Religious Diversity in a New Australian Democracy

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Religious Diversity, Disintegration and Democracy

Just as the mainstream established Christian religions in Australia decline at various rates and in various ways, new religious groups flourish. The variety of these groups is astonishing, to many disconcerting. They include not only the New Religious Movements that burst on the scene from the 1960s to the 1980s - the likes of the Church of Scientology, the Hare Krishnas, the Moonies - but at least five other types of new groups. These are: New immigrant and ethnic community (NIEC) religions; New Christian conversionist groups, especially Pentecostals; and overlapping these New fundamentalist or charismatic groups within Catholicism, Judaism and Islam; New cults, centred around therapies and/or gurus and /or celebrities and/or ritual practices; and overlapping these New Age spirituality networks.

Now these types, as suggested by my nervous phrase, 'overlapping these', are not good classifiers: each type is internally diverse, and placement of particular groups in one type is often going to be problematic. All of which underlines the simple point I'm making with the list: that increasing diversity or pluralism is one of the key features of the contemporary religious scene in Australia - not secularisation, not scandal, but increasing diversity.

In this paper I want to explore answers to some questions about the social and political significance and consequences of increasing religious diversity in Australia. The big questions are: What sort of Australian society is signified in increasing religious diversity? What sort of emergent Australian society is being constructed as religiously based values, and religiously grounded civic cultures become more diverse? Do we have cause to worry that increasing religious diversity in itself, or because of some of its constituent elements, threatens our national society? Or, putting it in terms of our theme, is there a diversity that needs to be managed because increasing religious diversity is both a sign and potential cause of the disintegration of Australian national society? As we shall see, we don't get very far until we break the big questions down into questions we can put to discussible evidence. But for a while I want to stay with the big questions.

Americans, more habitually than we, ask questions about the state of the Union, and put religious factors into their answers. I propose to outline some American responses to questions like mine to provide a sort of framework for my Australian

enquiry. Full advantage will be taken of the political scientist William E. Connolly's work, particularly his essay *Fundamentalism in America* (Connolly 1995). Connolly quotes James Kurth's lament about the decline of the U.S.A. as a nation state (1992)[1] as exemplifying a line of analysis of the state of the union with which he begs to differ. A refrain in the analysis is that the U.S.A., since the 1960s, 'has steadily become less a nation and more a multicultural society': note that opposition. As Kurth sees it, the U.S.A. entered the twentieth century as one of the few modern nation states, along with Britain, France, Germany Italy and Japan. These modern nation states organised and coordinated the cultural, security, and economic aspects of life in the great industrial societies of the day, channelling resources to the key institutions of the school, the army and the factory, and at the same time, channelling and integrating the output of these institutions to advancement of a clearly defined, consensual national interest. In the case of the U.S.A., by the end of the century, the sources of consensual value have been lost and the disintegration of the nation state is so far advanced that only a sort of cultural war against the internal and external forces undermining consensual value and national industrial production could restore the nation state, which is worth restoring, in Kurth's view, because it is the highest and best form of human society.

The new religious groups that I have listed enter the scene of decline and fall, but not as a bloc, except in the senses that the increasing religious diversity they constitute may be read as a sign of evaporating value consensus, accompanying the decline of those mainstream Christian denominations which are supposed to have helped shape consciences and dispositions of the good workers and citizens of industrial society. But, as Connolly points out, Kurth's sort of secular academic lament about the death of the modern industrial nation state is in tune with laments heard in at least one of the listed new religious groups - the 'new' Christian conversionist groups which claim to articulate the one, true and American Christian culture, and like Kurth, decry the other new religious groups as part of corrupting, creeping multiculturalism, destructive of American society[2].

It is as harbingers and producers of multiculturalism that all the other listed new religious groups are bunched as enemies of national society. That basic dichotomy, multicultural society vs. nation subsumes others, in which the terms on both sides of the dichotomy are seen as linked such that each is cause and effect of the others. Consider the lists in columns 1 and 2 in the table on the following page.

