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Lecture Series: Mission in Australia: Challenges and Opportunities

2. The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: The Australian Context

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Introduction: Contextual Mission

I find the first words in Stephen Bevans' book, *Models of Contextual Theology*, very powerful:

> There is no such thing as "theology"; there is only *contextual* theology: *feminist* theology, *black* theology, *liberation* theology, *Filipino* theology, *Asian-American* theology, *African* theology, and so forth. … The contextualization of theology—the attempt to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context—is really a theological imperative.[1]

This perspective in theology differs from that of classical theology, which pursued truth as if it could be stated for all times and all places. Contextual theology has grown over the last hundred years or so—but particularly in the last forty years— as we have become aware of how important human culture is shaping our reality.

What applies to theology also applies to missiology. There is no such thing as missiology; there is only contextual missiology. So it is an urgent and important task to continually explore our context and ask what is the appropriate way to "live into" the reign of God here and now, in this place and at this time.

What will mission mean in my neighbourhood or yours? What will mission mean in Calcutta or in Fitzroy Crossing? What did mission mean in Australia over the last decade when it was ignoring the human rights and dignity of asylum seekers? What does mission mean to young people who binge drink and find themselves caught up in violence? What does mission mean in inner-city Perth, as distinct from King's Cross in Sydney? What does mission mean in outback Western Australia, among farmers, or among mine workers, or among Indigenous people?

We need to be creative and innovative. We need to affirm widely varying approaches to being the church in society. The task of allowing the Good News to take shape differently in different contexts is one that is ongoing, critical and demanding.

Today I can only sketch some of the contours at the level of our national context. For other levels, such as the context of Western Australia, or Perth, or the context of your suburb, you will need to take the exploration further.

[1] Stephen B Bevans, *Models of contextual theology*, Rev. & Exp. ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 3.

We need to take into account not only place, but also time. Australia was a very different place when I was born at the middle of last century. Contextual mission demands that we keep our eyes on the times as well as where we find ourselves.

I quoted Steve Bevans' opening lines a moment ago. Charles Dickens penned probably the most famous opening lines in English fiction in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, which also has the distinction of being the most printed English book of all time. I'm going to suggest that his sentiments also apply to Australia today. We all know at least the first two clauses, but I'll quote a bit more to you:

> It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way.[2]

What I think Dickens meant by these wonderfully evocative lines was that it was a time of great contradiction and rapid change. He was referring to Paris and London in the years just after the American War of Independence and just before the French Revolution. He goes straight on to say that, actually, the same could be said of his period, around 1860, seventy years later. And I have the same feeling about Australian society and, in particular, our opportunities for mission today. There are exciting opportunities to engage with Australians around us as Christians today, and yet mission in any western country, as Lesslie Newbigin said, is "the most challenging missionary frontier of our time".[3] To echo Dickens, it is the age of wisdom, it is the age of foolishness; it is the epoch of belief, it is the epoch of disbelief.

Let's look at a few contextual factors we need to take account of as the church sets about living into and announcing the gracious reign of God in Australia.

1. The European Invasion Still Haunts Us

There are two foundational facts about the European settlement of Australia in 1788 which affect us to this day.

The first is that none of the first settlers really wanted to be here. They saw this place as a harsh outdoor prison, situated at the end of the world, for the scum of Britain and those who had to look after them. As a result, Australians are not as patriotic as the Americans. We don't have a long and proud history like Britain. And we've generally clung to the edge of the continent, living in cities, while at the same time admiring the pioneer spirit of those who live in the bush. We've been called exiles, migrants, Europeans in Asia. Who are we and do we really belong here?

The second foundational fact is more important. We Europeans

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[2] Charles Dickens, *A tale of two cities* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003 (1859)), available at <http://www.citygateweb.com/ebooks/dickens-ataleoftwocities.pdf>, 1.
[3] Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The gospel and Western culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 20.

- invaded this land without a treaty,
- shot and killed the indigenous people when they resisted,
- moved them off their land,
- introduced diseases which wiped them out by the thousands,
- destroyed most of their culture,
- treated them as invisible,
- discriminated against them,
- led them to despair and hopelessness,
- introduced them to alcoholism and welfare dependence,
- let them languish in third-world conditions,
- removed their children and
- denied their claims to land.

Only in 2007 was an official apology been given by the federal government for one aspect of this mistreatment, the removal of children. It's a good start and the political mood is changing.

