

**Christian Research Association
Research Paper No. 2**

A Maze or a System?

**Changes in the Worldview
of Australian People**

Philip Hughes

© Christian Research Association, Kew, 1994.
Available from Locked Bag 23, Kew, 3101.

Social Change and Age Change

I once read a copy of a letter that one old man had written to another. It went something like this: Aren't the young people today terrible! There is no respect for their elders. What is the world coming to? The letter was written about four thousand years ago, on a stone tablet in hieroglyphics in Egypt. The generation gap is part of human experience in every age and every culture. For purely physical reasons, the young have always had more energy than the old. Usually they look for a little more excitement in life and are more willing to take risks. The old, on the other hand, have necessarily had more experience of life and the wisdom which derives from that, and often feel that their wisdom is not fully appreciated.

There is more than a generation gap today. To the differences between the generations, that have to do with their physical condition and their experience of life, must be added the effects of changes in society. Because of the changes in our society, the younger people have grown up in a very different world from

Contents

Social Change and Age Change	1
A New Community	2
The Ways Australians Conceive the World	5
Some Specific Changes	9
1. Social Hierarchy	
2. Authority	
3. Power	
4. Feelings in Decision-Making	
5. De-Institutionalisation	
Some Implications	13
1. Worship	
2. Education	
3. Theology	
References	16

that of the older people. This paper examines some differences between older and younger people in Australian society at the present time. It arose out of examination of survey data from the National Social Science Survey which pointed to some significant differences in attitudes and values between people under 40 and over 50. (People in their 40s were

often in between.) However, this paper seeks to understand those differences in terms of an historical framework of recent social change.

Experiences of growing up have a long-lasting effect on the ways we think about the world and understand life. The different experiences of the younger generations from those of the older generations have a significant effect. The younger and older people see the world in different ways.

There has been continual change in Western society over several hundred years. The technology that is available to us to accomplish the various tasks of living and providing the conditions in which we live has been continuously changing. Some of those changes have had a profound effect on the ways people live and think.

Technological change is one factor which produces major changes in human society. The advent of printing, for example, profoundly affected society which has never been the same since. It enabled ideas, information and feelings to be exchanged between vast numbers of people who did not know each other personally and were at considerable geographical distance from each other. The coming of printing provided one of the necessary conditions for the Reformation to take place.

In the last three decades, new technology has changed the ways in which almost all Australians live. It has affected how they prepare their food, clean the dishes, the clothes and the house, how they communicate with each other, and how they are entertained. It may be too soon to assess the impact. But it appears these recent changes have affected Australians' view of life and religious faith in a very profound and irreversible manner.

This paper focuses on Australian society. As is explained within the paper, the urban areas have often experienced the changes in a more penetrating way. While I have not had the opportunity to check comparable data from other Western societies, I suspect that many of the changes described here are to be found throughout the Western world and in many countries entering a post-industrial era.

This paper is in three parts.

1. **A review of how the nature of our lives in community has changed.** This discussion builds on material from previous publications of the Christian Research Association, including *Patterns of Faith*, and *Faith Without the Church?*

2. **Some changes in our thinking about the world.** This material emerged from differences in the attitudes and actions of people under 40 and people over 50 as found in National Social Science Survey data of 1993. It is also based on participant observation of the differences in the ways older and younger people operate in society.

3. **Some implications of changes in worldview** for education, worship and the understanding of religious faith.

Religious faith has to do with people's most basic and fundamental perceptions of reality and the underlying values by which they operate. Therefore, religious faith is very sensitive to the underlying changes in worldview, and it is often in religious expression and meaning that such changes become evident most quickly. While some changes may be hidden behind the centuries of traditions that dominate some forms of religious expression, those who are interested in understanding social change should not overlook the religious dimension.

A New Community

In previous books, the Christian Research Association has unravelled some effects that these changes have had on the community in which we live (Hughes and Blombery, 1990: 35-40; P. Bentley, et al., 1992: 83-84). Prior to the 1960s, the local community had a great deal more significance for most people than it does today. At least some members of each family lived largely in the local community, defined by what was comfortable walking distance. They shopped there, went to school there, and were involved in voluntary and leisure activities there. They looked for friends and found support within the local community.

