

# Catholic Church Engagement in Australian Society: A Symbiotic Relationship between “The Religious” and “The Secular”?<sup>1</sup>

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*The Catholic Church is a major provider of social welfare services in Australian society. Attitudes and practices relating to charitable / welfare activity are, therefore, important indicators of the Church's engagement in pluralist society. In this paper, data from the 1996 Australian Catholic Church Life Survey, the 2001 National Church Life Survey (Catholic Component),<sup>2</sup> and the 1998 Australian Community Survey<sup>3</sup> are used to examine such indicators. The research shows that charity/welfare is regarded by Catholics as a core function of religion. Moreover, this is shown to tap into two differing orientations: one specifically religious, the other less so. These two orientations are also identified in the provision of welfare services by Catholic organisations in the sense that their mission accords with the first orientation, while service delivery tends to accord with the second. These findings prompt exploration of the possibility of a symbiotic relationship between “the religious” and “the secular” in Catholicism's social engagement.*

## **Introduction**

This paper explores the concept that, for Australian Catholics, the moral imperative of religious faith implies engagement with the secular. Catholic Church engagement in charitable/welfare activity is presented as a site of interface between “the religious” and “the secular” which challenges interpretations of the relationship between these as dichotomous. The general hypothesis is that, in relation to Church welfare activity, both in terms of attitudes and practices, there is a type of “spirituality” in “the middle” through which “the religious” and “the secular” flow into each other.

The paper begins with an examination of the relationship between “the religious” and “the secular” from a predominantly sociological perspective, and proceeds to a consideration of theological perspectives on this relationship in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and in the context of faith-initiated social welfare. This provides the wider theoretical background for the research to be presented in this paper. We then consider some selected studies which show evidence of a Catholic emphasis on charity and social engagement, and the type of religious/spiritual orientation which seems to go with it. This provides the context for the presentation of research findings on attitudes of Catholics towards Church

engagement in social welfare in Australia and the religious/spiritual orientations underlying these attitudes. The findings are viewed alongside findings from studies of welfare service delivery – providing the context for discussion of their implications for the relationship between “the religious” and “the secular”. While the paper does not set out to distinguish between religion and spirituality, such a distinction does emerge in a somewhat inductive fashion as the relationship between the religious and the secular is examined.

## **Theoretical Approaches to the Religious and the Secular**

### *Construction of religion and “the world” as dichotomous categories*

The relationship of religion to “the world” has often been addressed within a framework of dualisms: religious/secular; “other world”/“this world”; sacred/profane; transcendence/immanence; vertical/horizontal etc. The implications of such dualisms have long been discussed by social theorists.

Nietzsche (1889/1968: 124-5) considered that in Western religion “...the concept ‘nature’ had been devised as the concept antithetical to ‘God’” and that this postulated antithesis could engender a distorted religious other-worldliness that precluded engagement with earthly needs. In addressing the two categories of “profane” and “sacred”, Durkheim (1915/1976: 428-9; 1887/1972: 241), like Nietzsche, observed that Western Christianity had conceptualised the material world as profane – effecting the separation of religion’s intellectual functions from its more practical functions.

According to Luckmann, the segregation of the sacred cosmos from the profane world which was postulated by the Judeo-Christian tradition had the potential to localize religion in special institutions whereby tensions could develop between religious affairs and everyday life resulting in an antithesis between “religion” and “society” (Luckmann, 1967: 66-7). Bellah’s interpretation of the dualism phenomenon was in terms of the process whereby a religion’s focus on the “other world” – and devaluation of the everyday empirical self and the empirical world – leaves the human goal as that of salvation achieved in religious life as separate from the empirical world of everyday life (Bellah, 1970: 32-34).

These are but a few of the many and varied commentaries on the construction of religion and the world as dualistic. From them we can see the potential difficulty of considering issues relating to religious engagement in social welfare in the world if religion and the world are regarded as dichotomous categories.

### *Towards an interpretive framework*

Casanova’s (1994) analysis of dualisms is more helpful for our purposes. He argues that Christendom was structured through “a double dualist system of classification” whereby there was a dualism between “this world” and “the other world”, but also a further dualism within “this world” between a religious and a secular sphere – both dualisms being “mediated by the sacramental nature of the

church" (1994: 15). He stresses the need to distinguish between these two dualisms (Casanova, 1994: 14). Casanova's conceptual distinctions would seem to offer some contextual clarity. More specifically, they allow for an examination of the relationship between the religious and the secular within "this world" without compromising any sacramental linkage between religion and "the other world" – i.e. the transcendent.

Moreover, there does not appear to be any reason why Casanova's interpretive framework cannot accommodate within "this world" a non-dichotomous (perhaps even potentially symbiotic) relationship between the religious and the secular. Such a relationship is hinted at by Martin (1969:3) in his observation that "There is almost nothing regarded as religious which cannot also be secular, and almost no characteristics appearing in secular contexts which do not also appear in religious ones".

When the aim is to examine how religion engages society/"the world" in the context of charity/welfare, Casanova's schema has much to offer. The remainder of this paper, then, assumes this underlying framework adopted from Casanova. However, the framework is being used as an aid to understanding and is not itself the focus of this paper. It is, therefore, implicit rather than explicit.

The attempt to move beyond a dualist analysis also draws upon some of Rose's (1992) insights relating to "the middle" (between apparent opposites). Indeed, the focus on what appears to be a site of interface between the religious and the secular – i.e. Church engagement in social welfare – approximates a type of "beginning in the middle" (cf Rose, 1992: 113).

### *Theological Considerations*

Theologians such as Milbank, Ward and Pickstock (1999: 2) contend that around the late Middle Ages some aspects of the thought of figures such as St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas were misinterpreted; Milbank et al. argue that many of the dualist constructions which held sway after this time were "theological distortions". In rejecting such dualisms, Milbank (2000: 36) allows for a non-dichotomous relationship between the religious and the secular.