I agree with Norman Habel that Australia will only find its soul as a nation when the long journey of reconciliation is taken, involving personal relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people, symbolic actions of healing, justice, a treaty, compensation, and practical steps in health, education, housing and so on.[4] The churches have a central role in this, because reconciliation is at the heart of the kingdom of God.[5]

2. We Swing between Brashness and Uncertainty

The world often sees us as a bunch of Crocodile Dundees or Steve Irwins. Some of it is endearing. Speaking at least of the dominant cultural image of Australians, we're informal, egalitarian, anti-authoritarian, and so on. Some of it is ugly—the drinking, the low-brow behaviour, the loud Australian.

But if we peel back the layers a bit, we find a great deal of cultural uncertainty. We constantly compare ourselves to others. We excel in sport rather than in science or the arts. We sell Uluru and uranium to the world—things that are there, rather than things we do or invent.

Our culture is relatively young. Like an adolescent we swing between overconfidence and being unsure of ourselves. Binge drinking is widespread, particularly among young people, which suggests that in order to socialise and feel OK we need to get smashed first.

How will our culture hear that because God loves and accepts us as we are, we don't have to try so hard or be so anxious. Fifty years ago Richard Niebuhr wrote a little book called *Christ and Culture*, in which he suggested that the gospel neither totally condemns any culture; nor does it baptise any culture. Some like the idea of the gospel

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[4] Norman C Habel, *Reconciliation: Searching for Australia's soul* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 1999).
[5] Ross Langmead, 'Transformed relationships: Reconciliation as the central model for mission', *Mission Studies* 25.1 (June 2008), 5-20.

"fulfilling" a culture. Niebuhr chose the term "transforming" a culture, which involves challenging what is bad and fulfilling what is good.[6]

Australian culture, like any other, is a mixture. It partially reflects some aspects of the kingdom of God—such as our egalitarianism and mateship—and at the same time (we would say from our Christian perspective) it will search for its soul until it grows up into maturity, caring for its poor, passing on meaning to its young people, realising that its ugliest characteristics reflect a shallow and destructive side of our national psyche.

3. We're a Western Nation

Even though we have a distinct Australian culture and are unique in being in the Southern Hemisphere right next door to Asia, we're also a classic example of wider western culture. We borrow from Britain, particularly in our heritage. And we borrow from the US, whose global cultural influences are incredibly widely felt.

The main characteristics of most western nations are that we are rich, former colonisers, Christian in heritage and of broadly Caucasian stock. If the world were a village of a hundred people, only two or three people in that village would be as wealthy and powerful and educated as we are in this room today.

One result of being in the rich corner when most people are in the poor corner is that others want to migrate here. All over the world people are starving, dying through violent conflict and oppressed by undemocratic governments. As a nation we've had our moral fibre tested by desperate asylum seekers landing on our shores. The church has been a consistent voice for tolerance and welcome, based on the gospel call to care for the needy.

Another result of being western is the historical baggage of being known as Christian, imperialistic and thinking we run the world. We are caught up in conflicts such as in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan. Also, in this era of militant Islam we are caught up in the global atmosphere of fear in the West, and we're spending billions on anti-terrorist measures. We're giving up certain civil liberties in order to capture terrorists. The gospel message of love overcoming fear is very relevant here. What might the churches contribute in dialogue and peacemaking?

4. The Young Think Differently from Their Parents

The time has come for me to be more careful in talking about "Australian culture" as if there is one such culture, because we live in a complicated pattern of overlapping cultures or sub-cultures. Indeed the fragmentation of society is one of the results of the individualism of modern culture.

I'm not going to use the term "postmodernism" here, because no-one agrees on what it means. And I'm not going to say that all members of the "Builder Generation" and "Baby Boomers" think one way and all of "Generation X and Y" think another way, because that

[6] H Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and culture* (New York: Harper, 1951).

is simplistic. But there are real differences between the generations, even if there is also real diversity within each generation.

