



A Shy Hope in the Mind: Secularisation and the Diversity of Australia's Religious Economy

What a supply-side analysis of religion might
reveal about the place of religion in Australia

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Analysis Paper 1

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Related Works

The Tyranny of Tolerance: Threats to Religious Liberty in Australia (Redland Bay, QLD: Connor Court, 2017)

Reason, Repentance, and the Individual: Recovering the Religious Roots of Western Civilization (Sydney, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 2017)

Hallowed Institutions: Religion and the Roots of Liberty and Prosperity (Sydney, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 2016)

Contents

Introduction: Why religion still matters.....	1
What can a 'supply-side' analysis of religion tell us about modern belief?	2
What are some key ideas in the economics of religion?	3
<i>School Chaplains</i>	4
What impact does the secularisation thesis have on how we think about religion?	4
Faith and the Australian religious economy: challenging the secularisation theory.....	6
What do we know about Australia's religious economy?	7
Are assumptions about Australian secularisation correct?	8
How does a supply-side analysis of religion challenge the secularisation thesis?	?
What are the implications of religious diversity for social policy?	?
Conclusion: the sun of religion has not yet set.....	8
Endnotes.....	9

Introduction: Why religion still matters

Those who oppose any appearance of religion in the Australian public sphere frequently argue that it simply has no part to play in a modern, multicultural, secular, and — this, without a hint of irony — diverse society. Religion is in decline, they insist, displaced by science; and in any case, culpable as the cause of much human conflict and misery.

The loudest proponents of 'diversity' are often those critics who mount a variety of arguments to support the confinement of religion — particularly Christianity — to the private realm of the home, the family, and the mind. One such argument is that religion is inherently discriminatory.

Yet attempts to confine the scope of religion amount, in fact, to a fundamentally illiberal assault on the foundational right to religious liberty. This assault seeks to restrict the freedom of individuals to pursue their conception of a 'good life' by ordering their own lives, and the lives of their families and faith communities, according to the tenets of that faith.¹

However, those arguments in favour of the confinement of religion are open to challenge. There are good reasons for questioning the supposed triumph of secularism, and for affirming the continuing significance of the contribution religion makes to Australian society.

Australia's social compact has been extremely effective in allowing a diversity of religious freedom and practice to flourish. For this reason, the religious element in Australian society has tended to be understated and discreet. Gary Bouma, a sociologist of religion, has quoted a phrase coined by Manning Clark — "a whisper in the mind and a shy hope in the heart" — to describe aptly the nature of Australian religion and spirituality:

There is a profound shyness — yet a deeply grounded hope — held tenderly in the heart, in the heart of Australia. It is not characteristically Australian to trumpet encounters with the spiritual like some American televangelist. Australians hold the spiritual gently in their hearts, speaking tentatively about it. The spiritual is treated as sacred. What is held protectively in the heart is sacred; the sacred is handled with great care.²

Affirmation of religion's significance, in turn, can serve to strengthen contemporary calls for more adequate protections for religious liberty, which have come under threat in Australia in recent times; particularly during the 2017 national debate about same-sex marriage.

What can a 'supply-side' analysis of religion tell us about modern belief?

Chief among the contentions of opponents of religion is that neither religion nor religious freedom matter. They mistakenly base this antipathy on what they interpret as a decline in *demand* for religion. They depend heavily on successive census returns to support these claims. Where they detect such decline, these critics claim that demand for religion has withered in a modern, enlightened age in which potential consumers of religion no longer need to derive meaning and purpose from a spiritual realm.

However, by failing to pay attention to overall levels of *supply* of religion in what scholars have described as the 'religious market' — or the 'religious economy' — critics of religion fail to see how different structures of religious markets serve to stimulate (or stifle) demand, and thereby affect levels of religious participation.

Supply-side analysis of religion features prominently in the field of study known as 'the economics of religion' which employs the same assumptions that inform economic enquiry into facets of life such as the family, education, and marriage.

Key among the assumptions of the economics of religion is that religious consumers make rational, informed choices about how to participate in religion — and in *which* religion. Similarly, religious producers are assumed to seek to maximise members or resources. As noted by Laurence Iannaccone, a leading proponent of the economics of religion:

The actions of clergy, congregations, and denominations are thus modelled as rational responses to constraints, opportunities, and technologies. As in other markets, the consumers' freedom to choose constrains the producers of religion. A seller cannot long survive without the steady support of buyers.³

A supply-side analysis of the Australian religious market, and the behaviour trends of religious consumers, might show a more vibrant and robust picture, and indicate that religion in Australia is healthier than perceived by critics such as the Rationalist Society of Australia.⁴ Such an analysis might therefore underline the importance of extending and securing adequate protections for religious freedom.