I don't want to go into all the interesting issues that the above diagram suggests - not the least of which is whether the U.S. national state with all those interacting characteristics ever existed, and if it did, whether a sort of sacred canopy of Judeo-Christian ethics and beliefs (with the Judeo added rather late in the piece!) held it together. Rather I want to use the American case and debates about the consequences of increasing religious diversity in U.S. national society to help define the issues concerning increasing religious diversity in Australia. Is it the case that the groups constituting increasing religious diversity, singly or collectively, take their place as

Column 1: **Multicultural Society**	Column 2: **Nation**
Increasing religious diversity	Unifying (Judeo-) Christian culture
Social fragmentation, multicultural regime	Organisation of organisations
Non-citizens	Citizens trained in civility
Post-modernism	Modernity
Deconstruction	Reconstruction of nation
Poor education, high illiteracy	Canonical literacy
Weak service economy	Industrial economy
Mass entertainment	High culture (recognised as such)
Military insecurity	Large military establishment
Lack of capable leaders	A unified pool of leaders
USA joins ranks of 'takers of history'.	USA was a maker of history

causes and effects of other items in column 1 (modified, of course to bear more semblance to the Australian case), and conversely, as subverters of the interacting items in column 2? Or, following some of Connolly's lines of argument about increasing cultural diversity in the U.S. might at least some elements in Australia's diversifying religions be making a positive contribution to the development of a new type of national society in which new principles of social solidarity, based on the disposition and the capacity to negotiate difference operate?

Connolly's work invites us to abandon lament for the passing of the sort of democracy which allowed a people to rule themselves despite difference of interest because they were united by shared religiously-based beliefs and values. Instead, we might first discern and then nurture a deeper, emergent form of democracy in which the constituents of a religiously, politically and ethnically multicultural order have a hand in the mediation of their own differences. Elaborating a little on Connolly, we might imagine an already emergent Australian society in which diverse religions dispose, equip and empower members to engage in the negotiation of different imagined futures, values and lifestyles - and, in those negotiations, actually perform a vital Australian democracy.

In the rest of this paper I want to set out in search of this supposed emergent Australian society in which religious diversity provides a foundation for democracy. This search requires, first of all, some refinement of conceptual tools to aid discernment. We need to rehearse the concepts that help us spell out the profound changes in political agendas and modes of political engagement that have occurred in advanced national societies over the last thirty years. We need to specify what sorts of religious belief, practice and organization *might* have the capacity to dispose and enable individuals and groups to engage in the democratic negotiation of differences. In addition to this consideration of types of religion we need to assemble the various Australias-in-the-making, of which a deeply democratic multicultural Australia is only one. And then, in conjunction with conceptual exploration, we

must do systematically what is attempted only piecemeal and sporadically here: consider the evidence about the religions, how they figure in the lives of their members and how they operate in the wider society.

Contextualising and Profiling the New Religions

As an aid to imagining the new Australia of democratically negotiated difference, it may help to rehearse some ideas and concepts that have developed as sociologists have tried to describe and understand the structures and dynamics of advanced national societies at the end of the twentieth century. These include five propositions which, together, challenge us to think beyond the simple either/or possibilities entertained by Kurth.

1. We are indeed moving away from the form of modern society conceptualised as a system of roles scripted in institutions regulated and coordinated by the "organization of organizations", viz. the state, which also mediates the central class conflicts of the society. But we are not moving towards inevitable disintegration and collapse. Rather, there are signs of new forms of solidarity, coordination, conflict and mediation as well as new modes of societal transformation. National societies, while retaining features encoded in the concepts of role, institutions, state, and class conflict, are becoming **also** societies of competing collective identities, formed in and contesting the future through social movements which operate in and on civil society as well as in the arenas of formal politics (Scott, 1990, Giddens, 1994). At the same time, social movements orientate their operations less and less to local community and national society and more and more to personal networks and the emerging global network society (Castells 1996).

2. Under the combined impact of globalizing capitalism and the information technology revolution, individuals in advanced prosperous societies are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices and choices about the source of meaning and experience (i.e. social identity) among a diversity of options (Giddens 1994, Castells 1997). Included in this diversity are traditional and new religious identities and lifestyles, ethnic-, gender-, and environmental-focussed identities and lifestyles, but also identities and lifestyles formed in and around the great administrative structures of the national economy and the polity on the one hand and, on the other, the emerging structures of the global network society. In such societies, negotiation of lifestyle and identity becomes more salient and more important to an ever-increasing proportion of citizens than the learning and monitoring of set social roles policed and modelled by agencies of the nation-state, established churches and local as opposed to transnational social elites.

3. The negotiation of lifestyle and identity is not only a concern of individuals. Such choices are negotiated collectively, and identities and lifestyles are developed, modified and defended in the interactions of identity politics. Social movements, and religious groups encouraging the open negotiation of identity contribute to a "dialogic democracy" of identity politics insofar as they insert "into the discursive

domain aspects of social conduct that previously went undiscussed, or were 'settled' by traditional practices" (Giddens 1994: 120).

4. Identity politics increasingly becomes the sphere of action in which whole societies, including the emergent global network society, constitute and transform themselves. (Castells 1997).