Some theologians have also identified social morality as a site for the apparent co-existence of the religious and the secular. For example, O'Collins (1974: 58) points out that religious and secular themes are intertwined in Jesus' behaviour and teaching: "On the one hand, his healthy realism let him sweep aside a religiosity which obscured the genuine needs and responsibilities of human beings as such. On the other hand, such horizontal thinking did not exclude man's [sic] vertical relationship to the Father".

Indeed, some commentators have argued that it was its very engagement with society that made early Christianity so distinctive. For example, Guthridge (1999) stresses that the wisdom, compassion and humanity enshrined in the life and teachings of Jesus "... struck a deep chord within the hearts of many people in Roman times ..." and that "... no other philosophy or religion laid any comparable

emphasis on the duty to love one's neighbour" (Guthridge, 1999: 17-19). According to Guthridge (1999: 19-21), in the first few centuries of Christianity, the Good Samaritan ideal of extending compassionate engagement in society beyond the bounds of race, class, religion etc., profoundly affected the wider society.

Hence, Christian engagement in "the world" in the context of social morality can appear as an original element of Christian life. To the extent that perspectives on this engagement may have changed in varying ways in later times, the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) has been seen as offering opportunities for renewal. Many writers agree that the redefinition of the Catholic Church emanating from the documents of Vatican Council II effected great change in the Catholic Church, particularly in relation to its engagement in "the world". "Instead of pitting the Church against the world...Council leaders saw the Church as fully integrated into modern life" (D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge & Meyer, 2001:15).

The very title of one of the main documents of Vatican II – "The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World" (*Gaudium et Spes*) puts religious engagement in the world centre stage. This document is concerned with the themes of human dignity and social justice. It shows a heightened consciousness of "the whole of humanity" and of the world – with emphasis on the Church's duty of "scrutinizing the signs of the times" and of understanding "the world in which we live" (*Gaudium et Spes* 2-4). Clearly, this document situates the world as the mission of the church. For O'Collins (1974:80-81), the Vatican documents' affirmation of the value of this life means that "The Christian obligation is to transform the world, not renounce it".

Indeed, passages in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* referring to rights and duties with respect to entire human race can be seen to indicate that "the people of God" involves the whole world community. Moral theologians such as Baker (2002) argue that two directions for moral theology stem from Vatican II documents: a call to be "Other"-centred through a social global morality (from *Gaudium et Spes*) and a morality of total charity (from *Lumen Gentium*). Baker (2002) interprets the moral principle of Christian life as discipleship of Christ and a universal way of being human which finds a resonance beyond those in the Christian community.

This type of interpretation of Vatican II theology signifies a departure from any view of the Church as separate from the world. Together with the Vatican II emphasis on a "preferential option for the poor" as an aspect of charity, it also points to significant implications for Church engagement in social welfare. Arguably, one of these implications is that of service out of a type of unconditional love for the "Other".

Clery (2001) argues that Vatican II changes influenced the practical aspects of faith-based welfare activities. She points out that, prior to the 1960s, the world view of people working in Australian Catholic human service organisations was bounded by the Church itself - with "distinctions between 'sacred' and 'secular'...

Interactions with the world were necessary but the world was to be viewed with suspicion” (Cleary, 2001: 223). In the wake of Vatican II, Catholic organisations changed the way they approached their mission (Cleary, 2001: 223). All people were considered to be potential recipients of service regardless of their religion, personal life choices etc. (2001: 148). Moreover, according to Cleary (2001:218), the implications of the Church being bound up with all humanity (not just Catholics) meant that social and political responsibility for all humanity was interpreted as fundamental rather than tangential to the Church’s work. Cleary (2001: 57) argues that this interpretation of the Church mission in the world meant that the Church’s “human services became its powerful tool”.

The foregoing would seem to support the view of Catholic Church engagement in social welfare as an important site of interface between “the religious” and “the secular” in this world. This positioning of the interface fits with some interpretations of Vatican II theology and with our interpretive framework adopted from Casanova. Moreover, as indicated by Casanova, the framework allows for linkage with the transcendent/“other world”. In other words, the ostensibly horizontal nature of Church welfare activity is not seen to preclude the vertical/transcendent dimension of religion.

### **Catholic Attitudes Towards Charity/Welfare**

Given that the Church is made up of its members, one might expect that their attitudes and efforts have some effect on the way the Church engages in social welfare in the wider society. Certainly, the voluntary efforts of practising Catholics have been shown to make an important contribution to social welfare (Daw, 2002). This paper focuses on Catholics’ attitudes towards Church social welfare activity as one means of viewing the nature of the interface between the religious and the secular.

Attitudes supporting engagement in the world through the assistance of those in need such as the poor and underprivileged in society have become recognised as an important aspect of Catholicism. Indeed, Tropman (1995: 271) finds an observable Catholic emphasis on “being altruistic, benevolent, bountiful, charitable, compassionate, generous, humane, philanthropic” that he describes as a “Catholic ethic”. Tropman (1995:270) does not suggest that other Christians do not also value these qualities. His point is that the value placed on such qualities tends to be “dominant” rather than “subdominant” among Catholics. According to Tropman (1995: 274), the Catholic ethic is unconditional in nature – valuing assistance to those in need regardless of “whether a person was worthy or not”. Greeley (2000: 129-134) has also drawn attention to the higher likelihood of Catholics (as compared to other Christians) to recognise social inequality, to emphasize “fairness”, and to exhibit an overall tendency towards “communalism in their ethical concerns” (as opposed to individualism). He points to “concern for the poor” as a strong indicator of Catholic identity (Greeley, 2000: 185).

In Australia, findings from the 1993 National Social Science Survey indicate the existence of similar attitudes among Australian Catholics. For example, Catholics accorded higher importance (than did those of other Christian denominations) to functions of the Church such as providing charity for the poor and challenging social injustice (Hughes, Thompson, Pryor & Bouma, 1995: 84-5). Data from the 1998 Australian Community Survey (ACS) also showed that, compared to other Christians, Catholics placed greater emphasis on the role of the Church as a provider of charity for the poor (Kaldor, Dixon, Powell & the NCLS team, 1999: 8-9).