What are some key ideas in the economics of religion?

While the field of the economics of religion is relatively new, scholars probed the economic dimensions of religion long before the 20th and 21st centuries. Notable amongst them was Adam Smith who laid the foundations for an economic theory of religion in one part of *The Wealth of Nations*.

In remarks about established religions in general, and the Church of England in particular, Smith noted the lack of zeal shown by clergy in comparison to the enthusiasm exhibited by teachers of religion who need to work hard for their subsistence:

In this respect, the teachers of new religions have always had a considerable advantage in attacking those ancient and established systems of which the clergy, reposing themselves upon their benefices, had neglected to keep up the fervour of the faith and devotion in the great body of the people; and having given themselves up to indolence, were incapable of making vigorous exertion in defence even of their own establishment.⁵

Little attention was paid to Smith's observations until recently; largely because, in Iannaccone's view, religion has long been viewed as an institution in decline. As such, it was deemed undeserving of more considered analysis of the question whether competition stimulates or retards religious activity. "Proponents of free enterprise will be pleased to hear that Smith's predictions carry the day," Iannaccone asserts.⁶

One key idea in an economic theory of religion, referred to earlier, is that religion is an object of choice. The freedom of the 'consumer' to make a choice about religion serves to constrain the activities of religious suppliers: "consumers *choose* what religion (if any) they will accept and how extensively they will participate in it."⁷

Iannaccone uses the term "religious economy" to describe, as a subsystem within the social system, all the religious activity going on in any society — that is, it includes both the supply of, and demand for, religious services:

Religious economies are like commercial economies in that they consist of a market of current and potential customers, a set of firms seeking to serve that market, and the religious 'product lines' offered by the various firms.⁸

As such, a religious economy is more than a metaphor: it operates in a way that is parallel to the subsystem of the commercial economy in that

it involves the interaction of forces of supply and demand for a valued product.

A second key principle of an economic theory of religion is that the greater the extent to which a religious economy is unregulated, and therefore market-driven, the more 'religious' a society is likely to be.

Far from debasing and diminishing religion, competition between suppliers of religious 'products' results in greater efficiency and boosts overall levels of religious 'consumption' — just as in the case of the markets for secular commodities:

Variations in demand result in the inherent inability of a single religious product line to satisfy divergent tastes. More specifically, pluralism arises in unregulated markets because of the inability of a single religious firm to be at once worldly and otherworldly, strict and permissive, exclusive and inclusive, expressive and reserved, or (as Adam Smith put it) austere and loose, while market niches will exist with strong preferences on each these aspects of religion.⁹

When the environment is highly competitive, a supply-side analysis of religion holds that religious 'producers' must consider abandoning inefficient activities and unpopular products in favour of those that have greater appeal and are more profitable.

When confronted with choice, the theory, in broad terms, assumes the religious 'consumer' — within the limits of their information and understanding, and guided by their preferences, and following the dictates of reason — will always attempt to select the most beneficial and rational option.¹⁰ As noted by Rachel McCleary, a prominent scholar of religion and economics, "economic reasoning implies that anything that raises the cost of religious activities will reduce these activities."¹¹

In the Australian religious economy, it would appear that believers are losing out to non-believers. But it is important to resist efforts by secularists who behave like monopolists, using public policy and regulation to restrict the market. They achieve this by means of the ratchet effect of creating new rights, using anti-discrimination laws to enforce them. Any challenge to the operation of this new right is met by secularist claims that bigotry and hatred are being promulgated.¹²

Yet the idea that an individual is truly free to exercise rational choice in selecting a religious faith is open

to challenge. Some critics have noted that people are frequently socialised into a particular religious tradition because of the circumstances and social context of their birth. And in some religious traditions, such as Islam, any attempt to choose an alternative faith amounts to apostasy.

Therefore, in turning now to assess the health of the Australian religious economy, it is important to note that while freedom of choice and unrestricted opportunity may be defining features of this country and the United States, they are perhaps not features of Bangladesh or Afghanistan.¹³ Yet the point remains that Australia has enjoyed a long history of religious freedom since colonial times.