5. Effective engagement in identity politics requires of the groups, associations and movements (national and transnational) involved that they foster orientations and dispositions to collective action for the development and defence of identity and lifestyle; that they equip and empower constituents for the hard slog of sustained contest and negotiation (identity politics, no less than formal interest politics is, in Max Weber's words, a "slow boring through thick boards"); that while providing community for the formation of identity, they also provide connection to the sites and means of negotiation and contest especially the media (Castells 1984). Groups, associations, and movements vary enormously in the orientations to collective action that they foster, and also in their capacity to empower and connect. The factors affecting this variation we might call the societal profile of a particular group, association or movement. In the case of religion, the societal profile of a religious group or association refers to the set of characteristics that affect, positively or negatively, collective and individual dispositions and capacities to engage effectively in dialogic, democratic identity politics.

This paper seeks to outline and discuss the societal profiles of religious entities contributing to increasing religious diversity in multicultural Australia. Particular focus is on the new religious movements, the New Age spirituality networks and some new cults - precisely the religious phenomena that are suspected of subverting identity politics as well as the integrity of national societies. These are the religions that are supposed variously to foster narcissistic, anti-social identities (Lasch 1980); to foster brittle, affect-based relationships (of the kind described by Hetherington 1992) rather than communal relationships (with characteristics posited by Milbank 1996) capable of sustaining the engagements of identity politics; to orientate devotees to other worldly concerns rather than this-worldly endeavour; to disempower adherents who abdicate agency to authoritarian leaders; and to remove whole groups from any connection to the sites and means for effective engagement in identity politics (Saliba (1995) summarises these sorts of charges levelled at the 'cults'). However, recent studies of groups suspected of having some one, or combination of these characteristics show few of them to confirm suspicion.

For example, recent American (Griffin 1995; Finley 1991; Neitz 1990) and Australian (Hume 1997) studies of neo-paganism - the Goddess movement and Wicca in particular - show how they provide orientations, dispositions and empowerment for effective engagement in identity politics. Acknowledging differences between diverse strands of these religions, these studies draw out some common characteristics, including a monistic world view which locates the sacred in nature, and the good in the restoration of harmonious relationships between the sacred cosmos and

humankind. At the same time, the religions are strongly antinomian: authority is found only in the freely questing, experimenting, dogma-rejecting self, and external authority, particularly of the patriarchal kind, is rejected. In pagan rituals the enactment of fantasies appears to stimulate the imagination of new forms of social life and new ways of living in harmony with nature. The combination of monism, antinomian tendencies and enacted fantasy disposes devotees to 'continual dialectic' well beyond the narrow confines of the religious group (Hume 1997:229), and thereby, to creative engagement in the environmental and women's movements. Just as common tendencies in these neo-pagan religions orientate and dispose devotees to action in such social movements, so they empower, women especially, for effective action (Finley 1991). Then, the low boundaries of most neo-pagan groups and networking between them appears to provide at once sufficient community for the development and maintenance of distinct identity, and sufficient connection with the mainstream to allow for effective political activism (Griffin 1995).

This brief consideration of claims advanced in studies of neo-pagan religions as compared to stereotyping claims made about the new religious movements and the 'cults' as nihilistic and disintegrative leads us to appreciate the need to construct societal profiles of the range of new religions as an essential step in understanding how they may figure in the transformation of whole societies. It also provides some leads about the components of such profiles. If we are to understand how the new religions are involved (or detached from) democratic identity politics in Australia, we need evidence about their basic focus, the locus of their religious work, how they dispose devotees towards the world, what sorts of boundaries their constituent groups construct, and whether their form of association allows at once the nurturing of difference within religious community and the engagements of identity politics beyond it. Combining insights from studies of the new religions with concepts and typologies long since developed in the sociology of religion (e.g. by Weber (1958a) for religious orientations and by Bainbridge and Stark (1980) for religious groups), the following grid for the construction of societal profiles of religious groups is proposed.

Societal Profile Grid

1. Religious orientations affecting dispositions and capacities to engage in identity politics.

    1.1 Basic focus and preoccupation

        self

        religious group

        society

        alternative or other worldly reality or divinity.

