15.1 shows the large contribution that salience and certainty of Christian beliefs make in explaining patterns of church attendance (beta = 0.357). Related variables such as recognising the Bible as an authoritative source of morals and values (beta = 0.181), attitudes towards the churches (beta = 0.091) and a church upbringing (beta = 0.059), also make a contribution to patterns of church participation. These are all direct measures of individual religiosity and as such are relevant to assessing the extent to which processes of secularisation have had an impact at the level of the individual.

Yet the table also shows that while these elements are important there is a wide range of other variables that help to explain patterns of church participation. These include:

- education level (beta = 0.065),
- agreeing that happiness is the main goal in life (beta = - 0.077),
- an emphasis on material goals (beta = -0.057),
- having close friends in the suburb (beta = 0.071),
- being divorced or separated (beta = -0.056).

It can be argued that the variables with negative betas in the latter list are also relevant to assessing the extent to which processes of secularisation have had an impact at the level of the individual. Agreeing that happiness is the main goal in life or placing a strong emphasis on material goals is generally at odds with the Christian emphasis on worshipping and serving God, being prepared to suffer for the faith, and acting unselfishly for the good of others.

TABLE 15.1

CONTRIBUTION OF VARIABLES IN EXPLAINING CHURCH ATTENDANCE

VARIABLE (AND QUESTION NO.)	CHAPTER	BETA
Salience/certainty of Christian beliefs (Q36-Q38)	5	0.357*
Religious authority (Q40a)	5	0.181*
Church upbringing (Q27)	6	0.059*
Year of birth (Q15)	7	-0.030
Marital status (Q19)		
separated or divorced	7	-0.056*
widowed	7	-0.051
Children aged 5-18 years at home (Q20d)	7	0.060
SES	8	
education level (Q17)		0.065*
renting (Q14)		-0.047
Comfortable with group processes (Q21)	8	0.010
Involvement in community organisations (Q6)	8	
residents' committees		-0.037
Hours working (Q12)	9	-0.042
Gender - female (Q14)	9	-0.012
Frequency of recreational pursuits (Q7)	9	
often go to discos		0.055
often go to theatre		0.048
often go to football/sport		-0.047
Materialistic goals important (Q22)	9	-0.057*
Agree that main goal in life is happiness (Q40d)	9	-0.077*
Religious identification (Q35)	10	
Non-Christian religion		-0.077*
No religion		0.057
Catholic (inc. Orthodox)		0.075*
Protestant		0.068*
Ethnicity (Q16)	10	
Born overseas-NESB		0.043
Born overseas-ESB		-0.011
Positive views of churches (Q32)	11	0.091*
Important aspects in attending church (Q33)	11	
Service no longer than 1 hour		0.047
No reading to do		-0.045
Dislocation in moving house (Q3)	12	-0.018
Length of time in suburb (Q2)	12	-0.043
Minutes commuting (Q13)	12	-0.020
Close friends in suburb (Q4)	13	0.071*
Know neighbours (Q5)	13	-0.006

Suburb satisfaction (Q1)	13	0.015
Awareness of local churches (Q28)	13	0.009
Access to a local church of your denom. (Q29)	13	0.010

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* significant at p<0.05 level.

MODELLING CHURCH PARTICIPATION

The variables shown in Table 15.1 above were used to derive a single regression model. Overall, the amount of variance of church participation predicted by this model is 59%.

Of the many variables available, a simpler model of 14 variables was derived using stepwise regression, which has an Adjusted R-squared of 0.57. Again, salience of religious beliefs make the greatest contribution to this simpler model. Other significant religious variables include attitudes towards the churches, believing that morals and values are best decided yourself, having a church upbringing or belonging to a mainstream Non-Christian religion.

Other attitudinal variables included in the simple model were seeing the main goal in life as being happiness and attitudes towards material goals. Again these are indirect measures of the priority of the Christian religion in the life and thinking of the individual. Community or lifestyle variables included were having close friends in the local area and going to theatres or concerts. Demographics included were being born in a Non-English speaking country, being separated or divorced, and renting one's place of residence.

The strong relationship between church attendance and traditional Christian beliefs underlines that Australia is indeed a 'secular' country in the sense that the churches are mostly involved with those who are the strongest believers. Those who believe the central tenets of Christianity, who see the importance of belief and practice, who accept religious authority, who see the church in a positive light - these people are mostly found in churches and form the churches' constituency.

Only some variables make an independent impact on church attendance over and above the impact made by holding Christian beliefs or having a church upbringing. These variables are shown in Table 15.2 below.

Disagreeing with the statement that 'morals and values are best decided for yourself, rather than relying on books like the Bible' had the greatest independent effect over and above beliefs and church upbringing. This suggests that the way people view the issue of religious authority does make a difference to their church involvement. And as outlined in a previous chapter, the decline of religious authority is a key distinctive in a more recent version of secularisation theory (Chaves, 1994).

The image of the church held by the respondent also has an independent effect over and above beliefs and upbringing. The most important variables in this regard were the issues of money (1.7% additional variance) and feeling on an equal level with the minister or priest (1.4% additional variance).

Other important variables having an independent effect over and above beliefs and church upbringing included seeing religious faith as among the most important things in life (additional variance = 2.8%) and disagreeing that the main goal in life is to be happy (additional variance = 2%). Individuals who are more concerned with their own happiness than with other things in life tend to steer clear of churches, perhaps because churches focus on the need to serve a higher being or to act for the good of one's fellow human beings.

TABLE 15.2

CONTRIBUTION OF VARIABLES IN EXPLAINING CHURCH ATTENDANCE

Controlling for Christian Beliefs and Church Upbringing

VARIABLE	Additional Variance* (%)
More than 1% additional variance explained:	
Disagree that morals and values are best decided yourself	3.8
Positive image of the churches	3.0
Disagree that there are many more important things than faith	2.8
Disagree that the main goal in life is to be happy	2.0
Disagree that churches should have less money	1.7
Disagree that its hard to feel on an equal level with a priest	1.4
Have fully read one of the Gospels as an adult	1.4
Have had a conversion experience	1.4
Agree that church teaching is useful for daily living	1.0
Between 0.5% and 1% additional variance explained:	
Have close friends in suburb of residence	0.7
Identify with a Protestant denomination	0.7
Place little importance on the length of church services	0.7
Have university qualifications	0.6
Disagree that people sit on hard wooden seats at church	0.6
Wanting a good house in a good area is unimportant	0.5

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey
* Change in Adjusted R-squared

While attitudinal variables tended to add to the variance explained, there were some social variables that also appear to have an independent effect. Having close friends in the suburb of residence is one of those. Presumably the local focus of churches means that those who are embedded in a network of close friendships at the local level are more likely than others to come into contact with local associations such as churches; alternatively, or in addition, they are more likely to continue participating in a local church than they otherwise would be.

University qualifications also make a difference, but in a positive way rather than negatively. Some versions of secularisation theory held that those who had had a liberal secular education were less likely to be involved in church life. While this may have been true at one time the picture is much less clear today. Those people with university qualifications are more likely to be church attenders than those people without such qualifications.

MOVING BEYOND BELIEFS

Is church participation primarily about having the right beliefs? It could be argued that acceptance of traditional Christian beliefs is part of the overall package of church participation and is less than conclusive in understanding the reasons why people are not involved. It could be that having certainty of belief and seeing the importance of such beliefs only comes through the plausibility structures that the church provides. As discussed in Chapter 5, the direction of causality between beliefs and church participation is by no means clear.

Other 'religious' variables too could be the outcome of a church involvement rather than making it occur. As discussed in Chapter 11, attitudes towards the churches are more likely to be an outcome of participation or non-participation rather than causing these to occur. In order to better understand the impact of 'non-religious' variables, the religious variables have generally been set aside in the following path analysis.

The exception to this is exposure to a church upbringing. This is temporally, if not causally, prior to current levels of church involvement and is rightly included as a starting point in the path diagram.

Path Analysis

It can be demonstrated that the effects of background variables such as religious upbringing and demographics are masked to some degree by other variables. This is shown by the development of a path model of interactions between variables (see Figure 15.2 below), using the approach set out by deVaus (1985b). This path model has been further simplified by removing variables and linkages where there were only weak relationships present. Of the many 'non-religious' variables present in Table 15.1, only those providing a significant path between individual person characteristics on the left of Figure 15.2 and church attendance levels on the right of the diagram, have been included in Figure 15.2 below.