School Chaplains

The conviction about the inherently discriminatory nature of religion is currently fuelling a demand by a group of humanist societies, which includes the Rationalist Society of Australia, that the Australian Human Rights Commission review the federally-funded school chaplains program.

Established by the Howard government in 2006, the chaplains program was continued under both Coalition and Labor governments, and has now had its \$247m funding renewed in the 2018 budget thereby establishing the program on a permanent basis.¹⁴

Under the program, those to be appointed as chaplains must be acknowledged through formal ordination, commissioning, and recognition by an accepted religious institution. Meredith Doig, president of the Rationalist Society, now wants the program reviewed because she says the terms of its structure and operation are "blatantly discriminatory."¹⁵

Although the term 'chaplain' has an overtly religious connotation, the complaint to which Doig's organisation has given its support argues that the work of a chaplain is entirely non-religious and could be undertaken by non-religious people. It argues that the program's selection criteria amounts "to requiring a person be religious. It excludes non-religious people from working as school chaplains." Advocates for the school chaplains program have dismissed the complaint as being motivated by "anti-religion, anti-God, anti-anything non-secular."¹⁶

What impact does the secularisation thesis have on how we think about religion?

The resilience of religion in Australia has been masked, to a great extent, by the vigour with which proponents of the so-called 'secularisation thesis' have made their case. This thesis, in its broadest terms, holds that as a society modernises, industrialises, and advances in technological competence, the once-pervasive religious worldview of an earlier, pre-modern age falls away.

According to the proponents of secularisation theory, decline in religion is not to be attributed to doctrinal or structural deficiencies — and, therefore, incapable of being reversed through reform. As noted by Steve Bruce, a leading sociologist and a strong advocate of the secularisation paradigm, "the decline of religion in the West is not an accident but is an unintended consequence of a variety of complex social changes [called] modernisation."¹⁷

Modernisation effects this social change, Bruce argues, because its processes undermine the power, popularity, and prestige of religious institutions. He also maintains that the 16th century Reformation in Europe played a major part in laying the foundations for liberal democracy:

What were initially religious arguments inadvertently encouraged individualism, egalitarianism, and diversity, which in turn combined with growing social and structural differentiation to shift governments in the direction of secular liberal democracy.¹⁸

All paradigms of secularisation hold that modernisation — which includes processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, and technological change — has undercut religion and made supernatural claims more difficult to accept.

Bruce questions the entire exercise of applying economic models to religious patterns of behaviour. Whatever encouragement supply-siders draw from comparing diversity and religious vitality in different places at one time, he argues that it will be overwhelmed by contradictory evidence gained from studying one place over time. Bruce maintains that religious believers do not behave like consumers in the market place for consumer durable goods:

For most of the world, religion is not a preference; it is an inherited social identity,

closely tied to other shared identities. It can only be changed at considerable personal cost. Only in largely secular societies, where there is little religious behaviour left to explain, will people have the attitude to religion supposed by the [religious market] model.¹⁹

From noting empirical observations of such change as increased industrialisation and urbanisation, sociologists developed a theoretical assumption about the marginalisation of religion. Modern societies were considered, for all intents and purposes, to be secular, and assumptions about the irrelevance or meaninglessness of religion sank deeply into the minds of many.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to weigh the specific disagreements among sociologists about what the process of secularisation actually entails. What is of concern, however, are the conclusions

drawn by secularisation's proponents from empirical observations about social change that occurred during, and as a consequence of, periods of religious reformation and scientific development that began in early modern Europe.

For as Grace Davie, a sociologist somewhat critical of the secularisation paradigm, has argued, the observed connections between modernisation and the loss of the social significance of religion have now become normative — the process of modernisation is held to be *necessarily* damaging to religion:

With this in mind, it becomes easier to understand why European [commentators] have considerable difficulty accepting the fact that religion is, and remains, a profoundly normal part of the lives of the huge majority of people in the late modern world.²⁰

Faith and the Australian religious economy: challenging the secularisation theory

Since the middle of the 20th century, pundits in a number of western countries — particularly Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom — have been probing statistical evidence which appears to indicate a steady decline in religious belief and practice amongst the population of those countries.

They point to surveys and census returns that appear to show a general drift away from the involvement in religious institutions believed to have been the mark of an earlier age. Many Australian analysts, activists, and social commentators have noted very similar trends here.