Over the last thirty years, the local community has declined significantly in importance. One reason for the change was that married women entered the workforce in large numbers. Many of them had lived their lives in the local community and built their sense of community there. In 1947, only 8% were in the workforce. By 1966, they had grown to 27%. By 1976, it was up to 42% (Hughes and Blombery, 1990:89).

As they entered the workforce, most of them left behind the local community and their patterns of association changed. They did not mix so much with the people in the local community. They no longer had time for the voluntary and the leisure activities

they had pursued there. They made new acquaintances in their places of work - which were often outside the local community.

The movement out of the home for all members of the family was made possible partly by the changes of technology in the home. Cooking became easier with new stoves and pre-packaged and frozen food. Cleaning became easier as vacuum cleaners replaced mops and brooms. Cleaning the clothes became easier with automatic washing machines. Shopping became easier with access to the car. With refrigerators and freezers, it was no longer necessary to shop so often. The daily visit could be replaced by a weekly, or even monthly visit, to the regional shopping centre.

As the family income increased, and the cost of cars as a percentage of that income decreased, more families had two cars. Indeed, they needed two cars so that both husband and wife could get to work. With access to cars, the community defined in terms of a comfortable walk was no longer so relevant. Within the time they had taken to walk a mile, they could now travel twenty or more.

Cars allowed people to be involved in activities some distance from home. They could participate in a wider range of leisure activities to which the car gave them access. It was easier to get to the mountains to ski in the winter and to the beaches to surf in the summer. Indeed, the range of activities of sporting activities in which people could participate increased.

The car also allowed people greater access to friends and family who lived some distance away. Twenty minutes travel now meant that one could reach the people within a radius of twenty miles rather than one.

Another important means of communication that entered most households in the 1960s was the telephone. Now one could talk with a vast range of people, all over the state, and even the world. One could keep in regular and personal touch with people who lived at a great distance. This also obviated the need for knowing one's neighbours and finding one's friends in the local community.

Even more significant than the car in changing patterns of entertainment in 1960s was the television. Instead of relying on the local community for entertainment, people found new and compelling entertainment in the home. Television transmission began in 1956. By the mid 1960s most homes had a television. By the end of the 60s, most of the televisions

were in colour. They occupied many hours of the week for most people and became the primary form of entertainment.

Televisions did more than entertain. They helped to redraw the community in which people were living. They provided very little news of the local community, but a great deal of news of the state, national and international communities. The televisions created a global community through the global network of information they created. The news of the wider world seemed much more exciting and interesting as presented by the television.

For all these reasons, the local area became very much less significant as the basis for social life during the 1960s. Most people no longer needed to find their leisure activities, their entertainment or their friendships in the local community. The car, the telephone and the television took them into a wider community.

To some extent, I have exaggerated the changes. Many people were working at some distance from home before the 1960s. Trains and trams, buses, bicycles and cars had already shown them a wider community. However, in the 1960s, many more people had access to these forms of communication. Much communication had taken place with friends at a distance using the post, and, in times of emergency, the telegram. The telephone, however, made the communication more efficient and much more immediate. It turned those written communications into verbal interactive forms.

While the significance of the local community declined for most people, there were still some people for whom it remained important. The elderly did not have ready access to cars. They were more dependant on walking. Children also had less ready access to the wider community. Many mothers with pre-school children were still at home without access to a car. Most primary aged children remained at schools within walking distance.

In the rural areas, the picture was a little different. There were fewer options for employment for married women outside the farm or family business. They tended to remain in the local community. Gradually, some small country centres have declined in significance and the regional country towns become more important for work, shopping and access to a range of facilities. However, this development has been more patchy and is dependent on such factors as the distance between regional centres, their facilities, and

changes in the density of rural population. Closure of schools in the 90s has had a significant impact in some rural areas.

Nevertheless, rural people have remained dependent on each other for sharing machinery, information and ideas. There is less specialisation in occupation in rural areas and greater need to communicate regarding stock and pests, markets and weather.

In most rural towns, the changes in the sense of community have not been as significant. Many rural centres are little more than walking distance from periphery to centre. Access to the car has not meant much greater access to a range of people or facilities as it has done in the large cities. Thus, the 'lived' community has undergone less change.

Until very recently, most churches have served local communities. Anglicans, Catholics, and mainline Protestants built their churches at walking distance from one another. Most churches provided leisure and other social activities for the local community. Most of them had youth groups, children's activities, activities for women, and clubs for men. Many churches had a range of sporting activities, with tennis courts, and perhaps a cricket and football team.

