I think it’s remarkable that recent histories of Australia seem to have forgotten the role of religion within the life of Australia. In fact, for a lot of people it just never occurs to them that religion is one of the most formative influences on the whole shape of Australian society and culture.

REVEREND DAVID MILLIKAN, ABC RADIO NATIONAL PROGRAM, THE RELIGION REPORT

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

In this chapter we will discuss:

• Contemporary Aboriginal spirituality
• Aboriginal spirituality determined by the Dreaming, kinship, ceremonial life and obligations to the land and peoples
• Dispossession and how separation from the land and kinship groups and the Stolen Generations has affected Indigenous peoples
• The land rights movement, looking at native title, and the Mabo and Wik decisions; the Dreaming and land rights
• Religious expression in Australia from 1945 to the present
• Changing patterns of religious adherence as revealed in census data
• The current religious landscape, with Christianity as the major religious tradition
• Issues of immigration, denominational switching, New Age religions and secularism
• The ecumenical movement and the role of the National Council of Churches and NSW Ecumenical Council
• Interfaith dialogue in multi-faith Australia
• Aboriginal spirituality and religious traditions in the process of reconciliation

TIMELINE

1945
End of World War II; the Chifley government sets up a Department of Immigration to increase the nation’s population; Australia becomes a founding member of the United Nations

1946
Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell introduces the major postwar immigration scheme; over 800 Aboriginal stockmen go on strike over pay and conditions. It is revealed that they were getting minimal wages for very difficult work

1947
Australia agrees to take displaced people from Europe

1948
Nationality and Citizenship Act introduced. Rather than Australians being identified as subjects of Britain, the Act establishes Australian citizenship

1949
Plans for the Snowy Mountain Scheme announced, which will employ thousands of new Australians

1950
Assimilation adopted as official government policy to ensure the dominance of the English language and an ‘Australian’ way of life among new Australians

1953
Northern Territory Welfare Ordinance makes Aboriginal peoples wards of the government

1955
Hotels in New South Wales no longer have to close at 6 p.m., ending the ‘six o’clock swill’
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>Over one million new immigrants have arrived in Australia since the war. They are mainly from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean and bring greater numbers of Catholic and Orthodox Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Migration Act removes the dictation test, used to support the White Australia policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>Aboriginal peoples eligible for Commonwealth Government benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Commonwealth Electoral Act allows Indigenous Australians the right to vote in all states except Queensland; Australia enters the Vietnam War.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Indigenous Australians gain right to vote in Queensland; the Second Vatican Council brings a modernisation of Australian Catholic churches; the Freedom Rides for Aboriginal equality begin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>The Wave Hill protests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>An overwhelming ‘Yes’ vote in a national referendum regarding Aboriginal issues; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are now counted as citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Arbitration Commission announces principle of equal pay for equal work whatever one’s race (equal pay between sexes is another issue).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td>Conflicts in Lebanon, Sri Lanka and Vietnam cause surges of immigration from these troubled zones to Australia, increasing Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist numbers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>More than 200,000 people participate in the largest demonstrations in Australian history, against the Vietnam War. Australian churches reveal a variety of attitudes to the protests; Pope Paul VI is the first pope to visit Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Neville Bonner becomes the first Aboriginal senator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Aboriginal Tent Embassy is established in Canberra; Women’s Electoral Lobby set up; Gough Whitlam leads the first Labor government to be elected since 1949.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Gough Whitlam announces the end of the White Australia policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>Woodward Royal Commission on Land Rights; the minimum wage the same now for women as men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>Symbolic return of land to the Gurindji people; Family Law Act introduces no-fault divorce; the Liberal-National opposition party lead by Malcolm Fraser obstructs supply in the Senate causing a constitutional crisis, which brings the nation to a halt until John Kerr, the Governor-General, terminates the Prime Ministry of Whitlam. The subsequent election is won by Fraser who becomes the new Prime Minister; Racial Discrimination Act established; homosexuality in private between consenting adults is legalised by the first state in Australia, South Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Aboriginal Land Rights Act introduced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Anti-Discrimination Act; Sex Discrimination Act; the Uniting Church is formed on 22 June.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>First Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras takes place in Sydney – arrests are made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>The Mutitjulu people are granted a freehold title by the government for a large area of land in Central Australia that includes well-known landmarks such as Kata Tjuta and Uluru; the Mutitjulu people then give the government a lease for 99 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Pope John Paul II visits Australia for the first time as Pope; Affirmative Action Act; Mary Gaudron first woman appointed to the High Court.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1988
The bicentenary of Australia is widely celebrated and commemorated with funding for cultural projects and capital works. The new Parliament House opens with a multi-faith service. Some Aboriginal peoples declare 1988 a year of mourning.

1992
The *Mabo* case is decided in the High Court and rules that Indigenous native title is existent in Australia. The colonial legal concept of *terra nullius* is thus terminated.

1993
The *Native Title Act* is passed and becomes law.

1994
The National Council of Churches of Australia (NCCA) is formed.

1995
Voluntary euthanasia is legalised in the Northern Territory, but this decision is overridden by the Federal Government’s Euthanasia Laws Bill 1996, proposed by Liberal MP Kevin Andrews; Pope John Paul II visits for a second time.

1996
The *Wik* decision is handed down by the High Court and determines that Indigenous native title survives the granting of pastoral leases; John Howard, a member of the Liberal party, becomes Prime Minister after defeating Paul Keating; this ends a record Labor government of 13 years.

1997
*Native Title (Amendment) Act*; *Bringing Them Home* report on the Stolen Generations is published.

1998
The first ‘Sorry Day’ organised to say ‘Sorry’ to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

1999
A motion is passed by both Houses of Commonwealth Parliament which expresses both recognition of and regret at how Indigenous Australians were treated in the past; the Australian Government itself is yet to apologise. A referendum to change Australia to a republic is unsuccessful.

2000
Cathy Freeman wins gold at the Sydney Olympics.

2001
An attack on illegal immigration leads to the Tampa and children-overboard affairs, and John Howard is re-elected.

2002
On 12 October 2002 bombs explode in a nightclub and bar in Bali, killing 88 Australians and 202 people overall; the Dalai Lama visits Australia.

2003
Australian military deployed to join the Iraq War.

2004
The Redfern riots occur between police and the Aboriginal community around Redfern station over the death of a young Aboriginal boy.

2005
Race riots occur in the beachside suburb of Cronulla, Sydney.

2007
The Dalai Lama visits Australia.

2008
Prime Minister Kevin Rudd makes a formal Apology in Parliament to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly the Stolen Generations; World Youth Day held in Sydney, with Pope Benedict XVI.