This is reflected in successive census returns indicating a steady increase in the numbers of those claiming no religious affiliation. In the 2016 census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the percentage of Australians reporting 'No religion' continued to increase — from 25.3 per cent in 2011, to 30.1 per cent.²¹ The verdict from the pundits' analysis is unequivocal: religion in Australia is finished.

The Rationalist Society of Australia, for example, holds that belief and action should be based on reason and evidence alone; answers to questions about human existence are to be found only in the natural world. And then, with a generous squirt of hubris, the society declares: "We're in favour of science and evidence as opposed to superstition and bigotry!"²²

Release of the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics census data was accompanied, predictably enough, by calls for an end to all religious privilege — whether in terms of tax advantages for religious foundations or publicly-funded expressions of Christianity at Christmas and Easter — and for a more overt public commitment to a secular Australia.

But responses such as these overlooked the fact that while the proportion of Christians had declined from 88 per cent 50 years ago to just over 50 per cent, Australia has a number of other significant religious communities. Of those respondents who claim a religious allegiance, 52 percent identify with Christianity, 2.6 per cent with Islam, and 2.4 per cent with Buddhism. The fastest growing religious group are Sikhs who have grown by 74.1 percent since 2011.²³

What do we know about Australia's religious economy?

Australia's religious profile was shown by the 2016 census returns to be both more complex and more diverse than religion's antagonists — cheered by the rise of those declaring 'no religion' — might have hoped.²⁴ Although religion is not practised consistently across Australia, it must be conceded that most research into religion and religious life has been confined to patterns of Christian practice, leadership, spirituality, and worship.

For example, in the early 1990s, a number of Christian agencies began a venture called National Church Life Survey (NCLS) Research; the aim of which was to provide a base of evidence to help churches connect with the wider community.²⁵ NCLS has since been joined by other research organisations, such as McCrindle Research, that have added considerably to an understanding of Australia's religious profile.

Research undertaken in 2017 by McCrindle focused specifically on attitudes to Christianity in Australia, but was no less interesting for that. It found that only 21 per cent of Australians are active in the practice of religion and that 57 per cent are not active at all.²⁶

The highest proportion of Australians in that 'active' category — 24 per cent — live in Western Australia, followed by New South Wales — 22 per cent. The highest proportion in the 'not active at all' category — 69 per cent — live in South Australia.²⁷

When McCrindle surveyed the attitudes of non-religious Australians, he found 49 per cent of them preferred an approach to life that is rational and 'evidence-based' rather than informed by the supernatural. Indeed, 14 per cent of those surveyed believe that religion is a wholly outmoded approach to life.²⁸

The report found that almost half of Australians who identify with Christianity — 49 per cent — do not attend church; they are also most likely to be female.²⁹ Whereas 22 per cent of Australians say they know a lot about the church, and 60 per cent know a moderate amount or a little, 18 per cent of Australians say they know nothing about it at all.

Nearly half of Australians who identify with spirituality or religion — 47 per cent — have been influenced principally by their household upbringing. Only 17 per cent of those who so identify, and who grew up in a religious household, have chosen to change or abandon their religious identity.³⁰

It appears that 48 per cent of Australians are strongly committed to their religious views. Even so, McCrindle's research indicates that a surprisingly large number of religious Australians — 52 per cent — would be open to changing their religious views, given the right circumstances and evidence.

Of these, it is members of the younger generations who are most open to making a change: 20 per cent among Gen Z, and 19 per cent among Gen Y. According to McCrindle, 57 per cent of Australians identifying with Christianity are open to changing their religious views.³¹

Greater openness to changing one's religious beliefs is one key indication of the rapid social change that has occurred in Australian society and churches during the past 40 or 50 years. The National Church Life Survey adopts the framework of "belonging, believing, and behaving" to track these shifts in religious affiliation, belief, and participation.³²

In a review of nine core qualities of church health and vitality, NCLS found there has been an overall decline in all indicators in Protestant churches during the past 20 years.³³ But the signs are not all discouraging:

One important feature of [the] twenty year review is that the trends are either stable or positive across most of the core qualities of church life. We see a consolidation across Protestant church life. The reality of a changing context has largely been accepted. Attention has turned to sharpening clarity about the core practices related to mission, discipleship, service and worship.³⁴

Openness to change of religion, reviving patterns of affiliation, and encouraging signs of engagement with religion suggest that the exchange of ideas between individuals who may or may not believe is of continuing importance. Indeed, McCrindle found that 31 per cent of Australians are "most prompted to think about spiritual, religious or metaphysical things through conversations with other people." Prompts that are reflective of a life stage differ between generations:

After conversations with people, social media is most influential for Generation Z (32 per cent), whereas reading a book or article (25 per cent) and personal unhappiness (22 per cent) are next likely to prompt thoughts in Generation Y. A major life crisis is the second greatest prompt for Generation X (21 per cent). Global and national issues (26 per cent) and a death in the family (24 per cent) are more likely to prompt thoughts in Baby Boomers than other generations.³⁵

These patterns of exchange between believers and other believers, or between believers and non-believers — whether in the form of conversations, written materials, or posts on social media — presuppose a forum where the free exercise of religion is upheld and protected.