    1.2 Locus of religious work

        daily life world

        secluded, monastic or semi-monastic

1.3 Type and locus of religious aspiration
        this-worldly functional adjustment
        this-worldly transformational
        other-worldly accretional
        other-worldly apocalyptic
2. Type of religious association affecting capacity for effective engagement in identity politics.
    2.1 Boundary and boundary behaviour
        low, and casual drift across boundaries
        low, and intentional exchange across boundaries
        high, but bridged
        high, and unbridged
    2.2 Form of association
        loose network
        commercial staff-client
        communal
        leader-focussed sect

The first set of types in the grid proposes to include the vast range of religious orientations found among the new religions which appear to affect dispositions and capacities to engage in identity politics. All three typologies are elaborations of types of religious orientations proposed by Max Weber (1958a, 1963) in his attempts to understand connections between different religious cultures, practical ethics, and the course of societal development. Types 1.1, basic focus and preoccupation, are formulated not only with Weber's categories of inner-worldly and other-worldly orientation in mind, but with an eye to an initial, simplistic working hypothesis that exclusive basic focus on self or religious group or some other worldly reality - orientations actually found among the new religions - will deflect groups and devotees away from the engagements of identity politics, and that, conversely, a focus on society, or on changing social structures or lifestyles will foster such engagement.

Most of the new religions considered here do indeed represent themselves or are represented as religions of the self: they focus on and are preoccupied with the self as source of authority and are religions **for** the self in the sense that they enjoin work on the inner self to achieve meaning, a sense of well-being, salvation in the next life or satisfaction in this. Paul Heelas (1993) characterises New Age religion as "self religiosity" in these senses. Therapeutic religions like the Church of Scientology and spiritual Yoga groups like the 3HO Foundation which work primarily on the inner self are also religions of self-orientation.

But classification under this heading is not easy. Many religions of the self also have a strong secondary focus on society, or seek to transform society or the world at large by working on the self in the first instance. The Sathya Sai organisation of Australia represents itself as 'a non sectarian spiritual organisation'[3] (Directory:

121). It is one of the twentieth century Indian religions that spread around the world in the1960s, arriving in Australia in the 1970s, and now claims over a hundred centres in this country and about 5000 members. It urges constant work for the disciplining of the self, but the end is not only self-improvement but the acquirement of strength and energy for the service of society. An even more recent arrival from India, Sahaja Yoga similarly urges working on the self for 'self-realisation' but especially in the context of the family, so to engender compassionate understanding of the world's problems and acquire the energies to address them. Of entirely different provenance, the pagan Goddess and Earth worshipping Church of All Worlds, formed in Australia in 1992, celebrates the authority of the self and "the realisation of ultimate individual freedom and personal responsibility" - but all this "in harmonious eco-psychic relationship with the total Biosphere of Holy Mother Earth" (Directory: 31). Focus on the 'self' for these pagans is meant to issue in new collective orientations towards sustainable development of the biosphere.

Similarly, basic focus on supernatural reality, or beings not of this world is not always exclusive focus in the sense that it precludes any engagements in this-worldly matters. There are instances of new religions which do appear to foster exclusive other-worldly focus - the infamous case of the Heaven's Gate, for instance. But groups like the Children of God and ISKON (Hare Krishnas), though in their different ways focussing mainly on the transcendent and on withdrawal from the world with a focus on the religious community itself, are also disposed to the provision of services to the world outside the community, and to forms of working in and on the world.

Max Weber's (1958c) account of the 'elective affinity' between the Calvinist Protestant ethic and early modern capitalism demonstrated the importance of the two further aspects of religious orientations in the grid (1.2 and 1.3). Lived Calvinism, the Calvinist identity movement as we might now call it rather than the Calvinism of the theologians, had an enormous impact on the the political economic history of the West, in Weber's view, because it located the signs of salvation and work for the glory of God in the world of daily life rather than in monastic seclusion from the world. Furthermore, that work in the world embodied projects at odds with prevailing economic, political and cultural mores. Just as much as such work was intended to achieve the signs of salvation, the Puritan aspiration was also to transform daily life, its social relations and lifestyles, to correspond with a Puritan imagination, inflected with this-worldly asceticism. The tension in the basic focus between sinful self and inscrutable, demanding and predestining God, and the resolution of this tension in work in and on this world, produced the dynamics of an historically effective religious movement.

In the "world without spirit" (Weber 1958c:180-182) that is our world, the force of the Puritan religious movement long spent, it is nonetheless a fair working hypothesis that the basic dynamics of that movement will still operate. The new religions that orientate devotees to action in daily life, with the aspiration to transform it, we might expect, are potential identity movements or, like some of the pagan

groups, part of more broadly based identity movements. These are religions that locate religious work in the daily life world rather than in monastic seclusion (1.2), and that at the same time, aspire to transform the world rather than adjust to it.