2010
In October Pope Benedict XVI announces in Rome that Mary MacKillop is Australia’s first Roman Catholic saint.
CHAPTER 3  RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA POST-1945

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Religious expression in Australia since 1945 has been very different from that of the first 150 years of the colony. Australia became a Commonwealth in 1901 and endured World War I (1914–18), which forged an Australian identity. The following years of the Great Depression (1930s) and World War II (1939–45) helped develop a new independence, with a cultural and political refocusing from Britain to the United States, as well as developing Australia’s sense of itself as a world citizen. In the years following the end of World War II, Australia began to focus on its responsibilities as a global citizen. This included a re-examination of the relationships with the original inhabitants of the land – the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There was a new awareness that Indigenous Australians were not without spirituality, nor did they have a simple or ‘primitive’ approach to the world. Aboriginal spirituality is an extremely complex worldview that includes the Dreaming, complex relationships within kinship groups and extensive obligations to the land. Many Aboriginal people had become Christians, but retained ideas from their Aboriginal spirituality, developing a contextualised Christianity.

With increased migration in the years since 1945, migrants have brought new understandings of religious traditions. Immediate post-World War II migration brought more of the Catholicism of southern Europe, which was different from that of the Irish, as well as the Orthodoxy of Eastern Europe and the Islam of the Middle East. Asian migration brought another group of Muslims, as well as other Asian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Conflict in the Middle East, East Asia and the Balkans brought Islam in the 1990s and Indian professionals who migrated in the early twenty-first century brought Hinduism. Today, the religious landscape is vastly different from that of the mid-twentieth century, as the religious expression of Australians continues to develop in an increasingly globalised world.

3.2 THE DIVERSITY OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL SPIRITUALITIES

The Dreaming and Aboriginal spiritualities

Dreaming stories continue to have an enormous influence on Aboriginal Australians today. This is despite the fact that a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been converted to Western religious traditions. A significant change has also taken place within Christian congregations in particular. Where once many Christians rejected Aboriginal spirituality and refused to allow it to be related to Christianity for fear of becoming syncretist, Christianity has become more open to Aboriginal spirituality. This openness and the influence of one religious tradition on the other can be seen positively as contextualisation rather than syncretism.

Aboriginal spirituality is connected very closely to the land, and the Dreaming stories reflect this (see Chapter 1 for an explanation of Aboriginal spirituality and the Dreaming). There are regular ceremonies that enact stories sacred to specific areas; each region and landscape has its own stories, which are almost meaningless if removed from the geographical context. This is why the dispossession of the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander peoples from their land had such a profound effect on their religions and cultures. The basic plot of all the Dreaming stories is that something exists – the land, a site, some rocks, a waterhole – and a story is then invoked that explains how an ancestor transformed this land. The story is not simply told, but in many cases performed. These stories are essential to Indigenous culture,
INVESTIGATE


for they explain why things are as they are. Dreaming stories contain all the information needed to live in a place and prosper. Before anyone walks onto someone else's land, they need to know the story of that land. With often forced movements of Aboriginal peoples and dispossession of the land a sense of loss also pervades Aboriginal spiritualities. This is particularly the case with Indigenous Australians who have settled in urban environments.

Kinship
Family relationships that exist between people, and the rights and obligations associated with those relationships.

Moieties
Skin name subsections in many Aboriginal tribes.

Corroboree
An Aboriginal ceremony, usually in the form of a dance.

Rite of passage
A ritual to mark the progression of an individual through various status stages in a community.

Kinship
Traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is centred on notions of **kinship**. All forms of social interaction, including marriage, group meetings, sports, trade and so on are determined by complicated kinship (relationship) laws. The laws determine how a person relates to others and how they belong to the community. Perhaps the first significant element in the division of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups is their languages. Before colonisation there were hundreds of separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages that determined specific groups. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples knew a number of languages, but they always defined themselves through the original language of their own tribe. Within the tribe there were clans based on family groupings and within these clans there were further divisions into skin groups, or moieties. There are obligations within these social networks to care for others in times of need.

Ceremonial life
The word **corroboree** indicates an Aboriginal ceremony and is a Western term derived by settlers from one of the Aboriginal words for their rituals, ‘carriberrie’. These ceremonies often centre on retellings of Dreaming stories through singing, dancing, music and mime. Often the body of an actor is decorated to represent the spirit he or she is portraying. Other ceremonies of note include initiation ceremonies that relate to various stages of life. One example would be a rite of passage where a member of the tribe is initiated into adulthood and thus full membership of the tribe. These ceremonies usually involve the testing of strength, the revelation of special knowledge, the removal of the child from the mother, seclusion, the giving of a new name or sacred object, and a time of survival in the wild. Ceremonies are held to mark a person’s development and new roles in the group.

Other significant ceremonies include burial ceremonies, which can be very elaborate. Death in Aboriginal spirituality is the time when the spirit leaves the body and returns to the spirit ancestors. There are particular rituals associated with death so that the spirit is encouraged on its journey. Sometimes the body is cremated, buried or exposed, and in some areas elaborately decorated poles are erected. Often there are strict taboos associated with death rituals. This is reflected in the warnings often given on television shows that tell viewers one of the Indigenous persons in the programs has died, or that the name of a dead person will be mentioned.

Obligations to the land and people
Given the conceptions of Aboriginal kinship and ceremonial life, it can be seen that there are heavy obligations for each individual to the land and their fellows. Laws of kinship encourage the growth and maintenance of a complex network of dependence and support that extends beyond family groups. These interpersonal connections are refocused through the ceremonial lives of Aboriginal nations. The togetherness of the group is emphasised by the actions at these ceremonies, and the actions themselves are determined by Dreaming stories. These Dreaming stories also connect each Aboriginal group to the land which they inhabit and are thus the custodians of that land. The land they are responsible for is called their ‘country’; it is their ritual estate. The protection and custodianship of that land becomes an integral part of the life of each individual and the culture of the tribe as a whole.

Implications related to Aboriginal dispossession
As European settlement spread across Australia, many Indigenous people were forced off their lands. They were dispossessed. Throughout the nineteenth century, white Australians believed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples would eventually die out, or that they must be assimilated into the white Australian population to survive. In the popular
thinking of the time, Indigenous Australians were racially inferior to Europeans. It was, therefore, not necessary to take into account any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attitudes to the land. Colonial Australians had begun this process of dispossession through the cultivation of the ‘empty’ land theory: **terra nullius** – a legal conceit that the land was not owned by anyone when white settlers arrived. The introduction of livestock and the misuse of the original environment aided in the destruction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world as did a vast range of diseases introduced by colonialists. A process of partnering whites with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples produced what were called ‘half-caste’ children. It was policy of many state governments to remove these children into state orphanages or foster care. Over time the connectedness between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the land was broken.

Christian missionaries also sought to evangelise the Indigenous Australians and did so very effectively. While the missions contributed greatly to the breakdown of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language and culture, they also paradoxically contributed to their survival by providing a place where people could meet. Missionaries also worked to document and preserve elements of traditional culture. Some missionaries also took on a strong advocacy role in speaking up for the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They even provided protection from some of the excesses of the white community. The missions and the policy of protection did lead to dispossession and affect the expression of Aboriginal spirituality; two of the greatest factors were separation from the land and from kinship groups.

**Separation from the land**

Land, as suggested above, is intrinsic to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Most Westerners have a completely different understanding of ‘land’. In general terms, to Indigenous Australians, the land and the people have a deeply **symbiotic** relationship. That is, the people have responsibility to care for the land through management, rituals and other actions that preserve and maintain the land.