Are assumptions about Australian secularisation correct?

Census returns, together with research from NCLS and McCrindle, indicate that while the religious profile of Australia is clearly changing, religion in Australia is certainly not dead. Non-belief is certainly not the new normal.³⁶

Findings such as these are enough to warrant closer enquiry into the process of secularisation that is commonly held to have been underway in Australia since the middle of the 20th century. But as historian David Hilliard has noted, two other trends in Australian religious life are also identifiable.

First there is the emergence of new expressions of religious meaning in response to what Hilliard calls “the secularisation of public culture”, and which happens, for the most part, independently of established religious institutions.³⁷ Much of this is, admittedly, difficult to quantify; and the extent of its impact upon society is, as yet, largely unknown.

The second trend is the change in religion brought about by, and revitalised by, the arrival of new waves

of migrants from Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. For many of these arrivals, religion is a powerful source of identity in a new country. At the same time, says Hilliard, the growing presence of these religious believers has challenged those Australians who envisage a secular future for the nation:

Religion is not disappearing from Australian life but it is becoming more diverse, more fragmented and more a matter of individual choice. In the Australia of the twenty-first century there will be a wider range of religious alternatives than ever before but no common story, no shared faith reinforced by social institutions.³⁸

The champions of secularisation propose a static, binary account of religion in which there are those who believe in ‘God’ and those who do not. But this is little less than parody, for there are many forms of religious belief and many nuanced accounts of ‘God’. Far from being static, the Australian religious economy is very dynamic.

How does a supply-side analysis of religion challenge the secularisation thesis?

Supply-side analyses of religious markets suggest that the normative assumptions about secularisation are increasingly open to question. The task now is not to explain the absence of religion, as the thesis attempted to do, but rather to explain its *presence* in modern societies.

This is especially so when the ‘European’ way of thinking about religion is applied to a country like the United States of America — a country where the processes of modernisation have not been accompanied by a concomitant fall in religious observance and practice.

In an extensive survey of religious participation across ten Western democracies — which unfortunately did not include Australia or New Zealand — Raphael Franck and Laurence Iannaccone set out to test whether changes in church attendance can be tied to increased secularisation.³⁹ They constructed a retrospective time series that found strong secular trends indicating religious decline in developed Western countries. Yet they could find no evidence that this decline was actually *caused* by the familiar factors of modernisation:

Although our regressors comprise most of the variables claimed to undermine religion’s plausibility and social significance, none of these

variables shows any sign of causing religious decline: neither urbanization, nor education, nor income, nor industrialization, nor fertility.⁴⁰

Although their research did not specifically assess the impact of religious market structure, Franck and Iannaccone clearly doubted that religious decline could be traced either to declining religious competitiveness or to more stringent regulation (for example, immigration controls or planning regulations). “We found much evidence of secularization but no evidence for secularization *theory*. Sacred and secular are woven together too tightly to admit any simple separation.”⁴¹ [*Italics original*]

American religiosity, together with the rise of Islam as a significant factor in many modern societies, point to new ways of thinking about religion. Theories about religion that emerged from the European context now have limited application in the face of a new set of circumstances, as Grace Davie has noted:

The very factors that across Europe accounted for the erosion in the historical forms of religion (the negative associations with power and the rationalist alternative) are themselves in decline, liberating spaces hitherto occupied by opponents of certain forms of religion.⁴²

Indeed, Laurence Iannaccone and Rodney Stark go so far as to propose dispensing with the term 'secularisation' altogether, and on two grounds: first, because its function is ideological rather than theoretical; and second, because they find few observable instances to which the term can be applied:

What is needed is not a theory of the decline or decay of religion, but of religious *change*, providing for rises as well as for declines in the level of religiousness found in societies,

and indeed a theory that can account for long periods of stability.⁴³ [italics original]

Stark and Iannaccone maintain the focus of the term 'secularisation' is far too narrow. Hence, their encouragement to shift the focus of enquiry away from the attitudes of religious *consumers* towards the changing behaviour of religious *firms* — that is, those "social enterprises whose primary purpose is to create, maintain, and supply religion to some set of individuals."⁴⁴

What are the implications of religious diversity for social policy?