Paul Heelas (1993) describes a stream of New Age that is indeed orientated to this world but has no transformational edge, precisely because it fosters adjustment and aspires to hone skills for fuller, successful engagement in contemporary corporate business life. However, there are many new religions which are decidedly this-worldly in their location of religious work and aspire to transform the world rather than adjust to it. Many elements of the Pan-Pacific Pagan Alliance appear to be of this orientation, as are the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Sahaja Yoga, Sokka Gakkai International, Sri Chinmoy, and many other groups.

On the other hand, some of the new religions locate religious work in large part in seclusion from everyday life, and aspire either to build up merit for a life to come (other worldly accretional) or to prepare to be survivors for that better mode of existence that is shortly to erupt into the everyday world (other worldly apocalyptic). Religions fostering these orientations steer members away from any collective action to engage with and transform the prevailing social order and cultural mores in favour of preparation for the better life to come. Some other-worldly religions present themselves as having both accretional and apocalyptic or survivalist tendencies. An example of this is the Church Universal and Triumphant (the Summit Lighthouse), which came to Australia from the U.S.A. in 1978 and now has seven main centres and several smaller ones around Australia. The Church indicates that its primary purpose is the publication and dissemination of the teaching of the Ascended Masters - including Jesus Christ, Mother Mary, Moses, Zarathustra and Gautama Buddha. The teachings and practices promoted by the Church are meant to help adherents achieve progress through prayer and meditation in a series of incarnations towards the goal of Ascension and reunion of the soul with God (Directory:43-4). This orientation is not necessarily to be realised in radical seclusion from the world, and does not preclude service to the world. But the primary orientations and aspirations are clearly other-worldly directed, and the present Messenger of the Church has made pronouncements of imminent apocalypse in the recent past, urging preparations for survival.

Location of a religion according to the religious orientations it fosters is not all there is to a societal profile. Characteristics of the religious group itself, its form of association, also bear on the capacity of members of the religion to engage effectively in identity politics. In the grid (2.1) the first set of types of form of association refers to boundary and boundary behaviour. Many of the new religious groups have high boundaries, symbolic fences, and in a very few cases physical constraints, separating insiders from outsiders. By and large, groups with high, firm boundaries are also basically focussed on the group itself and aspire to achieve this- or other-worldly goals for members only. They are not disposed and do not dispose to engagement in the exchanges of identity politics. Examples of new religions with relatively high

boundaries are Amanda Marga, the Children of God, the Unification Church (the Mooonies), ISKON and Subud, and the core elements of the Church of Scientology and the Temple of Set.

But consideration of even this short list alerts us to two further characteristics of religious groups. First, these groups, like most new immigrant and ethnic community religions (NIECs), though they might have high boundaries, vary in behaviour around those boundaries; and boundary behaviour affects capacities and dispositions to engage in identity politics. Second, height and tightness of boundary is a subtle variable in its connection to capacity for engagement in identity politics. The boundary of a given religious association may be so low and loose that there is insufficient density and stability of exchanges between members to build and sustain particular identity. This (to a complete outsider at any rate) appears to be the case with such religions and the Church of All Worlds, several of the Yoga spiritual groups, or groups like the Sydney Goodwill Unit of Service. But just how high and tight boundary must be to allow sufficient density of exchange without entailing closure from the contacts and engagements judged necessary for effective entry into identity politics, cannot be specified here: this is an issue that awaits careful empirical research.

Boundary behaviour - particularly the extent to which groups allow or encourage 'bridging' across boundaries and enter into or disallow alliances with other groups - has emerged in recent American and Australian studies as an important variable in connection with matters under discussion here. Examination of boundary behaviour is especially important in the case of just those high boundary groups which foster particularistic, out-of-the-mainstream identities (including some NIEC religious groups) which, as they proliferate, give rise to the fear of the tribalisation and fragmentation of society, in Australia as much as in the U.S. Bouma (1996:104-5) suggests that at least some groups of that kind will enter into pragmatic alliances and pursue survival strategies which involve social and political engagement, thus, arguably, enriching civil society and facilitating the engagement of members in identity politics. Warner (1997), addressing our broad question in the case of the US, argues against those who fear that proliferating new immigrant and ethnic congregations pose a threat to American universalism. On the basis of ritual practices he has observed in these groups across America, he finds that particularist difference *is* established in these rituals, but so are 'bridges' intentionally extended across the religious group boundaries. Warner sees signs of the construction of "a society with a multitude of particular communities but also with multiple bridges between them" (Warner 1997:223).