In this paper there is an attempt to explore further Australian Catholics' attitudes towards charity/welfare. There is also an attempt to identify the religious/spiritual orientations underlying these attitudes.

### *Spiritual dimensions underlying attitudes*

Cieslak's (1999) research demonstrates how the spiritual dimensions underlying the attitudes indicated by church survey respondents may be identified. In Cieslak's study, 55,000 Catholics in the Diocese of Rockford, Illinois, were surveyed about parish programs. One of the main findings of the study related to the multi-dimensionality of spirituality. Cieslak's (1999: 1, 4) factor analysis suggested the presence of both "horizontal spirituality" (i.e. a focus on community or "people of God" and "the sense of finding God through others", especially the poor and dispossessed) and "vertical spirituality" (i.e. an emphasis on the sacramental and devotional aspects of religion and "the sense of God as transcendent, outside and above the human condition"). Cieslak (1999:13) reports:

One may hear suggestions made in religious writings or conversation which suggest that a spirituality which emphasizes God's immanence (the horizontal dimension) is the opposite of one which emphasizes God's transcendence (the vertical dimension). The unspoken assumption is that there is one dimension to spirituality, with immanence found at one end and transcendence at the other. This research has shown that the two spiritualities actually compose two different dimensions. The opposite of high transcendence is low transcendence, not high immanence.

Significantly, the highest loading variable in Cieslak's (1999: 3) horizontal spirituality factor was the item "Reaches out to the poor". According to Cieslak's conclusion about multidimensional spirituality, placing a high value on this "horizontal" element of reaching out to the poor can also be consistent with the holding of a "vertical" orientation towards sacramentality and the sense of God as transcendent. While Cieslak does not distinguish between religion and spirituality, the implication is that religion can hold together different dimensions of spirituality.

Our research, in attempting to explore Catholics' attitudes and their underlying spiritual orientations, builds upon Cieslak's terminology and follows some aspects of his method.

## **Addressing The Issues**

The issues addressed in our research overlap the data sets used. For the sake of convenience, the research is presented in two parts – according to data set. Part I presents analysis of data from the 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS) and the 2001 National Church Life Survey (NCLS) (Catholic Component). Part II presents analysis of data from the 1998 Australian Community Survey (ACS). The following indicates how the research questions are addressed in particular data sets:

1. How do Catholics view the concept of maintaining a religious orientation in a secular setting? For this question, CCLS data is analysed (in Part I).
2. How much importance do Catholics attach to Church engagement in social welfare? This question is addressed in both Part I and Part II. In Part I there is analysis of CCLS/NCLS data on the degree of importance attached by respondents specifically to the Church's provision of social welfare. In Part II there is analysis of ACS data on respondents' rankings of the importance of various general church functions.
3. How do Catholics view the motivation behind Church social welfare? CCLS data is analysed here (Part I).
4. Is it possible to identify a religious/spiritual orientation underlying attitudes towards Church social welfare? This question also relates to the motivation behind Church social welfare, but in a more indirect way. Factor analysis of ACS data on the ratings given by Catholics to the importance of various church functions is conducted in order to identify any underlying orientations. There is analysis of variance of the extracted factors (orientations) and church attendance in order to increase understanding of such orientations (this analysis is in Part II).

The issues addressed in the data analysis lead on to later discussion of whether the religious/spiritual orientations underlying Catholics' attitudes to Church welfare might be paralleled in the mission and practice of Catholic welfare organisations.

## **Data & Analysis Part I**

*Data Source: 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (CCLS) & 2001 National Church Life Survey (NCLS)*

Catholics attending Mass on a particular weekend in 1996 completed CCLS questionnaires. The sample comprised 281 parishes (out of a total of about 1412 Australian Catholic parishes) and over 100,000 responses were received. In 2001 a similar project was undertaken as part of the NCLS (which is also part of the 2001 International Congregational Life Survey). In both 1996 and 2001 a mixed set of questionnaires was used. The present research uses data from 1996 Questionnaires G (N= 1645) and P (N=1014), and 2001 Questionnaire N (N=615).

*Maintenance of a religious orientation in a secular setting*

The majority of Catholic attenders appear to believe that Christian life is possible in a secular setting. As Table 1 shows, the vast majority of respondents (78%) disagree with the proposition that "Christians must keep themselves separated from worldly things in order to avoid contamination by the world's attitudes and behaviour". When this questionnaire item was cross-tabulated with the frequency of church attendance, the level of disagreement remained stable. These results would seem to imply strong acceptance of the notion that it is possible to maintain a religious orientation in a secular setting.

**Table 1: Crosstabulation: "Christians must keep themselves separated from worldly things..." \*Attendance**

			Attendance			Total
			Less often	At least monthly	At least weekly	
<b>Christians should avoid worldly things</b>	Agree	% within Attendance	9%	9%	11%	11%
	Neutral/Unsure	% within Attendance	14%	13%	11%	11%
	Disagree	% within Attendance	78%	78%	78%	78%
Total	% within Attendance	100%	100%	100%	100%	

**Note:** "Strongly Agree" collapsed into "Agree"; "Strongly Disagree" collapsed into "Disagree".

**Source:** 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (Questionnaire G) (N=1645)

*Importance of Church engagement in social welfare*

In response to the statement "It is very important for the Church to provide social welfare services" the overwhelming majority of respondents (82%) agreed in 1996 and this level of agreement was even greater in 2001 (89%) (See Table 2).



**Table 2: "It is very important for the church to provide social welfare services" (1996 & 2001)**

	1996	2001
Agree	82%	89%
Neutral / Unsure	12%	7%
Disagree	6%	4%
Total	100%	100%

**Note:** "Strongly Agree" collapsed into "Agree"; "Strongly Disagree" collapsed into "Disagree".

**Source:** 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (Questionnaires G & P) (N=2659) and 2001 National Church Life Survey (Catholic Component) (Questionnaire N) (N=615).

This would seem to resonate with the Gospel message of the virtue of charity and with Vatican II's emphasis on the primacy of charity. It would also seem to validate (from the perspective of Catholics) the Church's extensive role in welfare provision in Australian society.