As local communities declined in significance in the 1960s, so these leisure and entertainment facilities declined in significance. Indeed, many church sporting clubs closed. Evening worship services found they had to compete with the television. Youth and children's activities ceased to be so popular. The women's groups found it hard to attract younger women, partly because few of them were home during the day. The percentage of Australians attending worship services declined markedly.

One high point of church attendance in Australia was in the 1950s. Perhaps the Billy Graham crusade of 1959 had some significance here. Surveys of the time found that about 44% of the population were claiming to attend church at least once a month. Through the 60s, church attendance declined. By 1970, it was 33% and in 1990 it is down to 23% (Bentley et al., 1992: 23).

Most people did not give up their allegiance to a Christian denomination. Nor did they give up their Christian values and beliefs. Even today, the vast majority of Australians continue to identify with a Christian denomination when the census form is distributed, and will indicate belief in God when a survey is taken. But comparatively few go to church.

In other publications we have sought to explain why some people left - particularly from the Anglican and mainline Protestant churches - while other people stayed - with higher proportions in the more conservative churches. We have argued that many of those who stayed had different reasons for going in the first place. They tended to see church involvement as necessary for the very nature of their faith, while most of those who left felt they could be good Christians without going to church (Bentley, et al., 1992: 77-96).

As people left the local community, they became involved in a range of activities with groups of different people who did not know each other. Thus, the group of people they met at work had no overlap with the friends they met down the golf course. The people who went to the night class were quite different again. People built their range of acquaintances in a wider range of activities. As these activities drew on people from a wider geographical area, so the likelihood of overlap decreased. Community fragmented into many unrelated segments.

Not only did these segments contain different people, they often operated with different language and values. Each segment developed its own vocabulary and ways of communicating. The assumptions people shared in each segment could be quite different. For example, discussion of homosexuality might be quite unacceptable in one group of people, but readily accepted in another. Religious language might be appropriate in one of life's context, but inappropriate in another. People might know one's marital status in one group, such as one's work, but in one's tutorial group at college such a thing might never be discussed.

People have become aware of a much greater variety of values and life-styles through living in this variety of segments of life. This awareness of a plurality of values and life-styles has increased in Australia through the greater range of people who have come to our shores as immigrants since the days when the White Australia Policy was abandoned. People have also become more aware of the plurality through the mass media, particularly the television. We have experienced within our own living rooms a variety of values, of languages, of intimate and social relationships than previous generations would have dreamt even existed. It has become impossible to shut our eyes to that plurality. We have had to make choices where previous generations assumed there were none.

There has been a tendency for people to develop a very wide range of acquaintances through the variety of life segments. The fragmentation of life tends to inhibit the development of cliques and the possibility of conflict that can emerge from them. At the same time, it has become more difficult to develop deeper friendships where more than one segment of life is shared and where support in life's ups and downs can be assumed.

Within the pluralism of beliefs and values which many people experience from day to day, it has become more difficult to maintain one's own beliefs as being the only ones possible. Faced with people who have very different beliefs from one's own, one is aware that one holds one's beliefs out of choice. The pluralism in modern societies may lead to a weakening of those beliefs and values which are not shared widely. Some observers have suggested that this has been a major factor in the tendency towards secularisation in modern society. Religious beliefs have been weakened or relegated to a private sphere of life which has little impact on the public sphere (Berger, et al., 1974: 75-76).

However, some people have returned to churches as places where they might find true friends who would support them in the whole of life. They have sought friendships in the church of a different quality than those found in other areas of life. The increased importance of small groups and the cup of tea after the morning service have been expressions of this.

Other people have looked to the churches to provide certainty in their values and life-styles amid the confusing plurality with which they are confronted in their daily lives and on the television. They have grasped at something that appeared firm and unchanging: something on which they could rely. They have deliberately taken steps to build walls around themselves to protect them against the pluralism and have held their beliefs and values dogmatically. Thus, one response to the plurality has been an increase in fundamentalism as a bulwark against a confused world (Mackay, 1993: 251-256).

Some people have sought to re-create local community life. In some places, street parties and celebrations have brought people together. Local community radio stations have heightened awareness of the issues and possibilities of local community life. But these are generally exceptions to the usual urban patterns. People gather as individuals because of common interests rather than as participants in an

on-going community for which they share responsibility.