By 1945, a number of major factors had resulted in the removal of a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their lands. This was especially the case when that land had an economic value for white settlers. The legal doctrine of **terra nullius** held that Australia was technically a land belonging to no one when the British arrived to establish their colonies, and so their occupation and ownership of the land were therefore legal. Governments began to reclaim reserve land and establish control over the people already living on reserves. Taking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from their land had a deeply traumatic effect. Separation from the land meant that they were not able to access food on the land and cultural practices and ceremonies associated with the land could not be carried out. It also meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were unable to draw effectively on the spiritual power of the Dreaming and the ancestor spirits. They were also restricted in their access to sacred sites and much tribal lore and law was lost.

**Separation from kinship groups**

Dispossession broke up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations and disturbed the religious and cultural beliefs and practices around which their lives had been centred, especially when people were separated or killed. Languages were often lost or severely restricted in their use. Ceremonies related to kinship were not enacted and so were lost. The place and role of tribal elders was undermined, and much cultural information regarding kinship obligations and taboos was also lost. Aboriginal peoples lost their sense of identity and belonging, not only to the land, but also to each other. This psychological effect was not perceived by most Europeans, who did not understand the deep cultural attachment Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had to their land, and the support networks of their kinship groups.

The **Stolen Generations** are a term used to describe the many children of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and ‘mixed’ blood

---

**Source 3.2 Separation from the land**

Litely ‘land belonging to no one’, the doctrine that Australia was owned by no one, and thus open to European settlement
who were removed from their families to be cared for on missions, in institutions such as the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls’ Training Home, or fostered with white families. The stated aim of removing children from their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families was to protect them from the perceived abuses of the Indigenous communities, to ensure they were given a good education, and to help them assimilate into Western society.

While some have argued that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, especially those who had European blood, were being neglected or abused by their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, it is difficult to prove the extent to which this occurred. In any case, given the high numbers of children removed from their families, it is difficult to believe that all had been in harmful family environments.

Perhaps one of the greatest ongoing effects of the Stolen Generations is the loss of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. As it was predominantly an oral culture, the removal of a generation from the lineage of cultural transmission means that far fewer children received their cultural heritage in its complete form. Instead, they were integrated to various extents into European culture.

Today, there are many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have lost touch with the specific knowledge and culture of their tribes. They feel the loss of this heritage deeply.

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Children from Their Families was begun in 1995 and published its report, Bringing Them Home, in 1997. The final report was based on the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who had been forcibly separated from their families and had lost their language, culture, identity, links with the land and thus their spirituality. In many cases, they never saw their family members again. Controversially, the report concluded that genocide had taken place. While this removal was primarily a government initiative, Christian churches have acknowledged that they were complicit in the Stolen Generations and have sought ways of repairing the great damage done.

One of the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report was for an official apology by the Commonwealth Government to the Stolen Generations. Throughout the late 1990s the conservative Howard government chose not to deliver this apology. Prime Minister John Howard believed that, however wrong their actions were, people who took Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children from their homes had had the right intentions.

One of the first acts by the Rudd Labor government, elected in 2007, was to apologise. On 13 February 2008 the nation stopped as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered these words:

I move:
That today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations – this blemished chapter in our nation’s history. The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.

DID YOU KNOW?

The film Rabbit Proof Fence by Phillip Noyce (2002) is based on the memoirs of Doris Pilkington Garimara and gives a shocking account of how Western Australian bureaucrats such as A. O. Neville managed racial ‘integration’ in the early twentieth century. Although not all Australians believe the film is completely accurate, it is still a startling dramatisation of themes regarding the Stolen Generations and reflects the prevailing attitude in Australia at that time.
**FURTHERMORE**

Access the Indigenous Law Resources website via the link at http://cambridge.edu.au/redirect/?id=5732 and scan the *Bringing Them Home* report to find a testimony from an Aboriginal person who was taken from their family. What does this testimony reveal about the implications of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families?

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry.

**Continuing effects of dispossession**

As time has progressed, the effects of dispossession have become evident in many aspects of life in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. As well as the despair that is often felt, there are other aspects including health problems, such as kidney disease, loss of eyesight, higher suicide rates and rates of incarceration. Other effects include drug and alcohol problems, lack of education opportunities and problems of housing and access to community services.

**Land rights movement**

The land rights movement is closely connected to rights for Aboriginal people in general. To reclaim land means, for Aboriginal peoples, to reconnect with their cultures and with their Dreaming stories (if these stories have not already been completely lost). In some circles it has been thought that Indigenous Australians did not strongly oppose the European move to take over land in Australia; but there has been long been resistance, such as the efforts of warriors, for example, Wyndradyne in the Bathurst area, and the protests in 1938 at the Australian sesquicentenary (150-year anniversary).

**The 1967 referendum**

The 1967 referendum was a very important step in the movement for equality for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. On 27 May 1967, the Australian people were asked to vote on two questions in a national referendum.

1. **Section 127 of the Constitution stated that in working out the population of Australia in a census ‘Aboriginal natives shall not be counted’**.
   - Question 1 asked the people to overturn this so that Aboriginal people would now be counted in the census.
2. **Section 51 of the Constitution stated that the Commonwealth Government could pass laws about ‘the people of any race other than the Aboriginal race in any state’**.
   - Question 2 asked the people to overturn this so that the Commonwealth Government would have the power to make laws regarding Aboriginal peoples.

The referendum had nothing to do with making Aboriginal people citizens or giving...
them the vote. As Minister for Territories Paul Hasluck announced in Parliament in 1961, citizenship had been gained by 1961 and Aboriginal people received the vote in federal elections in 1962.

There was overwhelming support across the country for these changes. The ‘yes’ vote was supported by both the Holt Liberal government and the Labor Party. Both referendum questions were accepted by over 90 per cent of the Australian people and by every state and territory. It was a significant moral victory and one of the few successful referenda in Australia.

Native title
Since the 1970s, the issue of Aboriginal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights has been significant in national politics. It is an issue that has often been misunderstood and has caused sharp divisions among the Australian people.

When European nations settled lands outside of Europe, they usually signed treaties with the original inhabitants. This occurred between the British and the Maori in New Zealand (the Treaty of Waitangi; 1840), and between American settlers and Native American tribes. The treaties were often one-sided, but the principle of prior ownership was accepted in these documents. If uninhabited land was discovered, it was declared *terra nullius*. Captain James Cook declared this when he landed in eastern Australia in 1770, and Captain Arthur Phillip accepted the idea in 1788. Cook and Phillip believed there were very few Aboriginal people. These actions meant they felt that no treaty had to be signed with the local inhabitants. It was not until the 1960s that the issue of Indigenous land rights raised its head in Australian politics.

• In 1963 the Yirrkala people from the Gove Peninsula in the Northern Territory sent a petition ‘written on bark’ to the Commonwealth Parliament, protesting about being driven off their land to make way for bauxite mining by the Nabalco company.
  – The bark petition failed, as the Northern Territory Supreme Court confirmed the notion of *terra nullius* and argued the Yirrkala people had no special claim over the land.