Whether such bridges are effective in enabling groups and members of a given religion to engage in identity politics will further depend on its form of association (2.2). A small number of the new religions have the form of loose networks, without hierarchy, permanent staff or strong central administration. Their members are linked only by fairly shallow and impermanent ties and the network itself is not dense or

stable, approaching the *bund* or 'communion' described by Hetherington (1992:93) as a "small scale, achieved rather than ascribed, unstable and affectual form of association...highly self-referential". Short of this extreme, the Australian Transmission Meditation Network takes the form of such a loose network. A much greater number of the new religions combine a loose network form for members who relate mostly as individuals to a commercially organised core. None of the new religions represent themselves as having a purely commercial form of organisation, the second of the four types listed under 2.2. But examples of the mixed type include the Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga centres, Sokka Gakkai and the Synchronicity Foundation. This mixed form may be exemplified by the latter instance. Synchronicity was founded in Virginia U.S.A by Master Charles in 1982 and is a non-profit incorporated foundation. Its stated purpose is to share and further "the Source Conscious experience and Source Conscious living through the art and science of meditation" (Directory:150). Its primary focus is High-Tech meditation. It lists as its sources of finance the sale of meditation tapes and compensation fees for High Tech Meditation Counselling.

A third form of association is the communal, and it is this type which is most likely to nurture the proclivities and abilities for effective engagement in identity politics, provided bridges linking the community to the wider society are maintained and sustain two-way traffic. The loose, relatively unstable network, as already suggested, will not sustain the collective action of identity politics because it is a form of association unsuited to the cultivation and internal negotiation of particularistic, distinctive identity and leaves individual members vulnerable to the shifting flows of alternative identities in contemporary consumer societies. By contrast, communal associations foster internally, multifaceted, dense and sustained engagements among persons who bring their otherness as well as their shared identities to the community (Milbank 1996). It is proposed as a working hypothesis that the internal dialogue and mediation of difference in communal associations disposes and equips members for external engagements in identity politics. Some ISKON centres appear to approach this ideal type of community, though, as noted by Rochford (1995) ISKON tends now to combine a predominant loose boundary, denominational form with small core communal associations. Several other new religions likewise combine core communal associations with another form of association, usually of the loose network kind, for ordinary members. Ananda Marga, the Buddhist Society of Victoria, The Church Universal and Triumphant and Sathya Sai all display this sort of combined form of association.

The fourth form of association, the leader-focussed sect is not nearly as common as the anti-cult literature would have it. However, there are leader focussed religious associations among the new religions and in recent developments in some older traditions. The Branch Davidians of Waco led by David Koresh was an example of the latter. At one point in their history, but certainly not now, the Children of God under the inspiration and leadership of David Berg, were of this type. The Raelians,

led by 'Rael' (Claude Vorilhon) appear to be highly leader-focussed in their one-way leader to member flow of communications within closed high boundary groups. It is unlikely that such leader-focussed sects equip individual members or groups for effective identity politics engagements. The argument in support of this working hypothesis takes off from differences between the leader-focussed sect and communal or combined communal associations. The latter allow the fluid yet functional forms of trust and solidarity which Jon P. Bloch (1998) argues are necessary if the cultivation of difference and the "spirit of negotiation" are to be developed together in a group. But in the leader-focussed sect, the flow of new information is centrally controlled and never negotiated by group members; there is no fluidity in the relationships of trust which are, in any case, forged only between the leader and individual members, rather than between members who are also engaged in the negotiation of their identities inside and outside the group. If Bloch is right, the form of association in the small number of new religions that are exclusively leader-focussed disables both group and its members for effective engagement in identity politics at the end of the twentieth century.

Conclusions

This paper stops short of the next two steps in the investigation of connections between religious diversity and the development of Australian society through the democratic negotiation of distinctive religious identities. The necessary steps taken here have been to assemble and discuss the elements of the societal profiles of the new religions; and to illustrate how the new religions actually vary enormously in the orientations that affect dispositions to engage in the democratic negotiation of religious identity, as well as in the associational forms that bear on effective identity formation on the one hand, and empowerment for effective engagement in identity politics on the other. On the way, a number of working hypotheses have been outlined, explaining how particular types listed in the grid of societal profile elements affect dispositions and effectiveness.