The Ways Australians Conceive the World

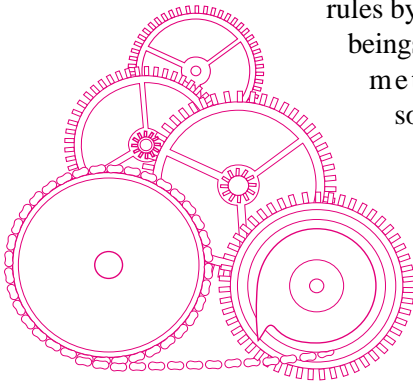
As people have moved into a wider community, their conception of community life has changed. People have become aware of great many more options than they previously knew existed. They have had to make choices about many things taken for granted by their predecessors. They have been much more aware of a range of options in their intimate relationships, for example, of alternatives to marriage in *de facto* and homosexual relationships. They have had to make decisions about roles within these relationships. It could no longer be assumed that the woman would look after the home and the man would provide the money through paid work.

While those people over 55 may remember something of the trauma of World War II, their world was generally more stable with less variation and fewer choices than the contemporary world. People related to fewer people, and generally saw those people in several life contexts. Thus, there was overlap in the people they met in the various activities - work, social, leisure, and educational - of life.

As the external world changed, so did people's internal world. The basic assumptions and categories that people used for operating in everyday life changed. As well as people making different decisions, the ways they made those decisions changed.

In a shorthand way, we can talk of this as a change in worldview. This does not mean that people have a specific picture of the world constantly in their minds. Rather, it means that people operate according to certain assumptions (which they may or may not be able to verbalise) and certain categories and processes. To some extent, sets of assumptions, categories and processes fall into patterns, which an external observer may describe as a 'worldview'.

Many people in Australia, raised prior to the 60s, assumed that the world operated as though the world was basically a stable and predictable place. The world ran according to certain rules. Science sought to describe the physical rules by which the world operated from the laws of Newtonian physics to the Darwinian rules of the evolutionary process. Medical science was seeking to understand the medical



rules by which human beings operated. The meteorologists sought to understand the rules which determined what the weather would be.

Perhaps they assumed that

the world was rather like an industrial machine. It operated in a mechanistic way, according to certain fixed laws. As we came to understand those laws, so we could operate more effectively in the world.

For many people, this idea of a closed system working according to certain rules, extended to the realm of human decisions. There were certain moral rules which were necessary for human society to operate smoothly. If people kept to those moral rules, then life would generally run smoothly. If there is no respect for the basic institutions of society, for the human person, property, and primary relationships, then a society is likely to descend into chaos.

Christians added their own dimension to this worldview. They held that God established the system. The future maintenance of the system was ensured by the faithfulness of the Creator who sustained it.

In 1974, Peter and Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner described some dimensions of this modern consciousness in a book entitled *The Homeless Mind*. They argued that two aspects of life dominated the modern consciousness. The first was technological production. The book argues that technological production assumes a mechanistic view of things in which there are clear causes and effects and in which one can reproduce the movements to produce identical results. Technological production also assumes that the processes can be analysed and their components identified. In order for technological production to be successful, there must be careful management. There is no room for emotional expression within the processes of technological production (Berger, et al., 1974:29-43).

The second aspect of modern life that dominates modern consciousness according to *The Homeless Mind* is that of bureaucratisation. Bureaucratic processes also assume that there must be careful management, with competence in specific compartments.

There is a hierarchy of roles and responsibilities with clear sequences of steps and timetables of activities. Rules and regulations govern the process. There is an anonymity in the processes which takes the processes out of realm of the personal and ensures that decisions are not based on individual situations. Rather, bureaucratisation seeks predictability and equal treatment for every person. It seeks to create an orderliness in the affairs of human beings (Berger, et al., 1974: 44-61).

The Homeless Mind describes some reactions to the modern consciousness of life dominated by technological production and bureaucratisation. Younger people, especially, were rebelling against the repression of the individual and the individual's interests and emotional expression. They were not happy about the modern world's impersonal ways of dealing with the individual through its bureaucratic structures and technological processes. One focus in Australia and the United States for anger at the bureaucracy was the drafting of young men to fight the war in Vietnam.