If the church is to listen to the younger generations we will need to appreciate what world it is they live in. Anything I say here will be too simple. But their world is one of fragmentation and choices. They value their individuality. They are highly-stimulated by media—mobile phones, SMS, Twitter, iPods, DVDs, CDs, TV, computers, the Internet, Facebook, Youtube. They are the best educated generation. They face economic barriers their parents never faced as housing and education gets more expensive. They live with constant change. Their world is saturated with images, celebrities, information overload and rubbish alongside quality. They highly value connecting with friends and family, and they seek community in various ways. They don't much go for institutions and long-term commitments. It seems natural for most of them to see truth as relative rather than absolute. They often see knowledge as partial rather than complete, and they have learned to see who's saying something before they decide whether it's true. They are less interested in overarching frameworks of belief than in what works or what brings a satisfying experience. They are less sceptical about God, the mysterious, the supernatural and alternative therapies than previous generations. Hugh Mackay calls them the "Options Generation", but paradoxically, they are facing many obstacles in exercising the options ahead of them.[7]

I'd like to add that I have the privilege of knowing many young people who share some of these characteristics but also show characteristics of every younger generation: idealism, abundant energy, resilience and hope.

Given that the age profile of church attenders is older than that of Australia generally, we need to listen carefully to the young. Not only are they the future of our society, they may be bearing aspects of the gospel message *to* the church, particularly in seeing the world in relational terms rather than institutional terms.

5. Our Lifestyles and Social Roles Are Changing Rapidly

As recently as the 1950s the place of a woman was in the home. The term "feminism" has come and gone, and now we have a paradoxical mix of feisty female independence and a revival of the raunch culture, including some who even argue that prostitution is an example of a woman choosing to earn big money and be independent.

After a slow start, the "sensitive male" has grown as a species. The big litmus test, I reckon, is whether an AFL footballer attends the birth of his baby or plays footy, and more and more the mother and baby come first.

The recent sexual revolution has been huge. In one generation marriage has gone from the norm to optional. Extra-marital sex and homosexuality, once matters to hide, are now so widely accepted as to be hardly worthy of notice in the media. Divorce and remarriage is now widespread, even within the church. We all know from personal

[7] Hugh Mackay, *Generations: Baby boomers, their parents and their children* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1997), 135-176.

experience how complicated life can get, simply organising who is invited to a family wedding or where the kids are spending Christmas dinner.

Households are smaller and vary much more. About a quarter of Australian households are one-person households, and another quarter consist of just two people.[8] Households containing mum, dad and kids have shrunk from being the vast majority to less than half of all households.

We used to work for one employer for many years, even our whole working life. Now, we not only change frequently, but many of us are part-time or casual. Many of us work shifts at all times of the day and week and our lives are complex. A large proportion of us are working longer hours, affecting our relationships and our availability to contribute to the church and community.

Summing up these and dozens of other lifestyle trends, there is no longer one moral framework which guides society as it did a hundred years ago and stretching back for centuries. Moral relativism means we have to construct our own ethics and our own path in relationships. For some this is liberating; for others, the ambiguity and confusion is deeply threatening.

As I suggested earlier, these are the best of times, and the worst of times. We live amid rapid change and contradictory trends.

Is the gospel an absolutist option, laying down the rules, or does it give guidelines such as love and justice in helping us to grow towards moral autonomy? The church's response so far has generally been characterised as negative and life-denying, whereas we see our message as life-giving and bringing freedom through obedience to God's ways.

6. We Abound in Cultural Diversity

We all know that Australia is one of the world's most multicultural societies. This is particularly true in Melbourne's western suburb, where I live. I shop in Footscray and the world has come to my door. I eat in Sydney Rd, Brunswick, and there are a dozen cuisines within two or three blocks.

We've undergone an astonishing transformation since abolishing the White Australia policy only thirty-six years ago and adopting multiculturalism as the official policy, the only nation other than Canada to do so.

- Since 1945 nearly seven million migrants have come, which means that half of our population increase since 1945 (from seven to twenty-one million) has been due to migration.[9]

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[8] Hugh Mackay, *Advance Australia—where?: How we've changed, why we've changed, and what will happen next?* (Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2007), 210-211.

[9] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Fact Sheet 2: Key facts in immigration', Australian Government, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/02key.htm>, 2009.