#### *Motivation behind Church social welfare*

In response to the statement "The primary reason for the church's social welfare work is to earn the right to talk to people about faith in Jesus Christ", the results are more mixed. As Table 3 shows, 46% of respondents agree with this statement, 32% disagree, and 22% are unsure. This suggests that some respondents see Church social welfare activity in terms of an explicitly religious purpose and some do not. It may be that respondents see different motivations for Church social welfare. It is noteworthy that a fairly large proportion (47%) of those who attend church at least weekly see Church social welfare in terms of religious evangelization.

**Table 3: Crosstabulation: “The primary reason for the church’s social welfare work is to earn the right to talk to people about faith in Jesus Christ”**  
**\*Attendance**

			Attendance		Total	
			Less often	At least monthly	At least weekly	
Talking about Jesus is the reason for Church social welfare	Agree	% within Attendance	39%	40%	47%	46%
	Neutral/Unsure	% within Attendance	38%	25%	21%	22%
	Disagree	% within Attendance	23%	35%	32%	32%
Total	% within Attendance	100%	100%	100%	100%	

**Note:** “Strongly Agree” collapsed into “Agree”; “Strongly Disagree” collapsed into “Disagree”.

**Source:** 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey (Questionnaire G) (N=1645).

This may well relate to the issue of whether Catholic welfare services are seen to function fundamentally as the practical expression of Catholic beliefs and values or whether they are seen to function as both the expression and the explicit promotion of such beliefs and values. We will return to this issue later when our findings are viewed alongside studies of Catholic welfare service delivery.

## Data & Analysis Part II

*Data source: 1998 Australian Community Survey (ACS)*

The ACS surveyed the wider Australian society including respondents from a variety of religions as well as those who have no religious affiliation or involvement at all. Given our particular interest in Catholics, this allows us to make comparisons between Catholics and the rest of the population. It also allows for comparison between practising Catholics and non-practising Catholics (whereas parish-administered surveys such as Cieslak’s and the Australian CCLS/NCLS are less likely to contain a representative proportion of the latter). The ACS comprised a mixed set of questionnaires involving a total of 8500 respondents. Our research uses data from Questionnaire 7 (N=1027).

*Importance of Church engagement in social welfare*

Analysis of ACS data shows that in response to the question “How important do you think it is for the churches to do the following? (Support the poor)” 37% of the total sample regarded this church function as “Most important” (See Table 4). In comparison, a much higher proportion of Catholics (i.e. 49%) regarded the church function of supporting the poor as “Most important”. This Catholic rate was much higher than that of the other denominational categories and lends some support to the notion of an Australian “Catholic ethic” mentioned earlier.

**Table 4: Crosstabulation: “How important do you think it is for churches to ... (support the poor)?” \* Denomination**

			Denomination				Total Sample
			Catholic	Other Christian	Non-Christian & Other	No Religion/ Unstated	
<b>Support the Poor</b>	Most Important	% within Denom'n	49%	32%	26%	38%	37%
	Other Response	% within Denom'n	51%	68%	74%	62%	63%
Total		% within Denom'n	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

**Source:** 1998 Australian Community Survey

While this comparison between Catholics and other denominational groups places Catholic attitudes towards Church social welfare in wider perspective, our main purpose in using ACS data is to tap into the differences among Catholics themselves.

Table 5 shows that for Catholic Non-Attendees (i.e. those who never attend religious services) “Support the poor” elicited the highest response rate in the “Most Important” Church function question, whereas it elicited the second highest response for All Catholics, and the fourth highest response for Catholic Attendees (i.e. those who attend at least monthly up to and including more often than weekly). Catholic Attendees gave higher response rates to “Give meaning and direction to life” and “Provide opportunities for worship” than they did to “Support the poor”.

**Table 5: Ranking of "Most important" functions of church (Catholics)**

Most important function of Church	All Catholics	Catholic Non-Attendees	Catholic Attendees
"Encourage good morals"	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>
<i>"Support the poor"</i>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1 <sup>st</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
"Provide opportunities for worship"	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>
"Give meaning and direction to life"	4 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup> *	2 <sup>nd</sup>
"Challenge injustice in society"	5 <sup>th</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>

**Source:** 1998 Australian Community Survey

\* *"Provide accommodation for the homeless" as "Most important" elicited the fifth highest response rate among Catholic Non-Attendees.*

The different ranking order between non-attenders and attenders requires some explanation. Perhaps it is possible that for those who regularly attend religious services, charitable activity such as supporting the poor is seen more as part of an overall multi-dimensional religious orientation. Factor analysis offers some insight into this possibility.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Orientations underlying attitudes towards Church social welfare*

Factor analysis was conducted on the ratings given by Australian Catholics on a scale of importance of various church functions. The aim was to discover any underlying factors in the response pattern.<sup>5</sup> Only one variable loaded significantly on more than one factor (using the convention that loadings of at least .3 are significant). This variable is italicised in Table 6 which shows all significant loadings (i.e. >.3) in the two factors that resulted from the factor analysis.

**Table 6: Factors & primary loadings derived from ratings of importance of church functions (Catholics)**

<b>Factor 1</b>	
"Give meaning and direction to life"	.923
"Encourage good morals"	.803
"Provide opportunities for worship"	.784
"Provide chaplains in hospitals and other institutions"	.775
"Challenge injustice in society"	.761
"Run social activities"	.678
"Convert people to the Christian faith"	.649
"Provide schools"	.640
"Provide counselling services"	.615
<i>"Support the poor"</i>	.422

**Factor 2**

"Provide accommodation for the homeless"	.949
"Provide homes for the aged"	.851
"Allow community groups to use church buildings"	.503
"Support the poor"	.484

**Source:** 1998 *Australian Community Survey*

As Table 6 shows, the two factors that were extracted include a general multi-dimensional factor and a factor relating to community needs.