The Homeless Mind notes some factors which had raised the sense of individualism at this time. Family life had changed. As infant mortality had declined considerably and contraception improved, family size had declined. Many families now consisted of only two or three children. These children were raised as individuals. Less frequently did older children have to take responsibility for the younger members of the household. The smaller family could more flexibly care for the needs and interests of each individual child (Berger, et al., 1974: 173). New levels of education were open to many children previously denied that luxury. This was symbolised in the 1960s by the opening of many new universities.

The new individualism, developed in family life, was transferred into the social arena at the same time as local community life declined. The young people of the late 1960s found themselves living in a world which was very impersonal. Large bureaucracies and institutions, which they perceived as remote from their personal experiences and individual needs, dominated their world. These institutions appeared to function in impersonal ways according to rules and regulations which took no heed of their individual feelings. Many felt angry with the apparent attempts at impersonal manipulation of people and at the ways people were regarded in terms of roles rather than as persons.

There were anger and frustration at many institutions. It was a factor which brought the Labour government of Whitlam into power, with a mandate to change many aspects of social life. It was a factor in the widespread anger at the use of bureaucratic rules and regulations to remove his government in the early 70s.

There was criticism of the educational institutions as people took up some themes in the works of Ivan Illich and Paulo Freire. The educational system was criticised for producing copies of people, fit only for the maintenance of the educational system, feeding people information which was 'useful' only within the system of education.

There was frustration at the nature of suburban living, as the suburbs of the major cities became increasingly dormitory suburbs. The folk singers sang of the "little boxes" which all looked the same, and the children who all turned out the same.

There was rebellion against the institution of marriage. They asked why should human sexuality be controlled to suit the systems that had evolved, rather than find expression in the reality of human relationships? There was new experimentation in relationships and a new openness in talking about sexuality. People explored new feelings and experiences through the drug culture and through the new forms of popular music (Mackay, 1993: 242- 245).

Some people tried to drop out of 'the system' of society altogether, forming communes. They wanted to get away from the modern world of technological production where people were reduced to cogs in the great machine.

Fashions in clothes and personal appearance changed markedly at this time. Some clothes that symbolised control disappeared such as the corset. Others items, such as the tie and brassiere were endangered. The pins which had held the hair in a bouffon were taken out, and the hair was let loose. Men grew their hair long and many grew beards. The neat and tidy suit gave way to the jeans and T-shirt.

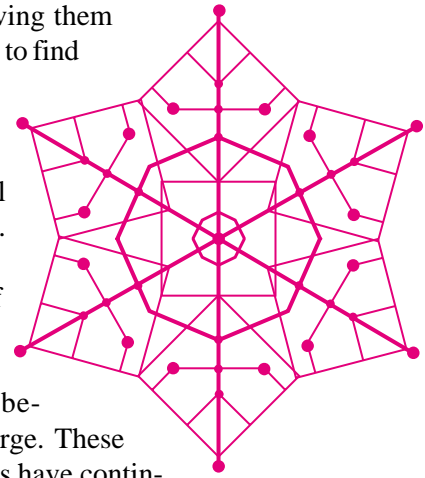
It was not just a reaction to a world dominated by bureaucratic and technological processes. These young people actually saw the world differently. They saw it from an individualistic standpoint, rather than in terms of a great system of which they were a small part. Instead of asking what is good for the nation, or for the system, they asked what is good for me? They saw themselves as faced with a multitude of

choices, giving them opportunity to find good experiences and find personal satisfaction.

A new set of assumptions about the world began to emerge. These assumptions have continued to dominate the ways people operate within the world. For those people who were raised post 1960, the world is more like a web than a closed system. It is an 'arena of competing powers', like a computer adventure game. It is a place where the unexpected often happens, and where good and evil forces operate in a variety of ways. It is a maze of events through which one must navigate, one event at a time. There are few general rules which operate in all situations and provide ways of dealing with the variety of events that occur.

The image of the computer chip replaced that of the industrial machine. There may be rules which govern a chip's operation, but it has become so complex that those rules are not available to most individuals. The mechanisms are now invisible, hidden in the millions of transistors, each of which are 'making choices'. The talk about chaos theory in science appears to support this different view of the world. So does the apparent inability of science to consistently predict even the mundane matters of life like the weather.