FIGURE 15.2: PATH DIAGRAM
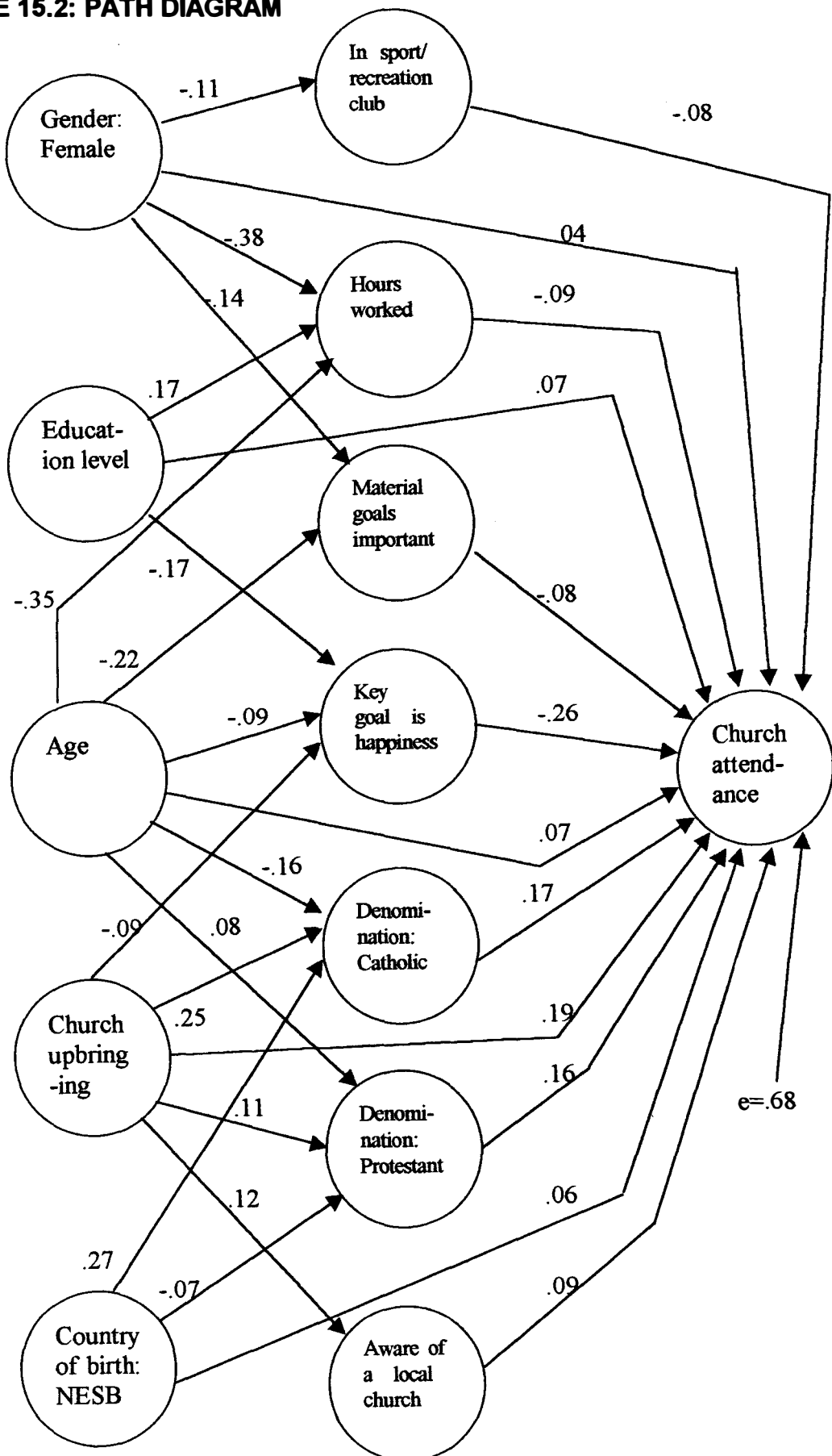
Path analysis shows that demographic variables that do not figure greatly in the final model nevertheless have an indirect effect through other variables. Perhaps the chief variable of this nature is the age of the person. Age has a relatively low direct effect on church attendance (beta = 0.07), even where religious variables have been removed from the model. Yet, as shown in Table 15.3, it has a similar indirect effect, particularly through 'lifestyle' variables such as hours worked and seeing happiness as the key goal in life. In this respect, the indirect impact of age on church attendance is stronger through these lifestyle variables than it is through religious identification.

TABLE 15.3

DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF BACKGROUND VARIABLES ON CHURCH ATTENDANCE

	BETA				
	Age	Female gender	Educ. level	Born o'seas NESB	Church upbringing
Indirect effect via lifestyle variables:					
aspects of recreational enjoyment	.008	-	-	-	-
involvement in sports clubs	.006	.009	-	.005	-
hours worked per week	.031	.034	-.015	-	-
importance of material goals	.018	.011	-.008	-.007	.006
agree key goal in life is happiness	.023	-	.044	-	.023
Indirect effect via religious identification:					
Catholic identification	-.027	-	-	.046	.043
Protestant identification	.013	-	-	-.011	.018
Aware of local church of your denom.	-	.007	-	-	.011
Total indirect effect	.072	.061	.021	.033	.101
Total direct effect	.075	.040	.068	.055	.192
Total causal effect	.147	.101	.089	.088	.293

Source: 1993 Western Sydney Survey

Having had a church upbringing has an even greater effect. Apart from a relatively large direct effect (beta = 0.19), Table 15.3 shows that a church upbringing has an indirect

impact mainly in relation to current religious identification (beta = 0.10). Beyond what is presented here, a church upbringing also has a large indirect impact on other 'religious' variables, such as one's image of the church, holding traditional Christian beliefs and disagreeing with the statement that morals and values are best decided yourself. It is the most important of the background variables in predicting current church attendance.

Regression Model

All of the variables shown in Table 15.1 were then grouped into blocks and entered in a regression model in steps, in a similar way to the path analysis.

Block 1 consists of the characteristics and religious background of a person. These include demographic variables: age, gender, marital status, education, housing tenure, children at home, ethnicity and the level of upbringing in church at age 12.

Block 2 consists of a diverse range of intervening variables. These have been termed 'lifestyle variables', and include hours worked per week, seeing the key goal in life as happiness, the importance of material goals, recreational activities, involvement in voluntary activities and coping with aspects of group processes.

Religious identification was also included here, although it could also be included in Block 1 as a background characteristic. Inclusion in Block 2 recognises that religious identification is increasingly a matter of personal choice rather than a given.

Block 2 also includes 'community' variables related to the suburb of residence, such as friends in the suburb, suburb satisfaction, knowing your neighbours, length of residence and perceived availability of a church of the respondent's denomination.

Block 3 consists of 'religious' variables and completes the model: certainty and salience of beliefs, attitudes towards churches, attitude to religious authority, and conversion experience.

TABLE 15.4
MODELLING CHURCH PARTICIPATION

	Cumulative R Sq	R Sq Change
Block 1: Demographics and church upbringing	0.168	-
Block 2: Lifestyle, community involvement and religious identification	0.323	+ 0.155
Block 3: Religious beliefs and practices	0.587	+ 0.264

The background characteristics in Block 1 account for 17% of the variance in church attendance levels. Having a church upbringing accounts for more than half of this; among the demographic variables, education level and being born in a non-English speaking country are among the strongest variables and are also positively related to church attendance.

The lifestyle, community involvement and religious identification variables in Block 2 account for a further 16% of the variance. Believing that happiness is the key goal in life and seeing material goals as important are key variables in this block, adding 13% to the variance and being negatively related to attendance. Denominational identification added 4% to the variance and 'community' variables such as satisfaction with the suburb and knowing friends and neighbours added 2% to the variance. Remaining variables added smaller amounts to the variance.

In Block 3, religious beliefs and practices added a further 26% to the variance, the full model explaining 59% of the variance in church attendance.