Supply-side analysis of religion in Australia is limited; therefore, there is a gap in our knowledge and understanding of a market-based account of the place that religion occupies in this country. It is a gap that might readily be filled by economists of religion and by the Australian Bureau of Statistics so that detailed regression analyses of religious life can be constructed.

However, a supply-side analysis is *likely* to show that far from diminishing in importance, religion has always been — and continues to be — a significant component of Australian society and culture. In addition to augmenting our understanding of religion in Australia, a supply-side analysis can also help to support the case for strengthening protections for religious freedom.

Yet Australians face insistent calls for the imposition of restrictions on the open exchange of viewpoints about religion with the purported objectives of promoting diversity, protecting the vulnerable, and eradicating hate speech. These calls, if heeded, clearly pose a grave threat to the fundamental human right to freedom of religion. As Anglican bishop Robert Forsyth has observed:

Freedom of religion cannot exist in a vacuum, but needs also three other freedoms — of speech, of association, and of conscience — to accompany it. [It] is through speech that religious notions are communicated and contested. It is by being able to associate with fellow adherents that religious community is possible.⁴⁵

Whereas contemporary discussions about diversity in Australia focus, for the most part, on race, gender, and sexual orientation, however, they also need to embrace the religious diversity of our multicultural population.

The life of a religious believer is always bound to be, at some level, a public life entailing interaction

with, and the organisation of, others. Denials of the continuing significance of religion in Australian society contribute to increasing demand for restrictions to be placed on the free manifestation and expression of religious belief.

This is a particularly important matter because of the questions that religion and religious diversity raise about the development and implementation of social policy. Changes to the religious profile that are mapped by census returns mean that no one group dominates national debates about policies in areas such as education, marriage equality, and the provision of social services. As Gary Bouma has noted:

Alliances among religious groups form around particular issues and may not extend to the other issues, making the field much harder for politicians to manage and much less clear for those who implement policy.⁴⁶

A more substantial account of Australia's religiously diverse profile, provided by a rigorous supply-side analysis, would assist the development of mechanisms for resolving conflicts that arise from various demands based on different rights such as the rights to freedom from discrimination, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion.

These conflicts already give rise to tension between religious communities and the secular state as the pressure on religious groups to accommodate secular, social norms increases. This has been happening in Australia, for example, with regard to sexuality, race, and gender.

Marked increases in religious diversity reflecting Australia's multicultural society will continue to intensify the complexity of managing social policy.⁴⁷ Awareness of this development has prompted undertakings by the federal government to investigate the scope of existing protections for religious liberty in Australia.

There is now an acknowledgement that, even though a culture of religious freedom has thrived, legal protection for religious freedom is limited and there is no explicit protection for religious freedom at the federal level.

In its submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade's Inquiry into the status of the human right to freedom of religion or belief, The Centre for Independent Studies argued that religious liberty must be upheld as a positive good and not as an exception granted grudgingly by government.⁴⁸

In a subsequent submission to the Religious Freedom Review established by Malcolm Turnbull in November

2017 after the same-sex marriage postal ballot, and chaired by Philip Ruddock, the Centre for Independent Studies supported a proposal from *Freedom4Faith*, a religious liberty campaign group, to enact an appropriate federal Religious Freedom Act.

Such an Act would extend positive protections for religious liberty as opposed to the negative protections on which it currently largely depends. It would also complement the tradition of unwritten rights and freedoms protected by custom and common law: "a law which sets out to codify and consolidate traditional [common law] protections could achieve its purpose without creating new rights or limiting existing freedoms."⁴⁹

Conclusion: the sun of religion has not yet set

There are few facets of human society — whether political, social, or economic — that are untouched by the influence of religion. What Grace Davie refers to as "the empirical realities of religion in the twenty-first century" therefore need to be reinterpreted and reassessed so the impact of religion on human society may be appropriately weighed and evaluated.⁵⁰

A supply-side analysis of religion in Australia would be likely to describe a religious landscape that contradicts — or at least questions — the prevailing orthodoxy promoted by the secularisation paradigm.