• In 1972 the Aboriginal ‘Tent Embassy’ was set up on the lawns in front of Parliament House.
  – The Tent Embassy highlighted both the claim for land rights and the awful living conditions of most Aboriginal people. It was a statement that the Indigenous people were ‘aliens’ in their own land and the Tent Embassy received international attention.
  – The Aboriginal flag was raised at this time.

• In 1974, the Woodward Royal Commission delivered its report into the issue of Aboriginal land rights in federal territory.
  – In a gesture of support, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam travelled to the Northern Territory and handed over to Vincent Lingiari and the Gurindji people some of the land they had been denied in court.
  – Whitlam symbolically poured soil into Lingiari’s hands.

• In 1976 the Fraser government passed the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*.
  – Aboriginal peoples could now claim Crown land not being used by other people.
  – An Aboriginal Lands Council was established to control this land.

• In 1985, Aboriginal peoples were handed ownership of Uluru (Ayers Rock). Ultimately these were largely symbolic gestures. During the 1980s, state governments moved on the land rights issue. Western Australia and Queensland were largely unsympathetic, being more concerned about maintaining the rights of mining companies and pastoralists. Little was actually achieved in recognising land rights.

The Mabo case
‘Native title’ is a legal term which recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to the use and occupation of lands with which they have maintained a continuing, traditional connection. In the
1970s, the Queensland Government began to remove the rights of the people of Murray (Mer) Island in the Torres Strait. One of the Meriam people, Eddie Mabo, took the Queensland Government to court to try to stop this happening. He lost the case. The decision was appealed, and the case eventually reached the High Court of Australia in Canberra. The High Court decided in favour of the Meriam people and recognised the principle of native title (sadly, Eddie Mabo had died by this time). The High Court’s 1992 Mabo decision was extremely important:

- By accepting the principle of native title, the notion of terra nullius was overturned. The court decision stated that native title to land had existed before the arrival of European settlers.

In 1993 the Native Title Act was passed. This Act accepted the notion of native title in law and also recognised the rights of owners of freehold property. Nevertheless, pastoralists and miners were still concerned. Many leased (rented) property from the government. Could Indigenous people claim native title over these lands? The new law caused enormous insecurity.

The Wik case
This issue was dealt with by the Wik decision of 1996. In this case, the High Court argued that native title could coexist with the rights of leaseholders. However, the pastoralists and the mining companies who leased lands were still concerned that the court was too much in favour of native title. This led to the 1998 Native Title (Amendment) Act (sometimes called ‘the 10-point plan’) passed by the Liberal Howard government. This Act stated that native title and leasehold rights could coexist but that, in any conflict of interest, the rights of the leaseholders would come first. This act returned some power to state governments who could extinguish native title in the national interest.

**The importance of the Dreaming for land rights**
The Dreaming is essential for Aboriginal peoples and their expression of their spirituality. Similarly, the land is essential for the Dreaming. They are inextricably linked. Thus land rights build upon the concepts of the Dreaming and are essential for its expression. One of the major aims of the land rights movement is to allow for the proper expression of the Dreaming.

**EXERCISE 3.2**
1. Describe the key events in the land rights movement.
2. Highlight the main people involved in the land rights debate, both for and against.
3. Explain why the issue of land rights is important to Indigenous peoples.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY 3.2**
1. Look up the names mentioned in the text and write notes on their relationship to the land rights movement.
2. Construct a table defining the key terms that relate to the land rights movement.
3. Prepare a debate on the following topic: ‘Westerners do not understand the issues involved in the land rights movement.’
3.3 RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN AUSTRALIA – 1945 TO THE PRESENT

The religious landscape

Religious expression in Australia has changed significantly since 1945. Australia has become a microcosm of the religious life of the world, and almost every religious tradition, ancient and modern, is represented by the hundreds of communities that dot the suburbs of Australia’s largest cities in the twenty-first century. The increasingly universal nature of Australian society has been created out of, and in spite of, an isolationist and racist history. Australian Commonwealth immigration policy played the central role in restricting immigration from 1901 until the 1960s. The policy itself was a reflection of the ideal of a homogenised white Australia.

Thus Australia remains, in essence, a Christian nation. Public holidays tend to reflect Western Christian rituals, in particular Easter and Christmas. Christian prayers are said at the opening of Parliament, and when politicians have a faith to declare to voters it tends to be Christian. Nevertheless, religious affiliations have changed radically since 1945. Christianity still claims to be the majority religious tradition but others are growing more quickly and there is a significant growth of those with no religious affiliation. Some would say that Australia is now a post-Christian society.

Changing patterns of religious adherence: using the Australian census

Questions about religious adherence are optional questions on the census forms and there has been a variety of responses over the years. Christianity is still the largest religious tradition in Australia, despite its reduction in the percentage of the Australian population. Within Christianity there are various expressions and these have changed significantly over the years. Since 1981, Catholics have replaced Anglicans as the largest denomination. Sources 3.5 to 3.7 show the numbers and percentages of people who responded to the religious question on the census forms for 1996, 2001 and 2011. (When updated Census figures are released, a new table and commentary will be placed on http://www.cambridge.edu.au/GO.)

These tables reveal interesting information, some of which is immediately obvious.

Source 3.5 Numbers of adherents to religious traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>199 812</td>
<td>357 813</td>
<td>528 977</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>12 582 746</td>
<td>12 764 342</td>
<td>13 150 670</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>67 279</td>
<td>95 473</td>
<td>275 535</td>
<td>188.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>200 855</td>
<td>281 578</td>
<td>476 290</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>79 805</td>
<td>83 993</td>
<td>97 336</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>68 600</td>
<td>92 400</td>
<td>342 476</td>
<td>270.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>2 948 888</td>
<td>2 905 993</td>
<td>4 796 786</td>
<td>65.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>1 550 585</td>
<td>1 835 598</td>
<td>1 839 649</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source 3.6 Percentages of religious traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Christianity is by far the largest religious tradition in Australia, although its share of the Australian population has dropped from 70.9 per cent in 1996 to 61.1 per cent in 2011. Catholics and Anglicans are the largest Christian denominations and the Uniting Church has experienced the greatest decline during those ten years. While small in numbers, the Pentecostal churches have experienced the largest proportional growth of Christian denominations, an increase of over 22 per cent.

Other information that can be gleaned from the census includes the fact that, apart from Judaism, the non-Christian religious traditions are growing at a much faster rate than Christianity. Judaism has remained around 0.5 per cent of the population, while Hinduism is now the fastest-growing religious tradition. The other four main religious traditions, Buddhism (2.5 per cent, the second-largest religious tradition), Islam (2.2 per cent), Hinduism (1.3 per cent) and Judaism (0.5 per cent) make up only 6.5 per cent of the Australian population.

The percentage of those who declare they have no religion has increased to 22.3 per cent and of those who do not answer the optional religion question to 8.6 per cent.