CONCLUSION

The results in this chapter confirm that the most predictive variables of church attendance levels are the beliefs which people affirm and how important they see those beliefs. The strongest believers tend to be found in churches and the most frequent attenders tend to be the strongest believers. The model affirms the primacy of variables associated with declines in religious thinking. Salience and certainty of belief emerge as key variables in explaining church attendance patterns, more so than religious identification, religious upbringing or the simple assenting to beliefs. The issue of religious authority emerges as important, as do more indirect measures of departure from religious priorities, such as seeing personal happiness as the main goal in life. All of these are aspects of the diminution of religious thinking as predicted by secularisation theory. The analysis here provides details of what such a diminution might entail.

The model also provides very limited evidence of the operation of some of the causal mechanisms traditionally associated with secularisation, such as involvement in the modern industrial workforce and the impacts of urbanisation. Hours worked and minutes commuting have limited explanatory power. Distances lived away from local church do not even figure in the model. Exposure to a secular education, as shown by level of educational qualification, is positively related to church attendance not negatively.

Variables that have a greater impact than these include seeing happiness as the main goal in life and placing great importance on attaining material things. These measures can be seen as indirect measures of the effect of secularisation and suggest a causal link between societal changes such as technological advancement and the rise of the 'consumer culture', and declining church attendances.

CHAPTER 16: CONCLUSIONS: WHY PEOPLE DON'T GO TO CHURCH

Church attendance in Australia has declined dramatically from 45% of the adult population attending in the previous month in 1960, to about 20% of the adult population attending at least monthly in 1998. Weekly church attendances have declined in a similar way: in 1960, 30% of people attended church in the previous week, compared with 13% who attended church at least once per week in 1998.

This chapter draws together conclusions from this thesis about:

- why smaller proportions of the population participate frequently in church life now than in the past;

- the implications of these findings for theories about religious change, for future research and for churches themselves.

THE MAIN FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH NON-PARTICIPATION

A major goal of this thesis was to identify and discuss a wide range of factors that help to explain patterns of non-participation in church. These have been identified for five main areas:

- religious beliefs and upbringing,

- age and socio-economic status,

- work and leisure,

- the institutional church,

- the built environment.

The multiple regression results presented in this thesis highlight the fact that, of a wide range of variables available in this analysis, the holding of Christian beliefs is the most powerful predictor of church participation. The degree of salience and certainty

about these beliefs is even more predictive of attendance than merely assenting to particular beliefs. As discussed below, this has important consequences for conclusions about the role of beliefs in explaining non-participation and in debates about the religious nature of our society.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that a host of other variables explain some of the variance in the extent of church attendance. This is not the first time that this has been demonstrated in the Australian context (eg. Kaldor, 1987). But the current thesis has taken this work forward through the examination of additional issues such as:

- a person's history of church involvement,
- attitudes towards material goals and happiness,
- leisure preferences,
- attitudes towards churches and expectations regarding church attendance,
- church buildings and the form of congregations,
- the structure of local neighbourhoods,
- neighbourhood involvement and satisfaction.

As a set of variables, demographic variables such as age and socio-economic status account for only a small part of the variance in church attendance. But while their direct impact is relatively weak, demographics do make an indirect contribution through other variables, as was shown in Chapter 15. The most significant demographic variable is the age of respondents. This points towards the different conditions under which each age cohort has been socialised as being a significant cause of non-participation. This has great implications for future levels of church participation, given that children are being socialised under the same relatively stable political and social conditions enjoyed by other age groups born since the end of World War II. Gender, socio-economic status and country of birth are also related in a less significant way to patterns of participation.

Lifestyle variables connected with work and leisure activities also help to explain non-participation in churches. A person's attitudes towards material goals and personal happiness were of the most significance among these variables.

Attitudes towards the institutional church were also found to be significantly related to church attendance, but it is more likely that these are a consequence of church participation rather than a predisposing factor towards church participation. Some variables, however, such as the view that a person has towards the value of church teaching, may predispose a person towards or against church participation. It is likely that at least some aspects of the image of the church held by people in society serve to discourage some people from actually attending.

A REJECTION OF RELIGIOUS BELIEF?

While both levels of church attendance and levels of affirmation of some Christian beliefs has declined significantly, this has not necessarily been accompanied by a large increase in explicit disbelief. If religion has been receding before a rising tide of rationality and scientific knowledge, as proposed under some versions of secularisation theory, it would be expected that this tidal flow would be accompanied by an increase in explicit disbelief. Yet, in the case of some traditional Christian beliefs, the proportion of people who definitely reject them has actually decreased since the 1960s. While the proportion of people who profess to have 'no religion' or who do not state a religion has markedly increased, the proportion of atheists has only increased from 2% in 1966 to 9% of the adult population by 1998.

Disbelief in the tenets of other major religions has also probably receded over the period, although this cannot be readily confirmed, due to a lack of survey data. Comparable survey data do exist, however, for one key Eastern religious belief. Reincarnation, which is a major plank of Buddhism, Hinduism and other Eastern

religions, was rejected by 70% of the Australian population in 1969. However by 1998 only 39% of Australians said that they definitely did not believe in reincarnation.

The comments made in the previous two paragraphs do not mean that the proportion believing in traditional Christian beliefs has been increasing. The survey evidence presented in this thesis suggests that there have been large increases in the proportion of adults who say that they are 'neutral or unsure' about various religious beliefs. Many people now adopt a neutral position on Christian and other religious beliefs, neither accepting nor rejecting them out of hand, while a significant minority still holds to traditional Christian beliefs. This is important evidence supporting those versions of secularisation theory that see belief as increasingly rhetorical rather than those versions that see religious beliefs disappearing before a rising tide of rationality.

Salience and Certainty of Belief

In seeking to better understand why Australians do not participate in churches to the levels of the past, a key issue then appears to be the level of salience and certainty of Christian beliefs. There is evidence presented here of a strong relationship between the salience of belief, certainty of belief and church attendance levels. Those who are the most certain about beliefs and for whom these beliefs are important tend to be much more likely to be involved in the churches than are people who merely assent to particular beliefs.

While the level of those assenting to many Christian beliefs has remained steady or fallen since the 1960s, there is evidence to suggest that the level of certainty about these beliefs has declined even more over the same period. While 52% of Australians believed in God without any doubts in 1966, only 30% believed without doubt in 1993. Declining church participation is thus better explained in terms of declining certainty about and salience of Christian beliefs, not just the percentage who assent to particular beliefs. For many outside of the life of the churches, it is not that they have

all ceased to assent to particular Christian beliefs, but rather that such beliefs have become less certain and less important in their daily lives.

This conclusion is important to debates between those who argue for the continuity of religious belief versus those who argue for the decline of religion. While religious belief may well continue at previous levels in the population, its strength appears to have eroded, particularly among those who are not involved in churches on a frequent basis. A strongly held set of Christian beliefs and church participation tend to be found together. A church involvement appears to be the most important structure for the maintenance of strong Christian beliefs in the present environment.

This is further reinforced by the fact that only a small minority of people beyond church life strongly hold to the tenets of church-oriented religion. There is a real sense in which, in relation to traditional Christian belief at least, most people do not strongly believe without belonging to a church. This presents an important qualification on the notion of 'believing without belonging' (Davie, 1994), since the conclusion could erroneously be made that churches are becoming irrelevant to the maintenance of Christian belief in the wider community. If anything, the role of churches in the transmission and maintenance of traditional Christian beliefs is critical.

While high levels of Christian belief and church participation are closely related, it is difficult to determine empirically the direction of causality between the two. Indeed, for those who have been church attenders for many years, it is more likely that a church involvement is maintained by the beliefs that they hold. However for those who are growing up in the life of the churches or who are recent proselytes to the Christian faith, it is more likely that a church involvement helps to maintain and develop the beliefs that they hold.

A Church Upbringing

The evidence presented here also confirms that people's religious upbringing is very significant in predicting whether they are currently involved in a church. Whether or not people had churchgoing parents or attended church services themselves as children appears to be influential on current attendance patterns. Theoretically a church upbringing provides the context for the formation of religious beliefs, early church experience and establishment of social relations with other church attenders – notwithstanding the disruption of such a process by moving house, family breakup and other events. Apart from having a direct effect on church attendance patterns, it has also been demonstrated here that a church upbringing has an indirect effect through the formation of religious beliefs and attitudes, as well as through its negative impact on the likelihood that one sees the key goal in life as happiness.