Factor 1 is a general factor which suggests a multi-dimensional church function of providing a system of meaning ("Give meaning and direction to life") and moral guidance ("Encourage good morals") which has both a "vertical"<sup>6</sup> dimension ("Provide opportunities for worship") and a "horizontal" dimension ("Challenge injustice in society", "Run social activities", "Support the poor"), together with an educative / missionary element ("Provide schools", "Convert people to the Christian faith") and a pastoral element ("Provide chaplains in hospitals and other institutions", "Provide counselling services"). Factor 1 seems to indicate the richness of what the church has to offer – including both "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions.

Factor 2 has significant loadings with "Provide accommodation for the homeless", "Provide homes for the aged", "Allow community groups to use church buildings" and "Support the poor". This factor suggests the function of caring for the needs of the wider community – especially the needs of the disadvantaged – hence, it appears to relate to a mainly "horizontal" dimension.

While it is not possible to make direct comparisons with Cieslak's findings because completely different questions and different interpretive schemes have been used, our findings would seem to support Cieslak's general observation that vertical and horizontal spiritualities can be inclusive of each other. Our findings also suggest that horizontal spirituality can stand alone.

To the extent that our factor analysis calls for a distinction between the two factors, Factor 1, in its multi-dimensionality, could be seen as suggesting a "religious" orientation, while Factor 2 suggests an orientation towards one type of spirituality.

It is interesting that, in our study, the one item that loads significantly on both Factor 1 and Factor 2 is "Support the poor". This suggests that charity is regarded as a core function – in both a richly religious sense and in a less-defined spiritual sense.

This, in turn, can be seen to bear upon our earlier proposition that the different ranking order between non-attenders and frequent attenders in relation to "Support the poor" might be interpreted in terms of an approach to charity as integral to an overall religious orientation on the part of frequent attenders.

Such an interpretation can be tested in terms of the factors that were extracted in our factor analysis. If there is a significant relationship between those who score

highly on the multi-dimensional religious factor (i.e. Factor 1) and those who attend church frequently, there would be some support for this interpretation.

Table 7 shows that when a oneway ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)<sup>7</sup> is conducted between (“Multi-dimensional”) Factor 1 and levels of Church Attendance (Catholics), it is found that there is a significant difference in the mean Factor 1 scores of those in different attendance categories ( $F(4,189)=14.93$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

**Table 7: Anova (Factor 1 & Church Attendance)**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	46.238		11.560	14.931	<.001
Within Groups	146.320	1	.774		
Total	192.559	1			

\* Catholics selected

**Source:** 1998 Australian Community Survey

Table 8 shows that while the mean score for Factor 1 in the “Never” attendance category is  $-.779$ , the mean score for this factor in the “At least weekly” category is  $.574$ . This indicates that those who frequently attend church tend to have much higher Factor 1 scores than those who do not attend church. Moreover, calculations based on Table 7 indicate that 24% of the variation in Factor 1 scores can be explained by different levels of attendance.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 8: Selected Descriptives (Factor 1 & Church Attendance)**

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Never	-.779	1.034
Less than yearly	.048	.950
At least yearly	-.048	.891
At least monthly	.184	.756
At least weekly	.574	.749
Total	-.012	.999

\* Catholics selected

**Source:** 1998 Australian Community Survey

On the other hand, as Table 9 shows, the difference between the mean (“Horizontal”) Factor 2 scores of those in different attendance categories is not statistically significant ( $F(4,189)=2.362$ ,  $p>.05$ ). In other words, the horizontal-only orientation tends to cut across attendance categories.

**Table 9: Anova (Factor 2 & Church Attendance)\***

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9.190	4	2.297	2.362	.055
Within Groups	183.853	189	.973		
Total	193.043	193			

\* Catholics selected

Source: 1998 *Australian Community Survey*

Hence, it would appear that while practising Catholics are just as likely as non-practising Catholics to view the church function of charity from a horizontal-only orientation, practising Catholics are more likely than non-practising Catholics to view it in the context of a multi-dimensional religious orientation – i.e. a perspective from which charity is bound to the overall religious meaning system.

### Summary of Findings

1. Analysis of CCLS data suggested that the vast majority of Catholic attenders accepted the concept of maintaining a religious orientation in secular society.
2. Analysis of CCLS / NCLS data indicated that an overwhelming majority of Catholic attenders believe that it is very important for the Church to provide social welfare services. Examination of ACS data on rankings of church functions placed Catholic attitudes towards Church social welfare in a wider perspective – showing that Australian Catholics attached a much higher level of importance to this than did other Australians – suggesting the notion of an Australian Catholic social ethic.
3. Analysis of CCLS data on views of the motivation behind Catholic social welfare work showed mixed results – some respondents seeing it in terms of religious evangelisation and some not seeing it in these terms. This prompted the question of whether the different perceptions of motivation reflected different orientations.
4. The question of different underlying orientations was addressed through factor analysis of the ACS data (on Catholics' perceptions of Church functions). Two factors were extracted indicating two orientations: a richly religious "multi-dimensional" orientation (i.e. including both "vertical" and "horizontal" dimensions) and a more loosely spiritual ("horizontal-only") orientation. The factor analysis also showed that, for Catholics, the Church function of supporting the poor loaded significantly on both the multidimensional factor and the horizontal-only factor – presenting this welfare activity as a core function in both a multi-dimensional religious sense and in a mainly horizontal spiritual sense. Analysis of variance between the respective factors and frequency of church attendance (of Catholics) indicated the tendency of frequently attending Catholics to view

welfare activity as integral to the overall multi-dimensional religious orientation. Catholics less frequently involved in formal religious practice were less likely to hold this orientation. However, the holding of the horizontal-only spiritual orientation cut across attendance categories.

## **Catholic Church Social Welfare Practice (Australia)**

Although the data analysis reported in this paper focuses on attitudes relating to church involvement in social welfare, the intention is to view this, as much as is possible, alongside consideration of the actual practice of welfare service by Catholic organisations.

In Australia the Catholic Church is a major provider of community and social welfare services. Catholic dioceses in Australia provide welfare services through local parishes, Catholic organisations such as the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and professionally staffed agencies such as Centacare (Dixon, 1996: 41). According to Catholic Social Services (2003), the mission is

“to enable the Catholic Church to fulfil the gospel imperatives to:

- (a) Stand with and serve those who are poor and disadvantaged and
- (b) Work for a just and equitable society”.