In some areas of life, the rebellious activities and attitudes of the late 1960s and early 1970s, have become the norms of the 1980s and 1990s amongst the younger generations. However, few people dropped right out of the system. The commune movement has failed to replace the urban social structures for most people. In many ways, there has been an accommodation to the bureaucracy and technological production processes of society. As *The Homeless Mind* indicates, it was not possible to give up all those processes of careful technical control without giving up some real benefits of modern society. Commercial airline systems cannot operate safely unless personal feelings and individual expression are relegated to the bureaucratic and technical processes which ensure that safety is reproduced, for example (Berger, et al., 1974: 193). Many facto-



ries have changed their processes so that people take greater responsibility for a major section of the production, sometimes within the context of teamwork, and in other cases, through rotation of roles. However, they cannot function without some technical control in their systems.

Most people have come to recognise that amongst the various arenas of life some do require systematic processes. There are some arenas, including many work arenas, in which there must be impersonal control and bureaucratic procedures. In other arenas, and particularly in most personal arenas, the interests and feelings of the individual can dominate. For example, popular music has developed, based on rhythm rather than melody, on volume of sound rather than on harmony. There has been continuing change in relation to the institution of marriage, with greater numbers of people entering into *de facto* relationships. While some see these as a temporary state prior to marriage, others have no intention to marry at all (Blombery and Hughes, 1994: 5-7).

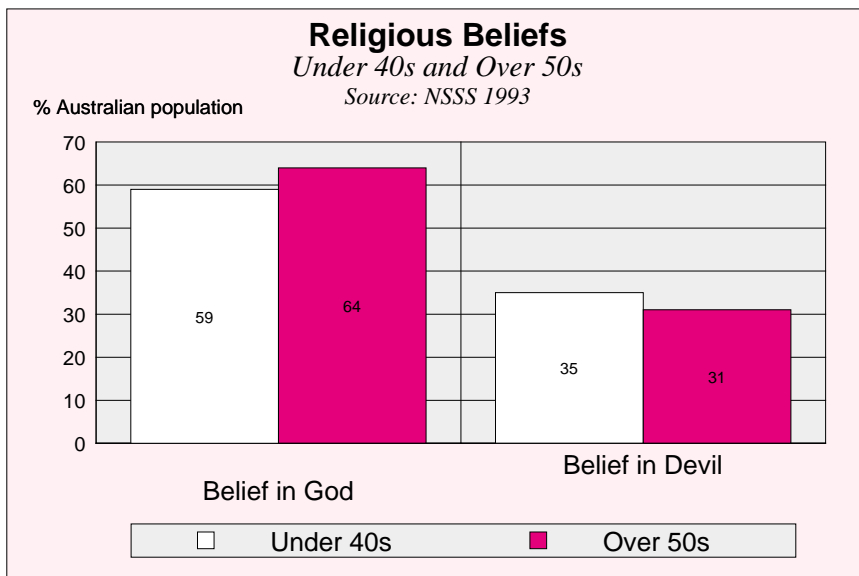
The people who reached the age of 20 in the late 1960s are now in their late 40s. For these people, and succeeding generations, the assumptions of the world as a multiplicity of arenas of competing powers have continued to dominate. Within the plurality of life-worlds in which the younger generations live, there are some arenas which are dominated by systems, and in which there is rational control. Even the world economic arena has been seen this way. But these arenas are seen as limited in scope as far as the life of the individual is concerned. People do not extend these ideas of a 'system' to the world as a whole.

These different ways of seeing the world have important implications for the nature of evil. In the world seen as a coherent system, evil involves the breaking of the rules. Evil is the moral or ethical failure to maintain the rules which keep the system operating. It is therefore a characteristic of people's actions and behaviour.

Within the world seen as an arena of competing powers, the powers which bombard or intersect in some way with the individual are identified as good or evil. Those powers which inhibit the progress of individuals through the maze, or stop people from finding fulfilment, may be identified as evil. Some people, particularly those with a Christian heritage, will personalise these evil powers as belonging to 'the devil'. Others may identify them as evil, but see them in an impersonal way.

In the population at large, there is a lower incidence of belief in God amongst those who are under 40 years of age compared with those over 50. However, there is a statistically significantly higher level of belief in the devil among the under 40s. Thirty-five percent of those under 40 believe in the devil compared with 31% of those over 50. This is rather an interesting result given that there are substantially more people under 40 saying they have 'no religion'.