Further, the proportion of children in Australia who are experiencing a church upbringing is decreasing. Primarily this is the result of their parents' priorities, in bringing their children up without any church involvement. This affects the level of experience that children have of churches and the kind of choices they make regarding religious involvement when they become adults. This in turn affects whether they choose to send their own children to church, resulting in an ongoing cycle of decline in the proportion of children attending church services or Sunday school.

Although it is not the only factor, this cycle appears to contribute to the progressively lower levels of church attendance being observed in each successive age cohort in the Australian adult population. When combined with a decreasing likelihood that adults will give their children a church upbringing, the impact of these progressive cohort changes in levels of church attendance would be expected to have a powerful negative influence on future church attendances in Australia.

While a church upbringing is much less predictive of current church attendance levels than is the salience and certainty of beliefs, it is nevertheless of great significance in understanding why people are not involved in churches, because of this cycle of decline. Beliefs and attendance at church appear to be in a reciprocal relationship, the direction of causality being both difficult to determine and probably varying according to stage in life and other factors. By contrast, there is a clear direction of causality between having or not having a church upbringing as a child and one's level of attendance as an adult.

It is also confirmed here that any return to church once people start to have children is more than outweighed by the numbers who leave church at the same lifestage. The main evidence for this is the relative stability or decline in the proportion of church attenders in each age cohort with the passing of time.

What Non-Participants Believe

The relationship between church participation and Christian beliefs is important in understanding why people are not involved in the churches. However, simply to look at Christian beliefs is to stop short of understanding what alternative belief systems, if any, Australians have adopted as a replacement to traditional Christian beliefs.

While many Australians are quite prepared to agree with the idea that various religions and philosophies each have different versions of the truth, this does not mean that they have adopted other mainstream religions as an alternative to Christian belief. According to the Census, only 3.5% of the Australian population identify with a mainstream Eastern religion. Most people falling into this category are immigrants from Asia or the descendants of immigrants. The proportion of Australians who have even an interest in the New Age movement or alternative spirituality is probably less than 15% of the population (Bellamy *et al.*, 1999).

Far more Australians appear to have adopted a relativised approached to religion and issues of truth, with no particular commitment to any system of beliefs. As part of this approach, spirituality is seen as relatively unimportant and the present life is the major focus. Although it does not necessarily embrace atheism, a relativist outlook on life is negatively correlated with traditional Christian beliefs (Bellamy *et al.*, 1999).

It can be concluded that non-participation in church reflects not so much the deliberate rejection of Christian belief among Australians as the adoption of a nominal or neutral position on issues of faith. Such a conclusion allows non-participation to be explained more in terms of neutrality or apathy than an unsympathetic view of the churches and the Christian faith. It can be readily demonstrated that many Australians are in fact neutral or unsure about particular religious beliefs, probably more so than in the past.

However this does not mean that they do not have at least some key beliefs which are in opposition to traditional religious views. The evidence of this thesis is that most of those who are not involved in churches, whether they are former attenders or have never attended, tend to be highly individualistic in their outlook regarding the formation of morals and values. Few people outside of church life are prepared to agree with the idea that morals and values are best formed in the light of Biblical teaching. Most are neither 'neutral' nor 'apathetic' on this issue, but specifically reject religious authority in this important area and would see it as a matter of individual conscience.

STATED REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

As though to reinforce the fact that a wide range of religious and social variables appear to explain patterns of participation, the questioning of non-attenders about the reasons they do not often go to church revealed a wide spectrum of responses.

For a third of non-attenders, weakness of religious belief was a primary reason for not attending more often. This was the most popular response among infrequent and non-attenders and broadly conforms with the expectations generated by the multivariate analysis of variables that explain participation. Issues to do with a lack of time were frequently stated reasons, as were specific problems with the churches as organisations.

The thesis also shows that stated reasons vary greatly depending upon a person's previous church involvement. People who formerly attended as adults are more likely to cite previous bad experiences of church people, a lack of time or not having a need to go as the main reasons for non-participation now. By contrast, those who have never attended frequently see a lack of belief as the greatest issue of all.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORIES OF RELIGIOUS CHANGE

If Australians are less inclined towards church participation than in the past, does this mean that secularisation processes, as they have been theorised, are responsible for this situation?

Many secularising 'events' in Australian history indeed took place prior to a recorded downturn in church attendance at the end of the nineteenth century. The end of state aid for churches, the widespread introduction of secular education, the Darwinian controversy and changes in the direction of Biblical scholarship coincided with the beginning of a long decline in Anglican and Protestant church attendance in Australia.

Since the 1950s there have been many changes associated with modernisation and urbanisation that have coincided with downturns in church attendance. These changes include:

- an increase in the average life span of Australians,
- a continued increase in the proportion of people living in urban environments,

- a doubling of personal consumption per capita between 1947 and 1974,
- a tripling of the number of motor vehicles per head of population between 1947 and 1961.

According to various versions of secularisation theory, these changes would be expected to have an impact on church attendances. For instance, Australia has been a highly urbanised country for much of this century, with more than 60% of the population living in urban settings since the 1920s, a proportion which has grown steadily to more than 80% by the 1990s (Australian Urban & Regional Development Review, 1995). The breakdown in local community associated with this change provides a less favourable environment for locally based institutions such as churches (Wallis and Bruce, 1991: 5).

But it is often difficult to link wider societal changes to individual patterns, such as frequency of church attendance. There are many aspects of this relationship that cannot be tested without comparable individual level data from previous decades. In addition, secularisation has been conceived as a long-term process stretching back many decades. The absence of strong individual level relationships does not preclude the possibility that secularisation processes are at work now as they have been in the past.

At the individual level, many of the statistical relationships in this thesis do conform with secularisation theory. The declining certainty and salience of belief in God among Australians, coupled with the strength of the relationship between belief and church attendance, as discussed in Chapter 5, would conform with the expectations of secularisation theory that sees religion as declining in the face of a rising tide of rationalisation. Placing a higher priority on personal happiness and the pursuit of materialistic goals, as described in Chapter 8, provides further indirect evidence of secularisation. Such values can only be encouraged in a modern consumer society such as Australia, which encourages the pursuit of such goals. Lower levels of church participation among working men and women, as discussed in Chapter 9, conform

with secularisation theory, as do lower levels of church participation among those people who can be described as more cosmopolitan and less embedded in their local community, as discussed in Chapter 13.

Modernity and Declining Attendances

What are some of the likely causal mechanisms between modernity and lower church attendance levels? Church attendance levels are now little different in urban compared with rural areas, suggesting that whatever differences still exist between the two environments is insufficient to affect church attendance. While a liberal, secular education may well have made an historical contribution to declining church attendances, it is difficult to argue that education has the same effect today. In fact a positive correlation exists at the individual level between educational accomplishment and church attendance. Similarly, while those in the workforce are less likely to attend church than are persons not in the workforce, this factor accounts for only a small amount of the variance in church participation.

Technical rationality associated with the development of technology has been theorised to have gradually displaced supernatural influence and moral considerations from ever wider areas of public life (Wallis and Bruce, 1991: 6). But the individual level data examined here suggest that technological developments may also be implicated in other ways, apart from the rise of rationality. In the past, the role of science in undermining faith has been conceived primarily as an intellectual confrontation. Now, new technologies, instead of attacking the intellectual foundations for faith, provide a challenge to church participation through the range of new experiences that they make available. The introduction of mass produced consumer goods has brought a range of labour saving devices into the home since the Second World War, thereby increasing discretionary time. New technologies such as television and satellite communication have further revolutionised access to leisure

and other activities. Together these factors have multiplied the leisure opportunities of the population.

In terms of the causal mechanisms of secularisation, there is scope for the consideration of theories centred on the relationship between motivation, patterns of behaviour and the environment. The relative importance of personal happiness, material goals and particular recreational pursuits also seems to have a role in explaining non-participation in church life. Such variables have not necessarily been emphasised in conventional secularisation theory but, based on the evidence presented here, appear to be of some importance as possible causes of declining church attendances.