One of the most important challenges for this exercise of weighing and evaluating is presented by the diversity of the Australian religious economy. Diversity in the religious market entails competition between suppliers; but whereas diversity can stimulate competition, it can also generate conflict.

Hence the importance of ensuring that religious competition in a liberal, secular democracy is framed by prevailing norms and laws. When these broader norms evolve — as they have been doing in Australia with regard to sexual orientation, marriage, and gender — the pressure on religious groups to accommodate themselves to those norms increases.

In the face of that pressure, and in order to diffuse conflict — as opposed to competition — between differing conceptions of the 'good' life, protections for the fundamental human right to religious liberty become even more important.

By testing the relationship between pluralism and participation in the religious market, supply-siders have found a positive correlation suggesting that competition does foster vitality. But this has been questioned repeatedly by critics who level the charge that religious market advocates fail to distinguish adequately between factors of supply and demand.⁵¹

The battle between religious market advocates and advocates of various forms of the secularisation thesis will continue to rage as economists and sociologists on either side of the divide continue to advance arguments and counter-arguments about the merits of a supply-side analysis of religion.

But whatever its flaws — and its limitations and scope do need to be tested further, especially in Australia — one of the principal merits of the religious market model is that it affords an important perspective on the social and cultural place occupied by religion; differing significantly from the one that customarily prevails.

A supply-side analysis of religion in Australia will pose new questions and portray a new image of the place of religion in the life of our society and culture.

Whereas the 2016 census found that some 30 per cent of Australians reported having no religious affiliation — leading to renewed calls for an end to state funding for all faith-based organisations — there remain 70 per cent who do claim a religious affiliation.

And while fewer people may go to church on Sunday, religious organisations are still heavily involved in our society. Many schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and welfare agencies, supplying essential services to all Australians, are religious — specifically Christian. And what drives them is religious conviction. Force them to divorce from their Christian purpose, and those faith-based organisations would quickly fade away; and our national life would be the poorer for that.

Despite the secularist protests about the demise of religion and its eclipse by the sun of rationalism, religion is not about to disappear from Australia's liberal, secular society. Multiculturalism, and our intake of new migrants, mean religious faith will still be with us. And people who believe in God will continue to find themselves in the majority for some years to come.

Endnotes

- 1 For an extended discussion of this issue, see P. Kurti, *The Tyranny of Tolerance: Threats to Religious Liberty in Australia*, (Redland Bay, QLD: Connor Court, 2017).
- 2 G. Bouma, *Australian Soul: Religion and Spirituality in the 21st century*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2. Clark coined the phrase to capture what he considered to be the essential character of the ANZAC spirit.
- 3 L. R. Iannaccone, "Extremism and the Economics of Religion", *The Economic Record*, (June 2012), 110-115, 111.
- 4 See the text box on page 3.
- 5 A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (New York: Modern Library, 1965) quoted in L. R. Iannaccone, "The Consequences of Religious Market Structure: Adam Smith and the Economics of Religion", *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 1991) 156-177, 157.
- 6 L. Iannaccone, "The Consequences of Religious Market Structure: Adam Smith and the Economics of Religion", *Rationality and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (April 1991) 156-177, 157.
- 7 L. Iannaccone, as above, 158.
- 8 R. Stark and L. Iannaccone, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the 'Secularization' of Europe", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sep., 1994), 230-252, 232.
- 9 R. Stark and R. Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 199.
- 10 R. Stark and R. Finke, as above, 38.
- 11 R. McCleary, "The Economics of Religion and Secularization", *The Review of Faith and International Affairs*, 5:1, (Spring 2007), 43-47, 44.
- 12 See P. Kurti, *Tyranny of Tolerance*, as above, 42.
- 13 See, for example, R. Ahdar, "The idea of 'religious markets'", *International Journal of Law in Context*, Vol. 2 No. 1, (2006), 49-65, 59.
- 14 The focus of the program has now been directed specifically to anti-bullying in schools. See, for example, "Budget 2018: school chaplains program made 'permanent'", *SBS News* (9 May 2018) <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/budget-2018-school-chaplains-program-made-permanent>
- 15 P. Karp, "Secular groups call for review of 'blatantly discriminatory' school chaplains program", *The Guardian* (1 April 2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/apr/01/secular-groups-call-for-review-of-blatantly-discriminatory-school-chaplains-program>
- 16 P. Karp, as above.
- 17 S. Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56. Bruce earlier defines religion as "beliefs, actions, and institutions based on the existence of supernatural entities with powers of agency, or impersonal processes possessed of moral purpose that set the conditions of, or intervene in, human affairs." S. Bruce, as above, 1.
- 18 S. Bruce, as above, 39.
- 19 S. Bruce, "Secularization", in B.S. Turner (ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 137-8.
- 20 G. Davie, "Resacralization", in B.S. Turner (ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 162.
- 21 Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2016 Census: Religion", <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/7E65A144540551D7CA258148000E2B85?OpenDocument>
- 22 See *The Rationalist Society of Australia*, <https://www.rationalist.com.au>
- 23 There are 125,900 Sikhs in Australia whose numbers grew from being 0.3 per cent of the population in 2011 to 0.5 per cent in 2016.
- 24 See G. Bouma, "Census 2016 shows Australia's changing religious profile, with more 'nones' than Catholics", *The Conversation* (27 June 2017) <https://theconversation.com/census-2016-shows-australias-changing-religious-profile-with-more-nones-than-catholics-79837>. See also, R. Barker, "Australians have an increasingly complex, yet relatively peaceful, relationship with religion." *The Conversation* (21 December 2016) <https://theconversation.com/australians-have-an-increasingly-complex-yet-relatively-peaceful-relationship-with-religion-70328>.
- 25 For more, see <https://www.ncls.org.au/>. The NCLS is now the most comprehensive religious research venture in Australia, but it confines itself to Christianity. In the following description of religion in Australia, therefore, the terms *religion* and *Christianity* are used almost interchangeably unless more specific use is required by the context.
- 26 *Faith and Belief in Australia: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends*, (Baulkham Hills, NSW: McCrindle Research, 2017). The object of the research was "to explore Australian perceptions and attitudes to Christianity, the Church, and Jesus". The McCrindle report, therefore, has nothing to say about other religions in Australia.