This social mission is regarded as “not peripheral but central to the life and identity of the Church” (Catholic Social Services, 2003). Services “are offered to any person in need, not just to Catholics” (Dixon, 1996: 41). Moreover, according to Catholic Social Services Victoria (2002: iv), “services are not offered from a position of superiority or aloofness but from one brother or sister in the Lord to another, as we together struggle for wholeness and meaning”.

A range of diverse services is offered relating to aged care, youth/family, disability, housing/homelessness, migrants/refugees, bereavement, alcohol/drug dependence, palliative care – to name just a few (Catholic Social Services Victoria, 2002). Overall, there are huge numbers of Catholic organisations, groups and societies involved in welfare. They vary in the closeness of their relationship to the central Church structure and range from small local parish-based organisations to large national bodies. They also vary according to sources of funding – i.e. “income they generate themselves, grants from the Church, and grants from the State and Commonwealth governments”; moreover, some agencies are funded by a mix of all three (Dixon, 1996: 41).

### *The debate about government funding of Church welfare service delivery*

While our research does not directly address the debate about government funding of Church welfare service delivery, to the extent that it is relevant in a contextual sense, some consideration is given to it in this section.

In recent years the Australian government has been implementing policies of privatisation and deregulation in areas of the economy such as welfare funding. The devolution of welfare responsibility has meant that church-related



organisations, in particular, have become “major sites of welfare services” (Brown, Kenny, Turner and Prince, 2000: 83). This applies especially to the Catholic Church, which has the largest collection of human service organisations of all the churches in Australia (Cleary, 2001: 6).<sup>9</sup>

Government funding of church organisations for the delivery of welfare services has given rise to some debate in Australia. Maddox (2001: 185) points out that, in tendering for welfare delivery contracts, church agencies have a competitive edge in that they can offer “high quality for a low cost” because of the compassion, dedication and goodwill of both their voluntary workers and paid workers. Also, as not-for-profit organisations, church agencies enjoy a level of tax exemption that commercial agencies do not (Maddox, 2001: 183).

Brown et al. (2000: 18) argue that the more Church organisations become dependent on government funding, the less they can function as independent forces in society; in other words, “their roles in advocacy and criticism” are undermined (Brown et al, 2000: 65). Some support for this argument comes from Maddox (2001:183) who notes that “refraining from criticism [of government] is increasingly one of the terms of a contract” for government funding of welfare services. On the other hand, Caddy (2002) observes that the very diversity of Catholic organisations in terms of their structures and funding relationships can, to some extent, protect the independence of the Catholic welfare sector as a whole. Caddy (2002) describes the Catholic welfare sector as a “rabbit warren” (compared to the more centralized welfare systems of other religious denominations) making it less vulnerable to conditions attached to government funding. It has also been pointed out that at all levels of the Catholic Church in Australia there is action and advocacy in relation to social justice issues and the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference certainly does not seem averse to commenting on such issues in the public domain.<sup>10</sup>

Still, some participants in the debate about government funding of church welfare see signs of a considerable degree of permeability between the church and the secular state in the area of welfare services. For example, it has been argued that the line between the religious and the secular has been blurred by the government’s use of religious language.<sup>11</sup> There has even been mention of a “theology” of government welfare policy.<sup>12</sup> While this debate is of some contextual relevance to our present research, our main concern here is the extent to which government funding issues impact upon the actual delivery of welfare services by Catholic organisations.

Brown et al. (2000) point to the difficulties government funding can present to welfare agencies. For example, they argue that operating through state bureaucratic regulations can hamper agencies’ attempts to respond to the diverse needs of clients (Brown et al., 2000: 93). Their findings indicate that the pressure to adopt practices and directions tied to government funding were often regarded as a problem by welfare workers and one “that contradicted their views of their

own work" (2000: 134). (The pressure to adopt the practice of "breaching" is possibly a pertinent example of this).<sup>13</sup>

### *Values-based welfare delivery*

However, according to Cleary's (2001) research into the management dilemmas of Catholic welfare organisations, an emphasis upon certain values can assist in the management of such contradictory pressures.

Cleary (2001: 62, 124) found that the CEOs of Catholic welfare organisations believed that the religiously-based *purpose* behind Catholic welfare services made a difference and they emphasized the importance of having an openness to the religious dimension of the organisation (2001: 149). Cleary found that the CEOs believed that the (high) quality of their service delivery was due to the fact that it was values-based (2001: 124). They also considered that their organisations made "a valuable contribution to society and to the Church" by virtue of the fact that "they exist to promote and develop a particular set of values" (2001: 159). The values identified included: "the care for the individual, the importance of holistic care, the choice of the individual over the system combined with issues about the generosity of the response of the system, belief in the supremacy of good over evil, the 'specialness' of the interaction with clients, the service delivery as a form of human liberation, and respect for the dignity of the human person" (2001: 149).

Cleary discovered that Catholic organisations' emphasis on such values could tend to be enabling of client-specific service delivery. She found that tensions between the business or corporate aspects of the organisation and the religious/spiritual aspects were often addressed specifically in terms of "the choice of the individual over the system combined with issues about the generosity of the response of the system" – sometimes referred to as the "Back-door Principle" (Cleary, 2001: 207). One reading of this is that it is a way of attempting to create more flexibility around the conditions placed upon welfare delivery – hence, making the delivery more client-specific and less conditional. It is possible that this makes it more in tune with the "unconditional" aspect of the "Catholic ethic".<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, Cleary (2001: 228) found that these same values were brought to the fore in dealing with tensions between religious teaching and welfare practice. For example, in response to the dilemma of "how to respond to the needs of the 'whole person' when that response might not be in accordance with Church teaching" she reports:

On one hand [Church] teaching is publicly proclaimed as fixed... while on the other, its pastoral practice values 'the individual over the system'. It does this by placing its teaching in its public arena and individual decisions in its private arena. The problems occur when situations in the private arena are moved into the public arena. The institutional Church then feels obliged to affirm its public position (Cleary 2001: 228).