Behavioural Theories

It could be assumed that many of the related lifestyle variables are a consequence of non-participation rather than a cause. However, it is equally valid to assume that such variables have served to draw people away from an existing or potential church involvement and are thus possible causes of non-participation.

Psychologically based theories of human behaviour suggest that behaviours become patterns through repeated experiences, either positive or negative. Increased leisure opportunities lead to increased experiences of different forms of leisure, reinforcing these particular patterns of behaviour. On the other hand, negative experiences of churches discourage attendance, and so lead to breakdowns in patterns of attendance.

This thesis has sought to explore the relationship between leisure activities and non-participation in church. It provides evidence that some aspects of recreational experience are negatively related to church participation, albeit in a minor way, and that some aspects of worship style, such as the length of the service, are predictive of attendance. These aspects deserve greater exploration, particularly where common threads can be identified between attractive church worship services and various

leisure activities. This would seem to have relevance in view of the relationship between contemporary worship and the flow of newcomers into church life, highlighted through research on the National Church Life Survey (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997: 82-90). Even after controlling for theological aspects, this relationship remains, suggesting that the predominance of traditional approaches to worship found across the denominations has contributed to lower levels of church participation.

As discussed in this thesis, there are also differences in the way that frequent church attenders and infrequent and non-attenders view personal happiness. Infrequent and non-attenders are more likely than frequent attenders to see happiness as the main goal in life. Understanding the contribution of leisure and recreational activities towards a person's sense of personal happiness, alongside other factors, would seem an important issue to explore further.

'Supply Side' Theories of Religious Participation

The thesis has noted evidence that is consistent with 'rational choice' or 'supply-side' theories of religious participation. The focus of these theories is on the characteristics of the churches themselves and the contribution this makes in explaining patterns of church participation and non-participation.

A more complete analysis of the impact of church life on patterns of participation has already been carried out elsewhere, using the Australian National Church Life Survey. The survey provided evidence that attendance growth is strongly influenced by the internal life of churches. Churches which have a more orthodox theology, strong visionary leadership, contemporary worship styles, an emphasis on outreach and an emphasis on the nurture of faith are more likely to be increasing in size and incorporating newcomers without a church background (Kaldor *et al.*, 1997; Kaldor *et al.*, 1999a: 72-83).

A supply side theory of church attendance also goes some way towards explaining observed denominational differences in attendance rates and in patterns of church growth and decline, although it is certainly not the only theory capable of doing so, as discussed in Chapter 10. Pentecostal denominations, for instance, have much higher rates of attendance by people identifying with them than is the case for mainstream denominations. Pentecostal denominations are also growing partly through the successful inclusion of new recruits from the wider community, at a time when attendances generally are eroding.

However, it must be conceded that explaining non-participation in terms of the failures of the churches can only go some of the way towards accounting for the steep declines in church attendance outlined in this thesis. At present, newcomers who have been present in their current congregation for five years or less comprise some 8% of Anglican and Protestant church attenders and an even smaller percentage of Catholic attenders. Increasing the flow of newcomers by one fifth right across the Anglican and Protestant churches and at the same time decreasing the drifting out of attenders by a similar proportion, would turn a projected 2% decline by the year 2001 into a 2% growth in attendance. Even if such growth could be achieved, it would be insufficient to prevent the continued erosion of participation as a percentage of the population, when it is considered that population increased by 5% over the period 1991 to 1996 and by 8% between 1986 and 1991.

Pentecostal denominations have been the fastest growing edge of church life throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Pentecostal churches in many ways incorporate the kind of qualities which have been identified through the National Church Life Survey research as being important for promoting church growth. Yet as a combined grouping, Pentecostals still comprise less than 1% of the Australian population. Though they are an important and growing group among church attenders, they are overall still a small group in the Australian population. While the example of Pentecostalism shows that some innovations to church life can and do have an impact on non-participation in the community, it is also clear that these impacts are currently

less significant than the forces which are eroding church participation overall. Of greater significance to church attendance levels appears to be changes in the population regarding levels of certainty and salience of religious belief.

Theories Associated with Age Differences

Despite the level of modernisation that has occurred in recent decades, the church attendance levels claimed by older adults, particularly those born between 1904 and 1923, have remained unchanged since the mid-1960s. By comparison, the church attendance levels of post-War age cohorts is much less than pre-War cohorts. The relative stability of church attendance among pre-War age cohorts suggests that secularising influences of modern society have had a partial rather than a general impact in Australia, at least in terms of church attendance levels.

The impact of secularisation has been most felt among the post-War age cohorts. The under-representation of young adults in church life appears to be more a function of differences between age cohorts than lifecycle effects. There is also evidence that these age cohort differences are partly a result of the decreasing likelihood that children are being involved in church life.

While conventional secularisation theory emphasises the rise of rationality as a key mechanism leading to secularisation, the evidence in this thesis suggests that the adoption of more worldly values has also played an important role. Empirical evidence presented in this thesis supports the notion that the greater acceptance of permissive moral values among younger age groups, combined with the rejection of traditional sources of religious authority, largely explains patterns of non-participation among young adults. The secularisation that has taken place among Australians emanates partly from short-term shifts in values associated with increased permissiveness. The links to longer-term modernisation processes are less easily confirmed, though they cannot be rejected on this evidence.

A further aspect that differs by age group is the salience of religious practice. The survey evidence presented in this thesis shows that while young adults are almost as likely to hold particular Christian beliefs as adults aged over 50 years, they are only half as likely to place much importance on prayer and on obeying or trusting God. Rather than rejecting Christian beliefs out of hand, younger adults appear less likely to act on such beliefs. As predicted by some versions of secularsation theory, their religious beliefs have become increasingly rhetorical. The age cohort trends observed in this thesis suggest that this secularisation of consciousness will become even more common in Australia in the future.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCHES

There are also some general conclusions that can be drawn regarding implications for churches apart from the specific conclusions already discussed.

The weight of empirical evidence in favour of one theory or another has differing implications for the churches. Broad empirical confirmation of a process of secularisation involving the erosion of church attendance and belief would mean that the churches could do comparatively little to prevent attendance decline. By implication the churches would need to prepare for an ever-decreasing role in society and ministry to a decreasing number of church attenders.

On the other hand, evidence confirming the impact of church life on attendances, as proposed under rational choice theory, or evidence which fits theories regarding the transformation of religion or the impact of ageing, opens up the possibility that declines in church attendance are reversible under the right combination of conditions, and that churches should be proactive in shaping their future.

The evidence presented here broadly confirms a process of secularisation, but gives some support to the notion that churches can make a difference. The findings of the National Church Life Survey (Kaldor et al., 1999a) suggest that churches with particular leadership qualities, worship style, theology and group life are making inroads by attracting newcomers without a church background. The contribution of demographic variables, lifestyle variables, and community variables to church attendance patterns suggests that different adaptations of church life to meet the needs of different kinds of communities, age groups, ethnic groups and socio-economic groups may help to boost overall church attendances. The findings based upon the range of variables which measure attitudes and expectations of churches and lifestyle variables, such as those related to recreational outcomes, point to possible developments in the style of church meetings. The findings also suggest the wisdom of further exploring the provision of high quality activities and facilities to meet social needs as a necessary first step towards the development of communities of faith based around such activities, as proposed by Hughes (1998: 38-39).

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The research undertaken in this thesis points to the need for further research in a number of areas.

The Relationship between Beliefs and Attendance

This thesis has highlighted the strong relationship between Christian beliefs and church attendance. It has also highlighted the relationship between the salience of such belief, certainty of belief and attendance. In view of the strong relationship between beliefs and attendance, this thesis has also sought to explore the issue of causality between the two in terms of available data.

While it is probable that many of those who leave church life are already in the process of losing their beliefs, this is not consistent with the relatively small numbers of church leavers across a range of studies who claim to have left church life because of a loss of faith (Richter and Francis, 1998: 27-28). It would be necessary to explore the leaving process among former attenders to discover what role loss of beliefs has in prompting someone to give up churchgoing. This would throw more light on to the causation issue.

The thesis has also highlighted that non-participants have not necessarily rejected Christian beliefs out-of-hand, but have adopted neutral positions on such beliefs, being convinced neither one way nor the other. Some recent work from the 1998 Australian Community Survey provides some promise in the empirical exploration of alternative beliefs among Australians (Bellamy *et al.*, 1999). Further research to explore the role of these beliefs in non-participation is needed, as well as in understanding better the relationship between such belief systems and traditional Christian belief.