As well as the Australian census, information can be gained from other research tools. One of the most significant is the National Church Life Survey (NCLS), which is conducted by a cooperative venture of churches in Australia. The last NCLS was held in 2011 and a wide range of results are available on the NCLS website. The information gathered by the NCLS is more detailed about patterns of church attendance. Its main drawback is that the survey is conducted during a church service on a particular Sunday, so it does not gather information about those who are not in the church that particular day. However, the NCLS survey results are extensively used by religious groups to understand religious attitudes and to plan for the future.

The Christian Research Association (CRA) also conducts statistical and other research relevant to religious groups in Australia. The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Religion in Australia also analyses religious data from the census.

The current religious landscape

Christianity as the major religious tradition

When Australia was colonised by the British, they brought Christianity, and the Church of England in particular. Since World War II, there have been significant changes to Christianity and its composition. Catholicism was present on the First Fleet, but it remained second in numbers to the Church of England (Anglican Church). Since 1945, the Irish/English composition of Christianity has changed with the coming of Orthodox Christianity from Eastern Europe and Southern European Catholics from Italy, Malta, Spain, Croatia and Poland. In the 1986 Australian census, the Catholic Church became the largest denomination and has retained that position. The reasons for the changes to the Australian religious community are myriad, but some of the main ones include immigration, conversion, the rise of New Age religions, secularism and the rise of atheism and non-religious worldviews.

Despite a decline in the percentage of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>4,799,000</td>
<td>5,001,600</td>
<td>5,439,300</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>3,903,300</td>
<td>3,881,200</td>
<td>3,679,900</td>
<td>-5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting</td>
<td>1,334,900</td>
<td>1,248,700</td>
<td>1,065,800</td>
<td>-14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>675,500</td>
<td>637,500</td>
<td>599,500</td>
<td>-6.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>497,000</td>
<td>529,400</td>
<td>563,100</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>295,200</td>
<td>309,200</td>
<td>352,500</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>250,400</td>
<td>251,900</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>174,700</td>
<td>194,600</td>
<td>238,000</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Christians, Christianity (at 61.1 per cent in 2011) is by far the major religious tradition. Christianity is reflected in the lifestyles of many Australians, the legal and political system and the dominant culture.

**Immigration**

As suggested, immigration was extremely important in influencing Australia’s religious profile in the years following 1945. Prior to 1945 the Immigration Restriction Act 1901 (popularly called the ‘White Australia policy’) ensured that those who came to live in Australia were primarily of white Anglo-Saxon origin. Immediately following World War II, most migrants came from Europe and were Christian. Postwar migrants included Italian Catholics and Orthodox Christians from Eastern Europe and Greece.

With the Vietnam War, there was an influx of refugees (known as ‘boat people’) from South-East Asia. To take one example, many Vietnamese who arrived in Australia were Buddhist, but because Vietnam had been a French colony, many were also Catholic. Their arrival coincided with a relaxing of the White Australia policy and the introduction of *multiculturalism*, which replaced the former government policy of cultural assimilation. Refugees from Vietnam, Thailand and Cambodia brought Buddhism, those from India and Fiji brought Hinduism, Sri Lankans brought both Buddhism and Hinduism, while refugees from Lebanon, Turkey, Indonesia and Bosnia brought Islam. Australia was not only a multicultural society; it was also to become a multi-faith society.

**Hinduism in Australia**

Hindus first came to Australia from what is now Indonesia, as traders to northern Australia as early as a thousand years ago. After colonisation they came as labourers, such as Fijian workers on the sugarcane fields in Queensland, and as itinerant traders throughout remote Australia. Many also came as servants of those British people who had lived in India. Many left as the White Australia policy came into force, but some stayed and others arrived. Due to pre-Commonwealth immigration, in 1911 there were 4106 ‘Hindoos’ in Australia. ‘Hindoo’ was a census classification that included Muslim Afghans, Punjabi Sikhs and Indian Hindus. By 1947, only 2189 people identified themselves as ‘Indian’, an indication of the effectiveness of the White Australia policy. Although it had been progressively modified since 1958, the White Australia policy ceased to exist completely after the election in 1972 of Gough Whitlam and the Australian Labor Party.

Since the abolition of the White Australia policy, there has been a steady stream of Hindus arriving, mainly from India, Sri Lanka and Fiji. These are mainly professionals and their families who have wanted to escape the restrictions of the caste system and the strict application of their religious tradition or escape from ongoing civil war in Sri Lanka. Although escaping their culture to an extent, once in Australia, homesickness and the need for a familiar way of life leads many Hindus to create religious communities and temples here.

About half of Australia’s Hindus live in Sydney, with over 90 per cent living in capital cities. Temples have been built in all Australian states except Tasmania, particularly in the capital cities. One of the most impressive is the temple at Helensburgh, south of Sydney. This is a temple dedicated to Vishnu (more accurately, Lord Venkateshvara, an *avatar* (manifestation) of Vishnu). It is here that the annual festival to Lord Ganesh takes place. This is the most popular festivity among Hindus in New South Wales. There is also an impressive Murugan Temple at Mays Multiculturalism

Policy that recognises cultural diversity within an overall cultural structure rather than expecting a nation to only reflect one particular cultural position.

Source 3.8 Ganesha festival celebrations at Helensburgh, NSW

Source 3.9 The Hindu community in Australia celebrating with Indian dance
Hill, a Shaiva temple catering for the Tamil community.

While Hinduism has largely been expressed in terms of the Indian community, there has been some growth of Hinduism among Westerners, mainly as a result of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness, commonly known as the Hare Krishnas.

The trend towards New Age religions has also introduced a number of Hindu concepts into the language and practice of many people who may not necessarily consider themselves religious. These practices include meditation and yoga and concepts such as reincarnation and karma.

The other experience of Hinduism familiar to many Australians is through travel to Hindu countries such as India, Sri Lanka, Fiji and one of the most popular destinations, the island of Bali in Indonesia.

Hinduism is in general a religious tradition that tolerates diversity. In Australia, Hinduism has a fairly homogenous expression because it is so linked to the cultural and racial origins of the Indian subcontinent.

In the 2011 census, the percentage of Hindus increased from 0.5 per cent in 2001 to 1.3 per cent of the population, and is now the fastest-growing religious tradition in Australia. This suggests that Hindu immigration is increasing and that the religion is slowly spreading. Although this is still not a large percentage of the population, it does show how immigration affects the distribution of religions in Australia.

Buddhism in Australia

The earliest Buddhists in Australia were probably the Chinese who were part of the gold-rushes of the 1850s. The Chinese have always had an ability to accept a diversity of religious expressions so, while many Chinese Australians were probably also Confucian, Daoist, or worshipped ancestors and local or clan deities, they were all classified as Buddhist. Few remained in Australia after the gold-rushes, and many more were discouraged by the Immigration Restriction Act 1901.

Australian society did have several prominent sympathisers with Buddhism through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These included a number of Christian Buddhist groups (although the Australian Christian churches were formally opposed to Buddhism) and the religiously curious, such as Prime Minister Alfred Deakin. Deakin was the second prime minister of Australia and a former follower of the Theosophical Society, which encompassed Buddhist teachings. While Deakin may have supported the concept of ‘pure Buddhism’, he was also an ardent supporter of the Immigration Restriction Act.