What has caused this rather different picture of the world to develop? As people moved out of the local community into a larger arena, their experiences of life diversified. It was not as easy to see the rules or the system. They were confronted by a plurality of moral rules and values, and life-styles which could not easily be contained within one system. Thus, one had to choose which way one would live.



The television, in particular, portrayed a world in which the unexpected was always happening. The events which happened according to expectations were not interesting to the television. They did not capture people's attention. Thus, the news became, to a large extent, the record of the unexpected, the spectacular and even the bizarre. Dramatic productions also have this character. Popular drama does not portray events as happening as one would expect in a closed system in which people are keep-

ing the rules. Such drama would not be interesting. Rather, it concentrates on the unexpected, and the various ways in which people might deal with it.

Indeed, the pattern of the soaps is that the characters are confronted by a new and unexpected situation. Things go 'wrong' in some sense or another. The task of the characters is to find a way around the new set of circumstances, and, in some sense, resolve it to achieve a new stability. But to keep viewers' interest, the unexpected and capricious is constantly happening. Life becomes a series of crises through which the characters move. This becomes the presumed pattern of life in the world. The unexpected, rather than the regular, becomes the norm of life.

The fact that younger people do not see the world as a stable system does not mean that God does not exist for them. Rather, they see God differently. Instead of the underlying source of the stability, God is seen as breaking in and working within the world, changing and developing the events that occur. God's actions may well be part of the 'unexpected'.

Some Specific Changes

To further explore what these changes in worldview mean, we will consider some specific assumptions and categories of thinking.

1. Social Hierarchy

One characteristic of bureaucratic processes is that there are clearly designated areas of authority and responsibility and a hierarchy of roles and responsibilities. In a world, seen as a system, people are seen primarily in terms of their roles and responsibilities in the world, and in terms of the social hierarchy which the system implies. To a large extent, the sense of a social hierarchy has disappeared. People do not immediately see people in terms of their level on a social ladder. This is especially true of the people under 40 years of age, but to some extent it has affected all generations.

The change in forms of address in which surnames are no longer used for those social superiors is a specific indication of this change. Family names placed people within the context of family institutions. Family names were used as a mark of respect. The use of first or given names is a symbol of intimacy and equality. There are still some cases, where people are unknown to each other, where first names may be considered an affront to the rules of intimacy. There are other cases where the situation is

seen as demanding social differentiation and surnames are used to reinforce that. For example, while some school teachers enjoy being called by their first names by students, others prefer to maintain the respect implied by the use of surnames, and there would be few secondary or primary school principals who would invite students to use their first names in speaking directly to them. These cases are the exceptions which prove the rule.

Another indicator of the change in the sense of social hierarchy is portrayed in the decline in use of university degrees in addressing people. In the 1950s, it was very common to put a person's university degrees after their name on the envelope. Today, it is exceedingly rare for that to happen. University degrees may be displayed in the context of a work environment where they are a symbol of the competence of the person in their occupation. They are very rarely used in the personal arenas of life.

Respect for people today is not based primarily on their social position or their roles, or even their educational standing. It is based largely on their performance as individuals, and very often it is judged by their creativity. This applies to everyone from leading politicians to business leaders to sports people and academics.

The value, and even the concept, of honour has largely disappeared in our society (Berger, et al., 1974: 78-89). It is closely related to the sense of dignity and the idea that people act according to their status and position within the social hierarchy. The challenge to honour occurred when the position or rank of a position was offended. If a person of high rank was insulted by having their position mocked or attacked, the honour of that person was at stake. In a world seen in terms of individuals, rather than roles and positions, there is no question of attacking people's honour even though one may attack them as individuals.

The decline in the sense of social hierarchy is evident within the church. Older people often look a little askance of the dress of younger people when they come to church. They are not at all sure about the torn jeans and the T-shirts. They find it hard to understand why the young people have dropped the notion that was very important to them that one dressed well for church. It was appropriate to wear one's best clothes.

Older people frequently complain that there is a lack of a sense of awe in modern expressions of worship.

There is little respect for God. Just as there is a 'carelessness' in dress, so there is a 'carelessness' in addressing God.