The Effect of a Religious Upbringing

The distinguishing of former adult attenders from other non-attenders has served to highlight the similarity of socialisation experience between those who currently attend frequently and those who used to attend frequently. However, these similarities raise questions as to what other features characterise a 'successful' religious socialisation among the children of church attenders, apart from having churchgoing parents.

Issues which need to be explored in the Australian context include the quality of relationship between children and parents, the intensity of the parents' own religious life, and the distinguishing characteristics of supporting groups such as youth groups, Sunday school and the childhood congregation attended.

Lifestyle and Demographic Background

This thesis has highlighted the importance of variables connected with lifestyle in explaining church participation. Such variables include people's attitudes towards happiness and towards money. Compared to the more traditional measures of socio-economic status, such as income, these variables have as much if not greater power in explaining church participation.

The research in this thesis brings together empirical evidence regarding patterns of church participation with theories found in the area of behavioural psychology. There are a number of such theories which have been used to explain patterns of human activity in the built environment which are beyond the scope of the data collected for this thesis. Indeed other methodologies apart from broad-based social surveys may well be needed to test fully such theories in relation to participation and non-participation in churches.

Lifestyle decisions are in part an outcome of beliefs and values held. Data collected for the 1998 Australian Community Survey will greatly expand the potential for analysis of non-participation from the viewpoint of values.

The negative relationship between personal happiness and church attendance, the priority of such happiness and how it is actually attained appears to be an important area to take further in understanding why people are not involved in churches. This is particularly so in view of other studies which have found a positive relationship between a sense of meaning in life, religious beliefs and life satisfaction (Headey and Wearing, 1992: 181; Headey and Wearing, 1998: 177).

The existence of links between non-participation and a lack of personal resources, such as education, experience of formal group processes and so on should be taken further as it may assist in explaining lower participation rates among lower socio-economic groups.

Community and the Built Environment

The presence of relationships between various types of community involvement and non-participation points to the need to explore this area further. A wide range of such variables have been included in the 1998 Australian Community Survey database, which will enable exploration of issues such as involvement in community groups, social capital, cohesion and fragmentation of local community networks, and the churches' role in the local community in different kinds of urban and non-urban environments.

The role of the physical structure of communities provided relatively weak results in the context of the overall analysis for this thesis, but showed some promise in the results for two of the four local areas examined in the Western Sydney Survey. On this basis, it is suggested that further research be done on this issue, particularly in the light of urban land release policies that have been commonly pursued in Australian cities and that have resulted in very low levels of residential density by world standards.

Refining Further a Typology of Non-attenders

There have been a number of attempts to develop typologies of non-participants that reflect their reasons for non-attendance. Labels such as the 'burned out', 'the disillusioned' and 'the compromised' are meant to evoke a sense of the explicit reasons that each group would give for their non-participation in church life. Furthermore, each of these types has been hypothesised as having distinctive demographic and social characteristics.

An attempt has been made to find links between personal characteristics and stated reasons for non-participation. Sufficient evidence exists to suggest that such links do

exist. There will be greater scope to take this issue further through the 1998 Australian Community Survey database.

Concluding Comment

There appears to be more than one answer to the question of why people do not participate in churches. While not claiming to speak the last word on the subject, it is hoped that this thesis has made a significant contribution toward a better understanding of non-participation in churches.

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APPENDIX: SURVEY DATABASES USED IN THIS THESIS

WESTERN SYDNEY SURVEY: 1993

This survey was conducted by John Bellamy, at first as part of a Masters programme at the University of New England, Armidale, through the Department of Geography and Planning and Department of Sociology. This Master's programme was upgraded to a Doctor of Philosophy, and transferred to Edith Cowan University, Perth. The database created from this survey has been the main source of survey data used in this thesis.

The primary aim of the survey was to explore reasons for non-participation in churches among adults. Unlike nearly all of the other databases mentioned in this thesis, the survey was purposely designed to explore this issue.

The Western Sydney Survey is not a national sample, but was conducted on an area basis with a view to relating area characteristics with patterns of church participation and non-participation. As such, the results cannot be generalised to the Australian population, although relationships discovered within the survey generally conform with those in common with national random samples of the population. The survey area comprised suburbs in the outer western and north-western parts of Sydney, including the following postcode areas:

Lower Blue Mountains: Springwood-Winmalee (2777), Blaxland (2774), Glenbrook-Lapstone (2773) and Emu Plains (2750).

Penrith: Penrith (2750), Kingswood-Cambridge Park (2747), and Mt Pleasant-Cranebrook (2749).

Mt Druitt-St Marys: St Marys-Colyton (2760), St Clair (2759), Mt Druitt (2770), Oakhurst-Plumpton (2761), and Rooty Hill South (2766)

Belrose-Frenchs Forest: Belrose-Davidson (2085), Frenchs Forest (2086) and Beacon Hill (2100).

Socio-economically, the study areas are broadly middle and lower income areas, which are typical of much of Sydney. The study areas do not include the 'high income' areas of Sydney, such as the North Shore and parts of the Eastern suburbs (Farrell, 1993: 58-63). The study areas generally contain less than the Sydney average of people born overseas. With the exception of Belrose-Frenchs Forest, the study areas contain higher than the Sydney average levels people aged 0-14 years (Farrell, 1993: 6-9, 22, 23).

Belrose-Frenchs Forest can be broadly categorised a 'middle income' area, with less than 30% of households classified as 'low income households' in the 1991 Census. In most of the area, 3-6% of the population were high income earners, with pockets of the area having 6-12% high income earners (Farrell, 1993: 58-63).

The Lower Blue Mountains was the next most affluent area, with less than 30% of households classified as low income households, but with some pockets of the area containing more than 50% low income households. Overall less than 3% of the population were classified as 'high income earners' (Farrell, 1993: 58-63).

Penrith is socio-economically mixed, with up to 50% of households being low income households in the residential areas immediately adjacent to the town centre, declining to less than 20% of households in the rural fringes and newer outer suburbs. Overall less than 1% of the Penrith population falls into the category of high income earners (Farrell, 1993: 58-63).

Mt Druitt-St Marys has 40-50% low income households in areas north of the Great Western Highway, and less than 20% low income households in the new suburbs to the

south of the Highway. The areas to the north of the Highway, where the majority of the population was to be found at the time of the 1991 Census, was originally developed as a public housing estate. The Sydney Social Atlas shows that 25 to 50% of dwellings across much of the Mt Druitt area were Government owned at the time of the 1991 Census (Farrell, 1993: 58-63, 88).

Census collector districts were randomly selected across the survey areas. Names of residents within these collector districts were randomly selected from the Electoral Roll. Selected persons were then mailed a copy of the survey form, which comprised some 100 items contained within 40 questions. The questions asked in the survey are outlined below.

The survey was conducted throughout 1993. The completed survey forms were collected by volunteers from local churches. Some 1119 useable forms were collected, representing a return rate of about 65% for the survey. Between 250 and 300 forms were collected from each of the four regions in the survey area. These responses were weighted in the database to reflect the true area populations in each region.

It was also necessary to weight the data to account for some imbalances between the demographic profiles of each region and the survey respondents. Generally, the sample was weighted for age group, to account for under-representations of people aged under 30 years and over 70 years. Weighting by gender was also necessary in the Penrith area.

Generally, there is an under-representation of Non-English Speaking Background persons in the database. This was expected, in view of the English language survey form that was used.