- 22% of Australians were born overseas and 16% speak mainly in a language other than English at home.[10]
- Western Australia has the highest overseas-born figure of all Australian states and territories, with 27% born overseas. On the other hand, immigrants to Western Australia often come from English-speaking backgrounds, such as Great Britain and South Africa, so only 11% generally speak a language other than English at home.[11]
- Among the capital cities Perth has the second highest proportion of overseas-born people at 31.1%, just behind Sydney at 31.3%.[12]
- Nationally, one in ten have come under the humanitarian program for refugees and their families.[13]
- Now migrants come from all over the world. In 2008-9 they came from nearly 200 countries.[14]
- This year more than 170,000 will come under the 'skilled migrants' program including 13,500 under the humanitarian program.[15]
- A multicultural society is a multifaith society. Just under 6% of Australians said in the 2006 Census that they belong to a religion other than Christianity. Hinduism is growing the fastest, followed by Islam and Buddhism, mostly drive by immigration.[16]

There has always been an undercurrent of racism in Australian history, and inter-racial tension surfaces from time to time. But the extent to which we are able to live in harmony in Australia is remarkable. The challenge to the churches is to reflect that diversity in our membership, because many churches are Anglo-Australian enclaves. Some Anglo-Australian Christians complain that migrants form their own mono-cultural churches, but the most numerous mono-cultural churches are actually Anglo-Australian.

Despite the resistance of Israel in the Hebrew Bible, the Bible clearly points to the mission of God to both enjoy diversity and express unity across cultural and ethnic barriers. Parts of the church are reflecting this mission very well, while others remain comfortable in isolation.

7. The Wealth and Power Gap Is Growing

A significant shift has occurred in Australia since the 1960s, when more than half of the population were "middle-class" in more ways than one but particularly in terms of

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[10] Department for Communities (Western Australia), 'Cultural diversity in Western Australia: A demographic profile', Government of Western Australia, <http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/publications/Info_Sheets/Cultural_Diversity_2008_web.pdf>, 2008.
[11] Department for Communities (Western Australia), 'Cultural diversity in Western Australia'.
[12] Department for Communities (Western Australia), 'Cultural diversity in Western Australia'.
[13] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Fact Sheet 2'.
[14] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Fact Sheet 2'.
[15] Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 'Fact Sheet 20: Migration program planning levels', Australian Government, <http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/20planning.htm>, 2009.
[16] Philip Hughes, 'What do the 2006 Census figures about religion mean?', *Pointers* 17.3 (September 2007), 1-2.

income and wealth. Those who were poor and those who were rich were small percentages.

But now the middle has shrunk and there are many more rich people and many more poor people. Our sense that we are all equal in value has taken a battering as we've become a society of "haves" and "have nots".

The top 20% of households earn 45% of the income and hold 60% of the wealth. It's true that we've all become better off. Compared to a decade ago we are on average 25% better off in real terms. But the average increase for the poorest 10% has only been $29 per week (in real terms), whereas the top 10% are $256 per week better off.[17]

The picture isn't simple, however. As our economy has grown on the back of a mining boom, household income in Queensland and Western Australia has risen much faster than in Sydney or Melbourne, for example. So much so that Perth is the only capital city in Australia which has no suburb averaging in the bottom income bracket, which is a weekly gross income of less than $884 per week, or about $46,000 per year. Perth also enjoyed the highest increase in income between 2001 and 2006, with a 39% rise in gross household income. It also suffered least among capital cities from sharply rising housing costs, leaving it very well off in comparison. [18]

What does this inequality mean for a society built on the myths of pioneers helping each other in drought, flood and fire?

We still dig deep and give generously in emergencies, but in terms of regular philanthropy—systematic giving to charities—we lag behind both America and Europe. While Australia became significantly more affluent in the last ten years, giving to charities hardly grew at all.[19] Despite our government committing itself decades ago to the United Nations recommended level of overseas aid—0.7% of our national Gross Domestic Product—we got as low as 0.24% seven years ago and, even with a recent re-commitment to the UN level, it is still only budgeted to be 0.34% in 2009–2010.

The gospel has a great deal to say about justice and the way we treat the poor. It even has lots to say about sitting on wealth and not giving it away. Will the church, by its example as well as in its preaching, lead the way in addressing the growing gap between the rich and the poor, or will our society continue to grow apart, straining and exploding as the poor grow resentful and the rich barricade themselves behind gated properties?

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[17] Mackay, *Advance Australia—where?*, 84.

[18] National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), *Advance Australia Fair?*, AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report, No. 20 (Canberra: AMP, 2008), available at <http://media.corporate-ir.net/media_files/irol/21/219073/infocus/natsem.pdf>, 17-18.