In the 1970s, Buddhism grew with the influx of Indo-Chinese refugees following the Vietnam War and communist victories in South-East Asia. The growth of Buddhism in Australia during the 1960s and 1970s coincided with growing disenchantment with traditional Western organised religion. There was also a growing interest in Eastern mysticism, of which Buddhism provides examples. The rise of New Age spirituality, which is itself heavily influenced by Buddhism, also contributed. Many Westerners are attracted to Buddhism as an expression of spirituality that is not necessarily theistic.

The period from the 1980s saw renewed efforts in Buddhist evangelism, including the building of temples, public seminars and visits by the Tibetan leader-in-exile, the Dalai Lama. His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama is a popular speaker in Australia, often galvanising support for the Free Tibet movement.

Because of the arrival of South-East Asian migrants, as well as its appeal to disillusioned Westerners and other ‘seekers of the truth’, Buddhism is one of the fastest-growing religious traditions in Australia. While still only 2.5 per cent of the population of Australia in 2011, it has grown from 1.9 per cent in 2001, making it the second-largest religious tradition in Australia after Christianity. Of the religious traditions other than Christianity, Buddhism seems to have the most appeal to the Western population of Australia. Much of Buddhism’s growth and diversity reflect the immigration patterns of the past thirty years. Often Buddhist groups seek to build temples and invite monks that reflect their particular cultural roots.

While Buddhism certainly reflects the diverse cultural origins of recent settlers

New Age movement

Promotes and develops individual ‘spirituality’ rather than (institutionalised) religion; New Age can include astrologers, yoga practitioners, séance attendees, shamans, neo-pagans and a whole range of other religious practitioners.

Meditation

The practice of emptying the mind to think or reflect on an aspect of God or religious belief.

Yoga

Any of various systems of discipline in the Hindu philosophical system concerned with achieving the union of the mind and body with the universal spirit.

Reincarnation

The concept of rebirth in physical form to the Earth – see samsara.

Source 3.10 There are two Chinese ‘Joss Houses in Sydney: Ming Yue in Retreat Street, Alexandria (built 1908) and Sze Yup Temple in Glebe (built about 1898, and shown here). Both temples have a variety of deities to worship including the Buddhist Guanyin bodhisattva and Chinese folk deities such as the red-faced Lord Guan.
in Australia, there are several factors that appeal to Australians in general. With the rise of a globalised society, Australians are more familiar with the teachings of religious traditions other than Christianity. Concern for the environment, the value given to life, vegetarianism and related concepts have appealed to those Australians seeking alternative values and lifestyles. Practices identified with Buddhism, such as meditation, are commonly practised and the atheistic individualism that underlies Buddhist philosophy is also attractive to modern Australians.

**Islam in Australia**

Islam is the third-largest religious tradition in Australia, after Christianity and Buddhism. There are nearly 500,000 Muslims in Australia, making up about 2.2 per cent of the population (2011). These Muslims come from all over the world, and from virtually every continent. About 36 per cent were born in Australia and 50 per cent are under 24 years of age. Most Muslims in Australia live in Sydney and Melbourne, with concentrations in certain suburbs. Mosques have been built in some of these areas, such as the Gallipoli Mosque in Auburn (by Turkish Australians), the Lakemba Mosque in Sydney (by Lebanese Australians) and the Preston Mosque in Melbourne.

Islam is probably the first monotheistic religious tradition to have come to Australia. As early as the mid-eighteenth century, fishermen from Macassar (southern Sulawesi, in modern Indonesia) visited the north and west Australian coasts. There is also some evidence that Indigenous worship in Cape York includes reference to the Arabic term for God, ‘Allah’. When European settlement began to extend into central Australia from the mid-nineteenth century, camels were used to aid that expansion. Experienced camel drivers were brought into Australia, mainly from northwest India and Afghanistan, particularly during the mid-nineteenth century (see Chapter 2).

Post-World War II migration brought Muslims as well as Christians from countries such as Turkey and Lebanon. Since the abolition of the White Australia policy and the influx of refugees from the Middle East since the late 1970s, Muslim numbers have increased again. Migrants have come as refugees from conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon and the former Yugoslavia (as well as general migration from these countries), and also Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia.

The majority of Muslims in Australia are Sunni Muslims, but there are significant Shi’ite groups (for example, the Al Zahra Mosque in Arncliff, Sydney) as well as smaller groups such as the Ahmadiyas. In the ongoing conflict between the USA and other Western nations and parts of the Arab world, Muslims have often been identified in the popular media as being the enemies of the West or of Christianity. This factor, and conflicts within...
CHAPTER 3 | RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA POST-1945

EXERCISE 3.3
1 Describe the role of the census in relation to the changing patterns of religious adherence.
2 How has the position of Christianity as a religious tradition in Australia changed over the years?
3 Explain how immigration has influenced the numbers of one religious tradition other than Christianity.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY 3.3
1 Identify one religious tradition other than Christianity in your area. Contact that group and interview a member to determine the way immigration has influenced that group.
2 Construct a graph of one aspect of the information contained in the census figures. Using that information, predict the movement of the figures in the next few years, explaining why you have drawn those conclusions.
3 Write a paragraph on the following topic: ‘As Christianity declines in Australia, it will soon be overtaken as the major religious tradition in Australia.’

the Muslim community, have made it more difficult for Islam to be accepted in Australia. The Cronulla riots of December 2005 demonstrated how racial and religious tensions can sometimes flare up. The distinctive dress of Muslim women, such as the *hijab* or headscarf, has also led to misunderstandings in Australia and overseas. From time to time the emergence of extremist Muslim groups, such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, feed hostility towards Islam. Islam in Australia is not a single identifiable cohesive community or practice. There is much diversity in Australian Islam. This ranges from traditional to liberal expressions of Muslim beliefs and practices, to the great diversity of the cultural backgrounds that exist in Australian Islam.

**Denominational switching**

Strictly speaking, ‘denominational switching’ means the exchange of church members between different Christian denominations. An example would be a Protestant Christian from the Anglican Church choosing to join a Uniting Church service because the style of worship and the attitudes of the congregation are preferable to that individual. While this switching sometimes takes place, adherence to Christianity in general continues its slow decline.

In the 2011 census, it can be seen that identification with the Anglican faith has continued to drop, while Pentecostal identification has slightly increased. Part of the reason for this shift is that some Anglicans are choosing to join Pentecostal services. Culturally, this can be explained in a number of ways. Pentecostal services are very much like rock concerts. Charismatic leaders preach with great authority and their services include rock-style bands often demanding a strong emotional response. Many Christians are attracted to the freshness and vitality of these services, with their emphasis on free forms of liturgy and contemporary music led by trained musicians and singers.

In 2007, accusations were made that Hillsong Church had ‘hijacked’ the *Australian Idol* television competition. Certainly many of the finalists were associated with Christian groups. Perhaps that is not so surprising. Many Christian churches have an emphasis on music and singing. How many pop and rock singers do you know of who have come from church backgrounds or church choirs?