- 27 *Faith and Belief in Australia*, as above, 16.
- 28 *Faith and Belief in Australia*, as above, 14.
- 29 *Faith and Belief in Australia*, as above, 36.
- 30 *Faith and Belief in Australia*, as above, 15.
- 31 *Faith and Belief in Australia*, as above, 17.
- 32 "Trends in Protestant church vitality over twenty years (1991-2011)", *NCLS Occasional Paper 23* (2013), 1.
- 33 The core qualities surveyed included worship, vision, leadership, innovation, service, inclusion, and faith-sharing.
- 34 "Trends", as above, 10.
- 35 *Faith and Belief in Australia*, as above, 19.
- 36 See P. Kurti, "Not losing our religion", *The Spectator Australia* (3 July 2017) <https://www.spectator.com.au/2017/07/not-losing-our-religion/>
- 37 D. Hilliard, "Australia: Towards Secularisation and One Step Back", in M. Snape and C.G. Brown, *Secularisation in the Christian World*, (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 86.
- 38 D. Hilliard, as above, 88.
- 39 R. Franck and L. Iannaccone, "Religious decline in the 20th century West: testing alternative explanations", *Public Choice* (2014), 159: 385-414.
- 40 R. Franck and L. Iannaccone, as above, 404.
- 41 R. Franck and L. Iannaccone, as above, 406.
- 42 G. Davie, as above, 168.
- 43 R. Stark and L. Iannaccone, "A Supply-Side Reinterpretation of the "Secularization" of Europe, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Sept 1994), 230-252, 231.
- 44 R. Stark and L. Iannaccone, as above, 232.
- 45 R. Forsyth, "Religious Freedom under Challenge?" in P. Kurti (ed.) *A Quartet of Freedoms: Freedom of Religion, Speech, Association and Conscience*, (St Leonards, NSW: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2014), 6.
- 46 G. Bouma, "Religious diversity: and social policy: an Australian dilemma", *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 47, No., 3, (2012), 281-295, 288.
- 47 See, for example, G. Bouma, as above, 293.
- 48 *Submission to the Inquiry into the Status of the Human Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief*, (Sydney, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 22 March 2017), 6.
- 49 *Submission to the Expert Panel on Religious Freedom*, (Sydney, NSW: Centre for Independent Studies, 7 February 2018), 4.
- 50 G. Davie, as above, 175.
- 51 See, for example, R. Ahdar, "The idea of 'religious markets'", *International Journal of Law in Context*, Vol. 2 No. 1, (2006), 49-65, 60.

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