[19] Leah McLennan, 'Australians stingy on philanthropy front', *Sydney Morning Herald* (10 March 2008), available at <http://news.smh.com.au/business/australia-stingy-on-philanthropy-front-20080310-1yfz.html>, accessed 16-8-09.

8. We Are Just Bracing for Climate Change

As I mentioned before, we are caught up in movements which are global rather than national.

On a per capita basis, Australia is the second highest emitter of carbon in the world after the US. Like so many rich nations, our footprint on the earth is huge. The church has been slow to see the importance of caring for creation, but in recent decades Christians have done a lot of reflection on what a right relationship with God's creation might look like.

As Australians scream about rising petrol prices, what will the church say? What does the gospel say about the use of a limited, non-renewable resource such as oil? Indeed, what does the gospel say about over-population, the economics of growth, the view that technology can fix everything? If Australians are to take the church seriously, we will need to see environmental questions as integral to our faith and roll up our sleeves and be part of developing solutions.

Australia is in a dilemma. We hold vast reserves of a dirty fuel—coal—and a moderately harmful fuel—natural gas—as well as a dangerous fuel—uranium. We've become rich by selling what we can dig up, cut down and suck out. Now we're told that these things are bad. It will hurt us to do the right thing by climate change.

Now what I'm going to say may sound a very impractical suggestion, but it isn't: I believe that the gospel addresses this problem first and foremost at the level of spirituality. A sense of long-term sustainability is a spiritual commitment. Relating to creation is a spiritual journey. Living with enough is a moral and spiritual decision. Beginning with ourselves is a spiritual perspective on solving social and environmental problems. Limiting our emissions so that developing countries can, for a while emit more, is a selfless moral stance. Will the church be able to provide these spiritual resources to a society that is alarmed, worried about costs, disconnected from the earth and largely seeking its own comfort and ease?

9. We're Not Very Religious and Becoming Even Less So

Despite the lack of enthusiasm for Christian practice, which goes back to convict days, in 1901 ninety-six per cent of Australians still identified as Christian. But that percentage has decreased steadily over the years. The percentage of Australians who identified as Christians in the 2006 Census dropped below 64%, fewer than two in three. And the rate of decline between 2001 and 2006 was the sharpest yet.[20]

The news is even more sobering for mainline denominations such as the Uniting Church, which lost 13% of those who identify as belonging to the Uniting Church between 1996 and 2006, and can expect further numerical decline as nearly a quarter (22%) of those who identify as Uniting Church are over 65.[21]

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[20] Hughes, 'The 2006 Census figures', 1.
[21] Hughes, 'The 2006 Census figures', 4.

While actual church attendance is declining at a slower rate, only about 10% of Australians go to church on any Sunday[22] and about 20% say they go at least once a month, the lowest figures in about fifty years of counting.[23]

Philip Hughes, in interpreting these trends, says that "denominational leaders should be concerned about the Census figures".[24] The decline in identifying as Christian is expected to continue for some time.

Some people try to say that this decline is good, because nominal Christians are dropping off and those who are left really mean business. I believe this to be too optimistic. For lots of reasons Christianity is not attractive to Australians today. As many commentators have said, this is a very challenging time in which to engage in mission.

10. Australians Still Want to Believe

The secularisation of Australian society doesn't mean, however, that we're a nation of atheists. Most of us believe in God or a higher power, even if we're a bit vague about what that means.

This is particularly true of younger people. A recent study of youth spirituality found that young people are still interested in the spiritual dimension. but they find church services boring. They seek an experiential faith. They like their experiences to be multi-sensory and stimulating. They pick and choose what works. They respect elders who have integrity but are not likely to join churches just because they're invited to.[25]

David Tacey has argued that there is a quiet spirituality revolution going on in Australian society, as people realise that our society is running on empty and that we need to tap into the springs of the spiritual dimension.[26] He says that religion hasn't responded very well to the yearnings for spirituality. This is particularly true of fundamentalist religion, which squashes the spirit of mystery. But he says that young people and the church need to listen to each other:

> Western religion is correct in its conviction that evil is a reality and we need to be redeemed from it. Youth spirituality is also correct in its perception that the world is charged with the grandeur of God, and that we need to align ourselves more fully with the divinity that can be found within it. Both religion and youth spirituality are possessed of valuable truths, and each can learn something important from the other.[27]

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[22] Peter Kaldor et al., *Build my church: Trends and possibilities for Australian churches* (Adelaide: Open Book, 1999), 15.
[23] Ruth Powell, 'Why people don't go to church ... and what the churches can do about it', *Pointers* 12.2 (June 2002), 8.
[24] Hughes, 'The 2006 Census figures', 6.
[25] Philip Hughes, 'Implications of the study of youth spirituality', *Pointers* 16.3 (September 2006), 7-9.
[26] David Tacey, *The spirituality revolution: The emergence of contemporary spirituality* (Sydney: HarperCollins, 2003).
[27] Tacey, *The spirituality revolution*, 85.