Survey Questions

1. **How do you feel about the suburb in which you live?** (TICK ONE ONLY)
a. ___ It's a great place to live
b. ___ It's quite a good place to live
c. ___ I don't mind living here
d. ___ I don't like it

2. **How long have you lived at your current address?** (TICK ONE ONLY)
a. ___ Less than 1 year
b. ___ 1-5 years
c. ___ 6-10 years
d. ___ More than 10 years
e. ___ All my life
If you ticked c, d or e, please go to Question 4

3. **When you moved to your current address, did any of the following happen to you?** (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)
a. ___ Loss of contact with close family members
b. ___ Loss of contact with close friends
c. ___ Change of job (or stopped working)
d. ___ Stopped churchgoing

4. **Do most of your close friends live in the local area?** (TICK ONE ONLY)
a. ___ No, most live elsewhere
b. ___ Yes, in the same suburb as me
c. ___ Yes, in this suburb or nearby suburbs

5. **Do you know your near neighbours well enough to know their hobbies and interests?** (TICK ONE ONLY)
a. ___ No
b. ___ Yes, one or two of my neighbours
c. ___ Yes, quite a few of them

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

6. **Are you an active member of any community groups or organisation?** (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)
a. ___ Service organisations (eg: Rotary)
b. ___ Resident committees (eg: Neighbourhood Watch)
c. ___ Schools organisations (eg: P&C)
d. ___ Charitable organisations
e. ___ Sporting or recreation clubs
f. ___ Unions/professional organisations
g. ___ Other (please write)_____

7. Which of the following places do you <u>often</u> go to? (TICK AS MANY AS APPLY)
a. __ A hotel or licenced club
b. __ A major shopping centre
c. __ The football or some other sport
d. __ A theatre or cinema
e. __ A disco
f. __ A concert venue
g. __ Private parties
h. __ None of the above

If you ticked h, please go to Question 10

8. From the above list, think of <u>one</u> place you most enjoy going to. Write its full name here:

_____

9. How important are each of the following in making times at the place in Question 8 enjoyable for you?

	Very Important	Of some importance	Not important
a. It is a new building/venue	—	—	—
b. Presence of a crowd	—	—	—
c. Can get food I like	—	—	—
d. Being with family or friends	—	—	—
e. It is a place I'm familiar with	—	—	—
f. Has music I like	—	—	—
g. Can meet new people	—	—	—
h. A quiet or relaxed atmosphere	—	—	—
i. Freedom to do what I like	—	—	—
j. Alcoholic drinks	—	—	—

WORK AND STUDY

10. What sort of job does the <u>highest income earner</u> in your household do? PLEASE WRITE IN FULL. (Eg: 'Office supervisor', 'Truck driver') Please answer for previous job if now retired or unemployed.

Occupation: _____

11. If you are <u>not</u> the highest income earner, what is your main occupation?

_____

12. How many hours per week do you usually work in a paid job? (and/or attend a course of study?) Please answer for your spouse also, if you have one.

	You	Your spouse
a. None	—	—
b. 1-15 hours	—	—
c. 16-24 hours	—	—
d. 25-34 hours	—	—
e. 35-40 hours	—	—
f. 41-50 hours	—	—
g. 51 or more	—	—

13. How long does it usually take you to get to your main place of work or education?
a. __ I don't work or study
b. __ I work at home
c. __ 1-10 minutes
d. __ 11-20 minutes
e. __ 21-30 minutes
f. __ 31-60 minutes
g. __ Over 1 hour
h. __ It varies a lot

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF

The following questions are very important to help us make best use of this survey. We would appreciate if you would answer these questions.

14. What is your sex?
a. __ Male
b. __ Female

15. In what year were you born? _____

16. Where you born?
a. __ Australia
b. __ Other (please write) _____

17. What is your highest level of education?
a. __ Primary school
b. __ Some Secondary school
c. __ Completed Secondary school
d. __ Trade or certificate from a Technical College
e. __ Diploma from a College of Advanced Education
f. __ A degree from a University
g. __ Other (please write) _____

18. Is the place in which you normally live:

a. __ Owned and <u>fully</u> paid off?

b. __ Owned, but still being paid off?

c. __ Rented from a public housing authority?

d. __ Rented privately?

e. __ Provided with job?

f. __ Don't know

19. What is your present marital status?

a. __ Never married

b. __ Married: first time

c. __ Remarried

d. __ De facto

e. __ Separated or divorced

f. __ Widowed

20. Do you have any of your children living at home? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

a. __ I do not have children

b. __ No

c. __ Yes, aged under 5 years

d. __ Yes, aged 5 to 18 years

e. __ Yes, aged over 18 years

21. Would you tend to find the following things easy or hard to do?

	Easy	Sometimes Hard	Mostly Hard
a. Say what you think to a large group of people	__	__	__
b. Do a lot of reading	__	__	__
c. Talk about your inner feelings	__	__	__
d. Talk about complicated ideas	__	__	__
e. Say 'No' when your friends want you to do something	__	__	__
f. Make new friends	__	__	__

22. How important are the following things to you?

	Not important	Of some importance	Very important
a. A job that provides a high income	__	__	__
b. Owning an expensive car	__	__	__
c. Having enough money for overseas travel/long holidays	__	__	__
d. A good house in a good area	__	__	__

YOUR CHURCH CONTACT

23. How often do you go to church services?
a. __ Hardly ever/never
b. __ A few times a year
c. __ Once a month
d. __ Two or three times a month
e. __ Every week or more often

If you ticked d or e, go to Question 26

24. Why don't you go to church services more often? (PLEASE READ THIS LIST CAREFULLY AND TICK YOUR TWO MAIN REASONS ONLY)

a. __ Feel uncomfortable with people at church
b. __ Don't like church services much
c. __ Previous bad experiences of church people
d. __ Disagree with church views on morals
e. __ Feel uncomfortable in church buildings
f. __ Don't like the church as an organisation
g. __ No churches of my denomination nearby
h. __ No good churches nearby
i. __ My family or friends don't like church
j. __ Not a strong believer/ Don't believe at all
k. __ Not enough time/ work commitments
l. __ Don't feel I need to go more often
m. __ There are other things I prefer doing
n. __ No transport to get to church
o. __ Other (please write) _____

25. As an adult, have you ever regularly gone to church at least monthly?
a. __ Yes
b. __ No, never
c. __ Unsure/ can't remember

26. Would you go to a normal church service if invited by close friends or family?
a. __ None of my friends/ family go to church
b. __ No
c. __ Unsure
d. __ Yes

27. As a <u>child,</u> did you have a lot of contact with the church in any of these ways? (TICK ALL THAT APPLY)

a. __ One/ both of my parents often went to church

b. __ Scripture teaching at school

c. __ I went to a private school run by a church or religious group

d. __ I often went to a Sunday school

e. __ I often went to church services

f. __ Other (please write) _____

28. Do you ever notice church buildings in your suburb?

a. __ Rarely/ never

b. __ Sometimes

c. __ Often

29. Is there a church of your denomination close to where you live?

a. __ Yes, in the suburb where I live

b. __ Yes, in a nearby suburb

c. __ No

d. __ Don't know

e. __ I do not have a denomination

30. Do you ever notice the church or church people in the media (eg: on radio, TV, in newspapers)?

a. __ Rarely/ never

b. __ Sometimes

c. __ Often

YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT CHURCHES

Please answer the following questions. <u>We would like to know what you think even if you don't go to church.</u>

31. Which statement comes closest to what you think?

a. __ Church services should be held in a traditional church building

b. __ Church services should be held in community centres/ schools

c. __ It doesn't matter what type of building church services are held in

32. Here are some opinions about churches. Would you tend to agree or disagree?
(PLEASE TICK AN ANSWER ON EACH LINE)

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Churches should have a lot <u>less</u> money	—	—	—
More people would go to church if the buildings were more modern	—	—	—
Church teaching is very useful for daily living	—	—	—
You have to get dressed up to go to most churches	—	—	—
People sit on hard wooden seats in most churches	—	—	—
It is hard to feel on an equal level with a minister/ priest	—	—	—

33. If you were going to a church service, would any of the following be important to you?

	Very Important	Of some importance	Not important
a. The church be within 10 mins drive of home	—	—	—
b. Off-street parking at the church	—	—	—
c. Going with a close friend or relative	—	—	—
d. More 'upbeat' songs, less hymns/ old songs	—	—	—
e. Service to last no longer than an hour	—	—	—
f. Having to do little or no reading in the service	—	—	—
g. The talk by the minister be short and simple	—	—	—

34. Here are some ideas meant to improve local churches. Would you be prepared to go to a church like this? (PLEASE TICK AN ANSWER ON EACH LINE)

	No	Unsure	Yes, to see what its like	Yes, with a view to getting involved
a. The church meets in a large church building (500 seats) and has its own carpark. A modern church service is held.	—	—	—	—
b. The church meets in a private home. Church meetings are very informal, with much discussion together.	—	—	—	—
c. The church meets in a room of a hotel or Club for an informal church service. Adults later meet for a drink in the Club/ hotel.	—	—	—	—
d. The church meets in a typical church building, but also has counselling, welfare and childcare during the week for church attenders to use.	—	—	—	—
e. The church meets in a school hall or community centre for an informal church service	—	—	—	—

YOUR BELIEFS

Your answers to the following questions will help us a lot for this survey. We would appreciate if you could share these with us.