The next two steps would be first, to construct and present the full societal profiles of as many as possible of the new religions, and indeed of the whole array of elements in Australia's increasing religious diversity including the NIEC congregations and new fundamentalist groups in established traditions. Second, the working hypotheses would be tested. These steps cannot be taken as yet because the evidence is not in. The evidence drawn on for the first steps reported here is too superficial and incomplete to rely on for the next steps. It comes from data gathered for a directory of new religious associations which was provided by some fifty-nine associations responding to a questionnaire asking them to summarise main beliefs and values as well as provide details of organizational structure, function and history. The self-representations in response to a minimalist questionnaire require amplification and checking before the associations can be confidently placed according to types in the grid and reliable societal profiles assembled. Further, reading

across the grid placements towards an understanding of the experience and implications of the new religion in the lives of members requires consideration of additional evidence from observation of the religious life of the group and in-depth biographical interviews with members themselves; and that research has still to be done for almost all the entries in the Directory.

However, short of fully reliable societal profiles and testing of working hypotheses, some patterns emerging out of tentative placing of the fifty-nine new religious associations can be noted. Further, and finally, these patterns may be drawn on to inform conclusions, admittedly speculative, about the sort of Australia that is at once revealed and constructed in the array of new religions.

When the grid placements of the fifty-nine associations were assembled on one chart, several features were easily observable. The first feature, as might be anticipated from the discussion of the grid typologies, is the variability of the new religious groups. There are indeed religions with profiles which appear to vindicate the fears and suspicions of a James Kurth: religions which orientate members away from the engagements of the good citizen of modernity, and wall them off from the polluting world of modern everyday life, thereby aiding and abetting processes supposedly leading to the fragmentation of society into mutually hostile tribal groups. These are the religions with a **fragmentation profile**. Curiously enough, though, a few new religions have societal profiles which suggest they are **restorationist**, i.e., they are capably about the business of restoring the sort of society whose passing Kurth laments. They urge the renewal of traditional family values, connect personal growth to civic action, and preach and practice bridging across multicultural divides; and they have the sort of communal structure, at least for core members, which would appear to facilitate socialisation into the key orientations and values of the religion, while providing at least symbolic bridges to the 'outside'. The Unification Church has this restorationist profile. Another set of religions shares a very different profile which is called here the **market profile**: focus on self, location of religious work in the daily life world, aspiration to functional adjustment to the demands of market competition, and low boundary association in which the salient relationships are of the commercial staff to client type. Religions with this profile, lacking orientations to collective action and without the associational means to nurture and sustain distinctive identity, are not expected to produce citizens either for the 'old' democracy of national state politics or the 'new' democracy of social movement identity politics.

However, the second notable feature of the chart is that among all the variation, the largest set of new religions shares the sort of profile which, according to our working hypotheses, may dispose and equip members for effective engagement in identity politics. This profile, called here the **movement profile** includes the following orientational elements: a dual focus on self and society, this-worldly location of religious work, and the aspiration to transform rather than adjust to the social and/ or cultural status quo. In associational form the religions with these orientational

features diverge into sub-sets: low boundary with easy drift and a loose network without a communal core on the one hand, and higher but bridged boundary with a communal core on the other. It is the latter, less frequent subtype, exemplified tentatively by such associations as ISKON, Sahaja Yoga, Sri Chinmoy, Sukyo Mahikari, and some of the groups within the Pagan Pacific Alliance, which is expected to maximise collective and individual effectiveness in the engagements of identity politics.

In the absence of further research, it is neither proper nor useful to list exhaustively the new religions according to type of societal profile; and it is premature to count the number of associations falling into each type, given the tentativeness of the classifications. But some conclusions drawn from the attempt at tentative classifications are worth presenting. First and most obviously, the range of profoundly different profiles shows that it is absurd to posit some single societal significance or impact of the new religions considered here, still less of the whole array of elements in Australia's religious diversity. Profiling and the typing of profiles so far suggests that while some few of the new religions may signify and even help produce (as bit-players, given their small size) a measure of disintegration of national society as imagined in the 1950s, others orientate and equip members to restore that imagined society. Some of the new religions encapsulate adherents in separate religious worlds that, in the short haul at least, appear not to articulate with the dynamics of social and cultural change, while others are contributing soul and energy to the new social movements.

Less obviously, the exercise in typing and classifying, albeit crude so far, helps us locate the new religions in the several different emergent Australias that the new macro-sociology, briefly reviewed above, helps us to discern and describe. The first of these is **pure global market Australia**. In the already prefigured future for this Australia, national society has indeed been subverted as politicians dismantle national institutions of production, distribution and accountability in favour of free market flows. The publics comprising civil society have shrunk as they have less and less to offer by way of symbolic or material goods to erstwhile participating citizens. These become fewer in populations of competing individual consumers of globally circulating symbolic and material goods. It seems reasonable to claim that the new religions with a market profile (tentatively including 3HO and Synchronicity Foundation Inc.) have what Weber called an 'elective affinity' with this emergent pure global market Australia. Put simply, this Australia is good for market-profile religion, and that religion is good for global market Australia as it jostles with other emergent Australias to attain its pure form.