This, again, seemed to suggest the “Back-door Principle” of addressing such tensions.

It would appear, then, that Catholic welfare organisations draw upon certain values relating to the care of the individual in the management of tensions resulting from institutional sponsorship – whether this be from government or church institutions. These values tend to fit with aspects of the Catholic ethic and are also compatible with the secular professional framework within which welfare workers operate. This, then, raises the question of the type of religious/spiritual orientations underlying such values and approaches to welfare.

### *Spiritual orientations underlying Catholic welfare service delivery*

As indicated above, Cleary also found that there could be tension between the religious belief system from which the values were derived and the delivery of client-specific service. Both staff and clients came from a variety of belief orientations (including non-religious orientations); moreover, some clients indicated that their lives had been damaged by certain church policies (Cleary, 2001: 132, 223). According to Cleary (2001:148), many Catholic organisations “struggled with the concept as to the degree to which they should appear to be Catholic or religious”. Cleary found a tendency for CEOs to try to overcome such difficulties by making a distinction between religion and spirituality – by linking the human person with the spiritual “rather than by seeing the formal practices and beliefs of the Church as essential to the relationship” (2001:161). This suggests that the values espoused by welfare organisations in relation to service delivery reflect a certain type of spirituality.

It is likely that the tension between Church teaching and pastoral practice relates to a view of Christian charity as the implicit expression of religious values rather than their explicit promotion – i.e. the notion that due to its very nature, Christian charity is compatible with the principle “actions speak louder than words”. For our purposes, however, this dilemma raises the question of whether the emphasis on “spirituality” rather than “religion” reflects the reality of Christian engagement in secular society. The point at issue is whether the tension between the Church’s teaching and pastoral practice is indicative of the symbiosis of “vertical” and “horizontal” dimensions or whether it is indicative of a movement towards a “horizontal only” position in its accommodation with the secular. In other words, is the separation of spirituality from religion part of the ongoing balancing act that religious pastoral practice is challenged to perform in its interface with the secular?

## **Spirituality and Religion**

In our factor analysis, the term “religious” has been used in reference to the multi-dimensional orientation evident in Factor 1. This orientation includes the vertical element of formal worship (which, for Catholics, implies sacramentality), the horizontal element of concern for the community and the poor, as well as other

elements relating to the religious meaning system, morality and organisation. This interpretation would seem to be compatible with the interpretation indicated by the participants in Cleary's study. Similarly, the horizontal orientation towards community needs evident in Factor 2 seems to correspond with the interpretation of "spiritual" as indicated by Cleary's participants. Hence, a particular type of distinction between religion and spirituality has emerged from empirical investigation. Yet, as Hanegraaff (1996:1) points out, what is meant by the term "spirituality" can be "extremely vague". He argues that distinctions arising from the *emic* perspective (e.g. the participants' perspective) should not be left unrefined (Hanegraaff, 1996: 6-7). Accordingly, reference to the Factor 2 orientation as "spiritual" requires qualification as meaning one type of spirituality. In so far as the horizontal spirituality of Factor 2 relates to an ethical orientation, there is aptness in Lindsay's (2002: 27) observation that "In some sense the area of spirituality overlaps that of ethics. Nevertheless, it cannot be reduced to it".

While the characterisation of spiritualities identified in this paper follows Cieslak's approach and is ultimately derived from data analysis, some consideration of the wider discourse on religion and spirituality is appropriate.

Writers such as Tacey (2000) have argued that the concept of spirituality as a form of intensity within religion has been replaced by the concept of an all-encompassing spirituality within which religion exists as one form of expression. The latter concept would seem to be supported by the growing body of research suggesting that biology "compels the spiritual urge" (Newberg, D'Aquili & Rause, 2002:8) and that spirituality "is rooted in a universal human awareness" (Hay & Nye, 1998: 4). Yet, in this view, spirituality is usually associated with a privatised mode of expression. Hay and Nye (1998: 18-19) find that spirituality underpins ethical behaviour, but they also note that the privatised nature of spirituality can reduce the potential for a social vision of ethics.

Brady (in Lindsay, 2002: vii-ix) regards spirituality "as the spark which glows at the heart of all genuinely human experience and should animate social structures and institutions". However, spirituality is often seen to be in tension with the institutional form. Indeed, the institutional character of religion is often portrayed as a major feature distinguishing it from spirituality. Still, Schneiders (2000: 15-16) believes that a "partnership" between religion and spirituality is possible through immersion in the spirituality of the religious *tradition* "...while sitting lightly to institution". The Catholic ethical tradition that has been identified in this paper may well be an illustration of how religion and spirituality intertwine.

While individual spirituality may be expressed through informal acts of kindness in the private sphere, this does not necessarily reach those in the wider society who are in genuine need of assistance and are in danger of "falling through the cracks". Previous research has shown that Catholics involved in the communal/organisational dimension of religion are also more likely to be involved in welfare activities reaching out to the wider society than are those who are more "privately" Catholic (Daw, 2002). Moreover, the organisational dimension

associated with the Catholic religious orientation assists the development of welfare organisations that can address the needs of the underprivileged on the scale required. The crux of the matter, however, is that at the point of contact between Catholic social welfare organisations and secular society the prime focus is on the needs of the *individual* in the *private* sphere. In this sense, religion can provide a vehicle for spirituality.

## Concluding Discussion

In our research on Catholic attitudes, the finding that most Australian Catholic attenders can conceive of the possibility of maintaining a religious orientation in a secular setting is in line with the interpretation of the Vatican II mission “in the world” that has been referred to in this paper. Moreover, the theological importance attached to Church provision of welfare services in secular society as part of this mission would seem to be paralleled in our finding of very strong support for these services by Australian Catholics – suggesting some aspects of an Australian Catholic ethic. This is demonstrated in a concrete way by the great scope of social welfare services provided by Catholic organisations in Australian society.