CONSIDER

In 2007, accusations were made that Hillsong Church had ‘hijacked’ the *Australian Idol* television competition. Certainly many of the finalists were associated with Christian groups. Perhaps that is not so surprising. Many Christian churches have an emphasis on music and singing. How many pop and rock singers do you know of who have come from church backgrounds or church choirs?

**Source 3.14**
A Pentecostal (Hillsong) gathering at the Sydney Entertainment Centre
Hierarchies, and considerable thought has been given to how to address some of the issues involved, to counter the possible demise of some denominational structures.

In recent years the term ‘denominational switching’ has also been applied to other religious traditions, for example, referring to those who change from Orthodox to Progressive Judaism.

The rise of New Age religions

The 1960s saw a strong reaction to the postwar prosperity and general conservative attitudes found in most Western cultures. This coincided with the beginnings of an awareness of the globalised world, ease of travel, new forms of global communication and a lessening of commitment to traditional structures such as Christian churches. Although many of the New Age religions such as paganism, Wicca, the self-improvement movement and the Children of God do not feature in great numbers in the census, they are, nevertheless, part of a wider movement of interest towards non-Western or non-mainstream religions.

For a more extensive discussion of the New Age movement, see the comments in Chapter 16 in ‘New religious expression’.

Secularism

A significant number of Australians are not religious, and that number is growing. This trend could be due to far greater levels of technological and scientific knowledge plus the perseverance of many religions in antiquated and conservative attitudes, for example, towards women, and the scandals and disputes in several Christian institutions. Of lesser importance, perhaps, is that people no longer have to follow a specific religion to be a citizen of a country, or to hold a position of influence in (some) societies, as was the case a few hundred years ago. Whatever the reasons, more people are deciding that religion is irrelevant to their lives and are choosing to replace traditional religions with other worldviews or have no religion at all. The numbers of those unaffiliated to a religion increased in the 2011 census to 22.3 per cent of the population (see Source 3.6 on page 56).

It has been suggested that many people, including those who have no religious affiliation, may still pray or have spiritual experiences. This is discussed further in Chapter 16.

EXERCISE 3.4

1. What is meant by denominational switching? Give one example.
2. Explain what has led to the rise of the New Age movement?
3. Define ‘secularism’. How has it impacted on the religious life of the Australian community?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY 3.4

1. In a graphic form of your choice, illustrate the attractiveness of Pentecostalism in modern Australia.
2. Debate the following topic: ‘The New Age is just the old age reinvented.’
3. Talk to a religious person and a secular person. Construct a table illustrating the differences in their beliefs.

Religious dialogue in multi-faith Australia

Since 1945 religious denominations have sought to break down the barriers that separate them. These came from the sectarianism of previous years and the suspicion with which other religious traditions were regarded in the past. In a multicultural Australia, denominations cannot easily ignore each other. There have been significant moves since 1945 to develop dialogue and cooperation between the diverse groups. This has taken the form of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue. Ecumenism has a more particular emphasis than interfaith dialogue, focusing on cooperation within a particular religious tradition. It is a Christian term for discussions between different denominations of Christianity to increase understanding and effect social change cooperatively.

Interfaith dialogue is a conversation established between hierarchies of different religious faiths and their members, or initiated by members of the different religious traditions at a local level. The main aim of these conversations is to develop familiarity and promote understanding and dialogue.
Ecumenical movements

Ecumenism has developed as a growing movement due to several reasons. As rural towns grow smaller, churches have seen the need to work cooperatively and share resources. Together with this fact, there is less emphasis in Australian society on denominational difference and a growing belief in the need to emphasise the unity of Christians, part of a changing ethos in Australia and across the world.

National Council of Churches in Australia

The National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) has a number of departments that foster cooperation between the churches at formal and informal levels. It grew from several ecumenical organisations, such as the Australian Council of Churches (ACC), and was formed in 1994. An important task of the NCCA has been to reverse the racist and discriminatory legislation that was affecting the social dynamic in Australia. For example, the ACC passed a resolution in 1966 calling for several reforms in the White Australia policy. The stance of this Council represented the stance of Christianity as a whole, setting a precedent for what was to become a relentless movement against racism and towards multiculturalism. The NCCA also lobbies governments and other decision makers from a Christian perspective as well as providing resources for the churches and the Australian community. The NCCA is also involved in interfaith dialogue (see the following section).

NSW Ecumenical Council

The NSW Ecumenical Council (NSWEC) was established to give churches a shared voice when following their religious beliefs and undertaking. The NSW Ecumenical Council began in 1982, although it had its origins in 1946 as part of the development of the ACC and the NCCA. It encourages the pursuit of social justice and operates many cooperative charity events. A central tenet of this organisation is the idea of unity between those who believe in God. This attitude allows the involved churches to focus on the tasks they perceive as their Christian duties, rather than competing with one another while seeking the same ends. The NSWEC also is involved in community projects such as helping settle refugees and providing accommodation to the poor.

Uniting Church in Australia

One concrete example of ecumenism at work in a formal sense is the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), which took place on 22 June 1977. The UCA has sought to develop liturgies that reflect its Australian context, encouraged social justice programs, sought to minister to different cultural communities and supported those discriminated against in Australian society, including women, who are now in positions of leadership, Indigenous Australians and the homosexual community.

While much of the move towards ecumenism is formalised at official church levels, often it is the work of significant people such as Reverend Fred McKay, former Superintendent of the Australian Inland Mission, which represents ecumenism for ordinary Australians (see the Case Study on page 64). There are many other groups involved in ecumenical projects, many at a local level and often unacknowledged at official or national levels. Other examples include the cooperative teaching of special religious education in schools, the National Church Life Survey and academic institutions such as the Australian College of Theology.

Interfaith dialogue

The years since World War II have seen the Australian community reassess its attitudes to many issues, including the place of religious traditions other than Christianity. Even Christian churches have reconsidered their long-held view that other religions are errors at best, or the work of the Devil at worst. This has led, especially since the 1970s, to a new involvement in interfaith dialogue.

Much of this dialogue is at an official level, with groups such as the NCCA involved in discussions with official bodies representing other religious traditions. The NCCA has established the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews. Some specific groups that also meet include the Council of Christians and Jews, in several states, which seeks to develop services and education seminars as well as encourage dialogue. The Affinity Intercultural Foundation was established by Muslim youth to help develop harmony with fellow Australians, and ISRA (Islamic Sciences and Research Academy of Australia) focuses on education.

On the Dalai Lama’s visit to Australia in 2007, the Australian National University in Canberra hosted an interfaith dialogue symposium. Several religious organisations attended. Other groups are involved in interfaith dialogue, such as the Association for Studies of Religion, that supports the teaching of Studies of Religion in schools, and regularly organises teachers’ workshops that include speakers from a variety of religious traditions. Indeed, the provision of Studies of Religion in
the NSW Higher School Certificate is, in itself, an example of interfaith dialogue.