Hughes has made the interesting observation recently that for all the talk about the spirituality revolution, it tends to be over-estimated. Fewer than 2.5% of people can be labelled "highly spiritual" (that is, doing something intentional about it) and at the same "not religious".[28]

Focusing more widely than on young people, I've found Tony Kelly's description of the typical Australian approach to the divine very helpful. He suggests that, for whatever reasons, we tend to resort to silence when it comes to spiritual questions. We are inarticulate. We are reticent and reserved. Some of this is due to repression, or being distracted by the sun and the beach. But some of it is in the best tradition of Christian mystics in the face of ineffable mystery. As St Ignatius of Antioch said, "Those who hear the word of God also hear his silence".[29]

There is a challenge here for us to relate the presence of God to the Australian desert, to the Australian person of few words but deep reflection, and to the Australian reluctance to put words too easily to things we can't understand.

11. Churches Are Learning to Live on the Margins

As part of Australia's turn from religion our society is becoming more secular. That is, the voice and perspective of the organised Christian church is less and less important in wider society. We are increasingly ignored in politics, economics, education, the law, the arts, the media (particularly television) and the intellectual life of the nation.

Sometimes religious issues surface. For example, in different ways religious belief has resurfaced in both John Howard's government and Kevin Rudd's government. But usually religious affairs are discussed only when the church is fighting amongst itself, putting views which are highly unpopular or being disgraced.

Secularisation means that religion becomes just one among many choices. A recent Australian Community Survey showed that in Australia, "compared with most other factors, religion does not rate highly among Australians in their self description".[30] Other factors are more important, such as being Australian, being male or female, the job we hold, our income, our education and our country of origin.

All of these trends mean that we are becoming more like the first-century church, which lived on the edges of society in a highly pluralistic context. In the period of Christendom in Europe from the 4th to the 16th century, the church grew used being near the centre of things. This was symbolised architecturally by the church spire in the centre of every town and the cathedral on the hill in every city.

In a post-Christendom world, we're learning to live with many changes. Some are very hard; others remind us of the way Jesus lived and the way the early church thrived. To use a list from Stuart Murray in his book, *Post-Christendom*, we've moved from the centre to the margins, from the majority to the minority, from being at home in our

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[28] Philip J Hughes, 'Religious trends in Australia', in *Reimagining God and mission: Perspectives from Australia*, ed. Ross Langmead (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007), 36.
[29] Tony Kelly, *A new imagining: Towards an Australian spirituality* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1990), 8-15.
[30] Philip Hughes, 'Trends in religious identification: Details from 2001 Census', *Pointers* 12.3 (2002), 4.

culture to being aliens in it, from privilege to plurality, from control to witness, from maintenance to mission, and from institution to movement.[31]

12. The Opportunities for Christian Engagement Are Enormous

The last thing I want to mention in my list of Australian contextual factors is simply this: In a time of rapid change and widespread anxiety there is enormous scope for Christian leadership in society. Prophets are those who discern what God is saying in their times and in their context. Sometimes they "foretell", that is, make predictions. More often they "forthtell", that is, tell it like it is.

We will have the moral authority to speak out if we do at least three things.

- If we develop a mature and reflective faith so that we begin to understand what the vision of the reign of God might look like;
- If we listen to those who analyse our society and discern where things are going and what will lead to our society's health and what will lead to our society's dysfunction; and
- If we work humbly and co-operatively with those of goodwill in all parts of society in a constructive way,

Then we will find ways of being salt and light in our context. We will be signs of the God's presence, imperfectly working towards this dynamic divine reality that begins here and now and stretches into eternity. Australia needs mature people of faith. It needs discerning analysts and commentators. And it needs armies of people of humility and hope who will roll up their sleeves and work together towards a society that will at least partly reflect the ways of God.

Ross Langmead, 28-8-09

[31]Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 20.