However, our research has pointed to the question of whether these services exist as the expression of Catholic beliefs and values, or, for both the expression *and* the explicit promotion of Catholic beliefs and values. The mixed response of Catholic attenders in relation to the motivation behind Church social welfare suggests the possible existence of both alternatives. Forty-six percent of respondents indicate an explicitly religious reason for Church welfare activity. Perhaps not surprisingly, Catholic welfare organisations also describe their mission fairly explicitly in terms of the promotion and development of Catholic values and cite their values basis as reason for the quality and effectiveness of their services. Yet, the values include some that are less explicitly religious and, paradoxically, these are the values that tend to be emphasized in organisational practice. This would seem to highlight the tension of religious engagement in secular society.

Our finding that, for Catholics, the Church function of social welfare taps into two different orientations, has certain implications. While this social welfare function is connected to other aspects of religion in the multi-dimensional orientation, it does not necessarily have this connectivity in the horizontal-only orientation. This returns us to our original concern arising out of the wider field of enquiry about the engagement of religion in secular society – i.e. if in the process of engagement in society, religion loses specifically religious connections, what does it mean for the relationship between the religious and the secular?

The (multi-dimensional) “religious” and (horizontal) “spiritual” orientations that our data analysis has identified are possibly reflected in the paradoxical aspect of Catholic organisational practice: the “spiritual” providing the “middle” between the “religious” and the “secular”. In so far as the religious moral imperative

requires engagement with the secular, the religious impulse seems to flow *to* the secular through the “spiritual”; on the other hand, a flow *from* the secular through the “spiritual” is reflected in the absence of explicit religious connections. To the extent that the religious and the secular tend to flow into each other in Catholicism’s social engagement, it suggests an “equivocation of the middle” (cf Rose, 1992: 146). On another level, concerns about the permeability between Church and state (that have been alluded to briefly in this paper) also suggest a type of equivocation.

In conclusion, our study has found some evidence of a Catholic ethic in Australia that bears upon the relationship between the religious and the secular. We have also seen that the type of unconditional love interpreted as the mission of the post Vatican II church is suggested by the attitudes of those at the coalface of welfare delivery. Yet this tends to occur through a distinction between spirituality and religion (cf Cleary, 2001) and seems to parallel the interweaving of the religious and the secular. It is as if in fulfilling its mission, a rich multi-dimensional Catholicism needs to engage with the secular and as it does so, a more horizontal type of spirituality tends to come into play which, while possibly more in tune with the secular, ultimately gives witness to the richness of the religious tradition from which it flows. The concluding question, then, is whether in the context of institutional charity, the symbiosis of vertical and horizontal spirituality indicative of religion moves towards a horizontal-only spirituality in a symbiosis of the religious and the secular?

## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup>. The 1996 Catholic Church Life Survey and the 2001 National Church Life Survey (Catholic Component) were sponsored by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) in association with the National Church Life Survey.

<sup>3</sup>. The 1998 Australian Community Survey, conducted by researchers from Edith Cowan University and NCLS Research, was made possible by a grant from the Australian Research Council, the support of ANGLICARE (NSW) and the Board of Mission of the Uniting Church (NSW). The research was jointly supervised by Alan Black and Peter Kaldor. The research team included John Bellamy, Keith Castle, and Philip Hughes. Some data has been made available for the analysis in this paper.

<sup>4</sup>. Factor analysis is a technique which enables the reduction of a large number of interrelated variables into a small number of underlying “factors”.

<sup>5</sup>. After examination of factor loadings in several different analyses, an oblique (Oblimin) rotation with a Principal Component extraction method was chosen on the basis that it had the least number of variables loading significantly on more than one factor.

<sup>6</sup>. Cieslak’s terminology is being used.

- <sup>7</sup>. Analysis of Variance is a technique used to test for significant differences between means.
- <sup>8</sup>. The value of Eta squared is .240 (i.e.  $46.238 / 192.559 = .240$ )
- <sup>9</sup>. However, Catholic Church involvement in social welfare needs to be seen in the context of similar involvement on the part of other churches. The Salvation Army, the Anglican Church, and the Uniting Church – to name just a few – all make significant contributions to social welfare in Australia.
- <sup>10</sup>. The extent to which Catholic welfare activity may underscore public acceptance of the Church's right to engage in public debate on social justice issues is discussed in Daw (2002).
- <sup>11</sup>. Maddox (2001: 189) argues that the religious language of “love and compassion” is appropriated by the government to explain and justify the church agencies' success in tendering for government welfare contracts. Maddox sees this as political borrowing of implicit religious language out of its explicit “confessional context” to reinforce the secular structure. She regards it as a type of exploitation of the “interweaving of explicit and implicit religion” (Maddox, 2001: 189).
- <sup>12</sup>. Voyce (2002) goes even further than Maddox in his account of the interrelationship between the secular state and church organisations in the delivery of welfare services. He contends that the government policy of providing self-help to the unemployed through punitive measures fits with a view of moral reformation of the unemployed through contact with religious community (Voyce, 2000: 4-5). He claims that “religious ideology has been repackaged as a useful tool” by the government (2002: 8) and points to statements by the (former) Minister for Workplace Relations that the government's approach to welfare service delivery “coincides with the traditional Catholic principle of *subsidiarity*” (as indicated in the 1931 papal document *Quadragesimo Anno*) in its delegation of tasks “to organisations which are closest to the problem in hand” (Abbot cited in Voyce, 2002: 22).
- <sup>13</sup>. One of the notable conditions placed upon those receiving unemployment benefits has been the requirement to comply with various job-seeking activities – non-compliance being subject to punitive measures such as possible withdrawal of benefits (“breaching”). According to an independent inquiry (Productivity Commission, 2002), “while breaching has obvious motivational and compliance benefits, its presence can also reduce the quality of the experience for (genuinely job seeking) clients...weaken trust between case managers and job seekers, and even adversely affect job seekers' employment prospects”.
- <sup>14</sup>. While it has not been possible to find details on the breaching rates of Catholic welfare agencies per se, it is perhaps noteworthy that not-for-profit agencies (which include a large proportion of religious agencies) have significantly lower breaching rates than other agencies (Productivity Commission, 2002: Ch 6).

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