The second emergent Australia is **pure modern industrial Australia**. Though this Australia may well have been closest to pure form in the fifth and sixth decades of this century, many of the public and private institutions survive, and the orientations, norms and values consonant with these institutions are upheld by large constituencies. The restorationist new religions, arguably, have an elective affinity

with this fading modern industrial order, joining sections of the established Christian churches and some of the Pentecostal congregations in its maintenance and restoration.

The third of the emergent Australias is **pure technocracy Australia**. We can already see this Australia in which ordinary citizens go about their everyday lives worked on but unable to work the political economy which rules over them according to the abstracted imperatives of technical rationality as administered by technocratic elites. In its fully realised pure form, resistant groups, some religiously inspired, might still be found but only as 'isolated utopias' in an Australian society conquered by technocracy. A subtype of the religions with market profiles will prosper in this Australia which they have had a small part in producing and sustaining: these are new religions like Synchronicity that find the pathway to the sacred and perhaps the sacred itself in a virtual reality that is accessible and attractive mainly to techno elites. It is probable that the input of such new religions to the progress of pure technocracy Australia is nowhere as great as certain developments in established religions, like Roman Catholicism's Opus Dei which appears very directly to foster and sacralise technocratic elitism.

Fourth is **pure tribalised Australia** . This is Australian society that has decomposed into mutually hostile fiefdoms or tribes formed around various principles of collective identity. The tribes of emergent tribalised Australia are of various kinds. Some are unstable groups of individuals temporarily sharing a lifestyle option or a therapy or a drug. Others are more stable but erect high boundaries behind which they go on strike from what remains of civil society and retreat from contact with other tribes. This emergent Australia is prefigured, though not exclusively so, in a few religious associations with fragmentation profiles.

Finally there is **enriched civil society Australia**. This is Australian civil society fighting back against colonisation and fragmentation by the forces of technocratic rationality and the individualising market. In this Australia, resistant movements (green, feminist) talk with one another, engage with the political economic elites, and win back territory for the exercise of citizenship and the slow creation of a renewed Australian 'vernacular republic'. Some of the new religious groups, those with the movement profile, already appear to add, dare we say, soul, to these movements. Insofar as these groups communicate with one another and articulate to an emerging new Australia through the social movements, they may be constructing an Australian community of communities.

This exercise in putting the new religious associations, important elements in Australia's increasing religious diversity, back into the various emergent Australias, is at this point highly speculative: an exercise of the sociological imagination awaiting hard, testing evidence. Nonetheless, it does help us draw some conclusions about the management of religious diversity in Australian society. If that means somehow controlling or even culling of diversity in the name of national integration, then management should be abandoned as counter productive. If Australian society ever

was integrated under a sacred canopy buttressed by the established religions (in itself a debatable proposition) it is certainly not that at the end of the twentieth century. At century's end Australian society can only be conceptualised as a jostling, competing set of projects, or imagined and already emergent futures, some more democratic and autonomous in global society than others.

This inescapably multicultural Australia is integrated only insofar as its constituent elements engage with one another in the mediation of difference through institutions of mediation and through a range of social movements. A first attempt to construct the societal profiles of new religious associations in Australia indicates that in their great variation, types of profiles are discernable. Each of these types appears to have an affinity with one or another of the emergent Australias. More important, a significant proportion of new religious associations, along with some of the older associations, appear to have profiles indicating that they dispose and enable engagement in the mediation of difference - what is called here identity politics. In other words, elements in Australia's religious diversity may well be sources of a new form of societal integration rather than subversive of it, and contributors to renewed democracy in a maximally autonomous Australian society within global society. If religious diversity is to be managed at all, it must surely be in the direction of encouraging it, and maximising dialogue and exchanges between its constituent elements.

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Endnotes

1. See James Kurth, 'The Post-modern State', *The National Interest*, Summer 1992, 26-36.

2. Kurth and a range of quite secular conservative social commentators in the U.S. join with the religious fundamentalists in another way, in Connolly's view. Both speak the language of nationalist fundamentalism which asserts that the state represents the highest point of political obligation and loyalty for every citizen.

3. This and quoted self-representations of other new religious groups in this paper are drawn from a Directory of New Religious Associations which I have compiled. New Religious Associations were asked to complete a questionnaire and provide information of main beliefs and practices, as well as details about organizational structures. At this point, the Directory includes entries for fifty-nine religious associations. It is so far unpublished but is cited henceforward simply as Directory.