In modern Australia, it is expected that religious traditions will find opportunities to maintain open dialogue in a multicultural and multi-faith society.

Aboriginal spirituality and religious traditions moving towards reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to the acknowledgement by various groups in Australia of the great injustices done to Indigenous Australians and the dispossession that occurred in the past. It also expresses their willingness and commitment to rectify these wrongs, where possible, to improve the position of Aboriginal peoples in the future.

After the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation ended in December 2000, Recognition Australia was established as a body aimed at providing an ongoing national effort in reconciliation. In order to benefit all Australians, Recognition Australia aims to encourage and form stronger relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australians. Its board of directors is made up of people who are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. These people are esteemed leaders in their respective fields and are all driven to stop at nothing in order to foster reconciliation in Australia. Their vision is for Australia to be a country that guarantees an equal life chance for all, and one which recognises and respects the important contribution, place and culture of the first Australians, that is, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. As a non-profit and independent body, their ambition is to remove the obvious gap in life expectancy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous children.

Reconciliation has become an important expression of spirituality in Australia,
especially as religious traditions recognise the mistakes of the past. Most Christian churches have developed groups that represent Indigenous Australians in the leadership of the denomination, such as the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (Uniting Church), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (Catholic) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council (Anglican). Many churches have ordained Aboriginal clergy and Nungalinya College in Darwin trains Indigenous clergy for the Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches. Other religious traditions have also actively supported reconciliation in Australia, including Jewish leaders, the Federation of Islamic Councils, the Buddhist Peace Centre and Vishva Hindu Prashad.

In 1996, the leaders of the Catholic and Anglican churches, as well as other Christian and Indigenous leaders, met with the Australian government to call for reconciliation. That call was largely ignored officially, but Christians and other religious leaders have forged ahead, providing examples of leadership to the nation’s leaders. There have been significant changes in the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and many aspects of Australian society. This was best expressed when thousands of people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge on 28 May 2000 to call for reconciliation. Other walks for reconciliation took place across the nation.

The religious profile of Australia has changed significantly since 1945, reflecting the diversity of the Australian community and beliefs. Now, recognition of Indigenous rights includes Welcome to Country and the use of Indigenous symbols in many church services or other religious celebrations and actions, such as smoking ceremonies. It is significant that the oldest inhabitants of this land are also part of this changing life and faith, and that recognition is given to the implications of the Dreaming.

**Source 3.16** An Aboriginal speaker at a Baptist ‘Make Indigenous Poverty History’ meeting

**EXERCISE 3.5**

1. Define the terms ‘ecumenism’ and ‘interfaith dialogue’. Make sure the difference between the two is evident.
2. Describe one example of ecumenism, noting its significance.
3. Explain one example of interfaith dialogue, noting its significance.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITY 3.5**

1. Write a paragraph about either ecumenism or interfaith dialogue, and evaluate in that paragraph its importance to a multi-faith Australian society in the future.
2. Find a Dreaming story that could relate to the teachings of one other religious tradition. Rewrite the story making those links more obvious.
3. Explore recent reconciliation efforts undertaken by a religious tradition and write a paragraph explaining how that religious tradition has, or has not, affirmed Aboriginal spirituality.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The Dreaming is central to Aboriginal spirituality.
- Kinship, ceremonial life and obligations to the land and people must be expressed as part of Aboriginal spirituality.
- Land is one of the most important issues to Indigenous Australians.
- Dispossession was the active policy of the colonisers of Australia.
- Dispossession has affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life through separation from the land and from kinship groups.
- The Stolen Generations has had a lasting impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- The fight for land and land rights has been evident in Australia since the early days of colonisation.
- Court decisions, such as Mabo and Wik, together with the Native Title Act 1993, have sought to redress the wrongs of the past.
- The Dreaming is inexorably linked to the land.
- Census data reveals much information about trends in religious adherence.
- Christianity is declining as a percentage of the population while other religious traditions are increasing.
- There is a large rise in the numbers who have no religious adherence.
- Christianity is still, by far, the major religious tradition in Australia.
- Immigration has had a great impact on religious expression in Australia since 1945, especially in the growth of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam.
- Pentecostal churches have increased through the growing trend of denominational switching.
- The New Age movement has had a profound effect on the religious expression of Australians and is now firmly entrenched in Australian culture.
- The increase in the ‘No religion’ category of the census reveals a growing move towards secularism in Australia and a decline in commitment to Christianity in particular.
- Ecumenism is a growing significant movement in Australian Christianity.
- Fred McKay was an important Australian ecumenist.
- Interfaith dialogue is also now a feature of Australian religious life.
- All religious traditions seek to move towards reconciliation in their relationships with Indigenous Australians.
HSC EXAM-STYLE QUESTIONS

In the HSC examination, students will be required to answer 10 multiple-choice questions (1 mark each) and one short-answer question (5 marks).

SECTION I – MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS (10 MARKS)

1. What best describes the relationship between Aboriginal people and the land?
   (A) Aboriginal people own the land
   (B) The land was terra nullius
   (C) Aboriginal people have obligations to care for their ‘country’
   (D) No corroborees are to be performed on the land

2. Dispossession has contributed to:
   (A) Aboriginal peoples moving to the coast
   (B) A breakdown in ceremonial life
   (C) Identification with a totem
   (D) The Dreaming

3. What was one of the decisions of the Mabo High Court judgement?
   (A) The abolition of terra nullius
   (B) The Wik decision
   (C) The Howard 10-Point Plan
   (D) Land rights and pastoral leases could coexist

4. What issue was identified as most significant in the Stolen Generations report Bringing Them Home?
   (A) Dispossession
   (B) Tribal law
   (C) The White Australia policy
   (D) Ceremonies

5. What was the effect of the Native Title Act?
   (A) Pastoral leases extinguish native title
   (B) Native title no longer exists
   (C) Acceptance of the concept of native title
   (D) Mining cannot happen on pastoral leases

6. Australia’s multicultural and multi-faith society is the result of:
   (A) Australia’s convict past
   (B) Immigration following World War I
   (C) Religious conversion
   (D) Abolition of the White Australia policy

Refer to Source 3.17 when answering questions 7 and 8.

Source 3.17 Percentages of religious traditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christianity</td>
<td>70.9%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>61.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. What is the second-largest religious tradition in Australia?
   (A) Christianity
   (B) Buddhism
   (C) Islam
   (D) No religion

1
8 Which of the following accounts for the changes in the percentage of those who indicate 'No religion'?
(A) Immigration
(B) Denominational switching
(C) Rise of the New Age religions
(D) Secularism

9 Which of the following is an example of ecumenism?
(A) National Council of Christians and Jews
(B) Uniting Church of Australia
(C) Pentecostal churches
(D) Affinity Intercultural Organisation

10 Which of the following is an example of interfaith dialogue?
(A) National Council of Churches
(B) Council for Christians and Jews
(C) Uniting Church of Australia
(D) The New Age movement

SHORT-ANSWER QUESTION (5 MARKS)
With reference to the present religious landscape, and using your own knowledge, account for the growth of the 'No religion' category in the Australian census.