35. What is your religious denomination?
a. ___ Catholic
b. ___ Anglican (Church of England)
c. ___ Uniting Church
d. ___ Presbyterian
e. ___ Pentecostal (eg: Assemblies of God)
f. ___ Baptist
g. ___ Orthodox
h. ___ Other (please write) _____
i. ___ **No religion**

Other religion:
j. ___ Moslem
k. ___ Buddhist
l. ___ Other (please write) _____

36. Do you believe in a personal God?
a. ___ I have no doubts about it
b. ___ I have some doubts about it
c. ___ Not a personal God, but I think there is a higher power or lifeforce
d. ___ I do not know if there is a God
e. ___ I don't believe in God

37. How important are the following to you?

	Not Important	Of some importance	Very important
a. Obeying God's commands	___	___	___
b. Prayer	___	___	___
c. Trusting God in everyday situations	___	___	___
d. Reading the Bible	___	___	___

38. An important Christian belief is that Jesus Christ was God and that he returned from the dead. What do you think?
a. ___ I don't believe it
b. ___ I have serious doubts about it
c. ___ I have minor doubts about it
d. ___ I believe it without any doubts
e. ___ I don't know

39. As an adult, have you ever fully read one of the books in the Bible about the life of Jesus? (These books are Matthew, Mark, Luke or John)

a. __ Yes

b. __ No

c. __ Unsure/ can't remember

40. Would you tend to agree or disagree with the following statements? (PLEASE TICK AN ANSWER ON EACH LINE)

	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Morals and values are best decided yourself, not by relying on books like the Bible	__	__	__
I have had an experience of Christian conversion	__	__	__
Besides religious faith, there are many more important things in my life	__	__	__
The main goal in life is to be happy	__	__	__
Science has disproved a lot of the Bible	__	__	__
Being a Christian means giving up alcohol and going to clubs/ pubs	__	__	__

NATIONAL AND OTHER SURVEYS USED IN THIS THESIS

Australian Gallup Polls

The Australian Public Opinion Polls (the Gallup method) were established in 1941 and conducted from then until 1973 by Roy Morgan, and from 1973 by McNair Anderson and Associates (Goot, 1987: 436). The survey method generally involved about 100 interviewers over one weekend conducting door-to-door interview surveys from random 'cluster' points across Australia. In this way, up to 2000 adults were interviewed, providing a random cross-section of the adult population (National Social Science Data Archives background notes).

Apart from the results of Australian Gallup polls on church attendance documented by Goot (1987), Australian Gallup polls discussed in this thesis include:

Month/Year	Survey no.	Subscriber	Subject
Date	*Survey no.*	*Report no.*	*Subject*
06/46	0042	365	Church attendance
06/46	0042	365	Reasons for non-attendance
10/47	0053	472A & B	Religious beliefs
10/47	0053	472C	Church attendance
09/49	0067	639	Reasons for non-attendance
04/61	0149	1537	Reasons for non-attendance
12/68	0201	2113A to F	Religious beliefs
12/75	0140	327B & C	Religious beliefs
06/76	0123	375	Church attendance

Religion in Australia Survey: 1966

This survey covered the religious patterns and values of Australians aged 20 years or over in NSW, Victoria, and Tasmania. Some 1832 people were personally interviewed at 1187 dwellings as part of a multi-stage sampling procedure. There are 2602 cases in the database (National Social Science Data Archives background notes).

This survey has been an important benchmark in religious research in Australia until the 1980s. The findings were first published in Hans Mol's (1971) *Religion in Australia: A Sociological Investigation.*

Australian Political Attitudes Survey: 1967

This survey is primarily concerned with political attitudes and national issues, but contains some questions to do with the religious background of respondents. The survey covered most of Australia (excluding the Northern Territory and ACT) and includes 2054 cases (Kaldor, 1987: 249).

Australian Values Study Survey: 1983

The survey for this study was conducted in Australia by the Roy Morgan Research Centre under the direction of the AVS Steering Committee, as part of an international study of values systems in over 20 countries (Bouma and Dixon, 1986: 187-193). In Australia, 1228 personal interviews with people aged 14 years or over were conducted.

The survey was primarily concerned with establishing links between attitudes and behaviours across a range of life areas, including religion and meaning and purpose in life.

As such, the AVS marked an important step for churches in Australia, being the first time that the churches cooperated to support a large-scale social science research project (Bouma and Dixon, 1986: xii).

National Social Science Surveys: 1983, 1989-90, 1993

The National Social Science Survey (NSSS) has been conducted periodically by the Australian National University.

The samples for the surveys were drawn randomly from Australian Federal Electoral Rolls. The surveys were carried out on a self-completion basis (mailed out/ mailed back). Potential respondents were sent an initial questionnaire and followed up by mail (National Social Science Data Archives background notes).

Each survey contained a set of questions regarding religion, as well as a wide range of demographic and other questions.

The numbers of cases in each survey were:

- 1983: 3012 cases,
- 1989-90: 4513 cases,
- 1993: 2203 cases.

Having been conducted in the same year as the Western Sydney Survey, the 1993 NSSS has generally been used in this thesis for providing national comparison data.

The 1993 National Social Science Survey contained a large set of questions on the topic of religion. Consequently this survey is an important source of information on the religious beliefs and practices of the Australian population.

National Church Life Surveys: 1991 and 1996, and Catholic Church Life Survey: 1996

The **National Church Life Survey** (NCLS) was a survey of church attenders across 20 Anglican and Protestant denominations. Some 310,000 people aged 15 years or over attending church activities at 6700 congregational centres, were surveyed in 1991. In 1996, 324,000 people at 6900 congregations were surveyed.

The surveys were filled in at church activities, usually worship services. In the 1996 NCLS, around 85%-90% of attenders filled in one of three primary survey forms of about 50 questions, resulting in databases each of about 90,000 people. The remaining 10%-15% received one of a number of randomly distributed forms, resulting in small national samples of about 2000 respondents each (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999b: 142-143).

A parallel survey of Catholic Church life, the **Catholic Church Life Survey** (CCLS) was conducted in 1996. It comprised a multi-stage sampling procedure of over 100,000 people in 286 parishes across Australia. It was conducted by researchers

under the auspices of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (Kaldor *et al.*, 1999b: 144).

The NCLS and CCLS represent the largest social survey projects ever undertaken by the churches in Australia. They are also among the largest databases on church life assembled anywhere in the world.

World Values Survey: 1995

The World Values Survey involved personal interview surveys of 2048 Australians. The research was conducted by the Roy Morgan Research Centre, on behalf of Alan Black and Elim Papadakis of the University of New England.

The survey was part of a larger international study comprising 44 countries.

Australian Community Survey: 1998

The Australian Community Survey (ACS) was conducted in late 1997 and early 1998 by researchers from Edith Cowan University and NCLS Research, a research organisation supported by the Anglican Diocese of Sydney and the NSW Uniting Church.

The aim of the survey was to better understand the relationship between local churches and various facets of community life. Eight classifications of local community were established, including four non-metropolitan classifications based upon population size and four metropolitan classifications based upon the Australian Bureau of Statistics Socio-economic Indicators (SEIFA).

The survey was carried out on a self-completion basis (mailout/ mailback). The response rate to the survey was about 50%. Eight different versions of the survey were produced, resulting in national random samples of over 1000 people each. Some survey questions appeared in all eight versions of the survey, resulting in a maximum sample size of 8,500 people for such questions (Hughes *et al.*, 1999: 7).

The ACS is possibly the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken of the religious beliefs, attitudes and behaviour patterns of Australians. The results of the survey have, however, only been used selectively here, being unavailable during the research and analysis phases of this thesis.