They are aware that things have changed. After years of calling each other by their family names, they are now on first name terms. They have generally come to accept the idea that the minister would like to be called by his or her first name. But there is an unease. They feel there is little respect, either for other people, or for God.

Behind these external changes, there is a rather substantial change in theology. God is viewed in a rather different way. As society was seen as hierarchical, God was inevitably seen in relation to that hierarchy. As it was appropriate to dress well when meeting one's superiors, so it was appropriate to dress well when coming into God's presence. As it was important to be respectful to those who were further up the social hierarchy, so it was appropriate to be respectful to God.

The idea of God having a superior social position makes little sense to the younger generations. Thus, wearing one's best clothes to church is not an issue for them. God is interested in them as people, and they come to relate to a friend. When faced with the choice of images of God as friend or God as king only 6% of those under 40 affirmed God as king, compared with 18% of those over 50 (NSSS, 1993).

The values in relation to God have also changed. Respect is not only expressed differently. It is no longer the primary value. What is far more important is intimacy and honesty. Younger people value a relationship with God that is intimate and honest,

rather than one where there is respect and awe. It is important, in their minds, to come to God without pretensions. Thus, casual clothes, which are a sign of intimacy and 'being oneself' are appropriate for church. Wearing one's best clothes is not so appropriate.

2. Authority

Authority is seen less in terms of a position and more in terms of the activities and relationships with a person. For example, teachers used to go into classrooms with authority as teachers. They could lose that authority by being poor teachers. Today, the situation has reversed. Teachers must win the right to teach, to be respected as good teachers, by teaching well.

The same is true, at least to some extent, for clergy. People under 40 have a much greater distrust of the clergy than those over 50. In the National Social Science Survey of 1993 23% of people under 40 said they felt the clergy in their church were hypocrites, compared to 13% of those over 50. Among those who attended church weekly or more often, 8% of people under 40 felt their clergy were hypocrites, compared with 3% of those over 50.

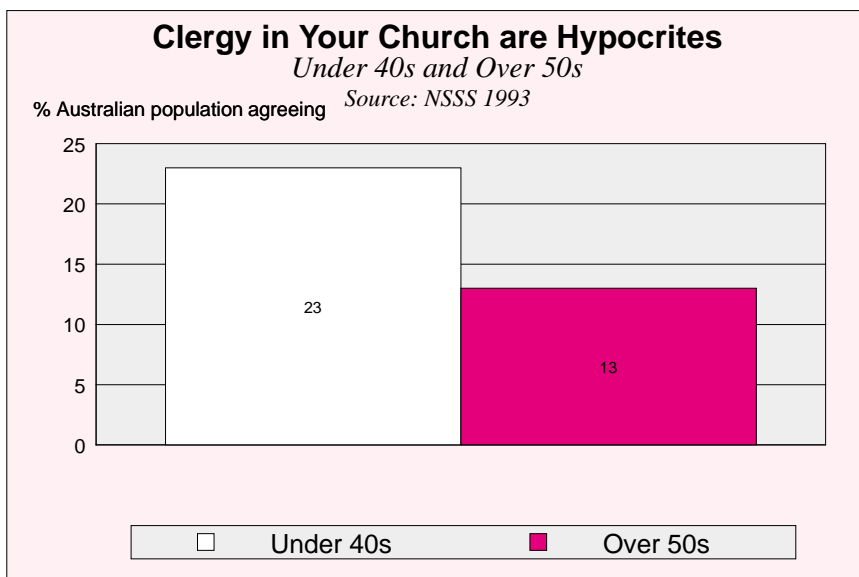
Clergy cannot presume to have authority tied to their position. They must win that authority by the ways in which they relate to other people, and they must do so in the face of some suspicion. This does not necessarily mean that there has been a 'diminution of authority' in Australian society. Rather, authority is developed and justified in different ways and according to different criteria.

These attitudes to authority have been transferred to

the authority of God. God's authority is recognised within the context of a relationship, rather than being tied to God's superior social position. There is an implicit assumption among younger people that God will justify divine authority by the way God operates in the world and the ways in which God influences the lives of people.

3. Power

These changes in the nature of authority have implications for the way in which power is conceived. If authority is under-



stood as the 'right' to do, then 'power' is the ability to do. For example, the politician and director of company are seen as having power in terms of what they are able to accomplish. Power is not seen primarily in terms of position and authority residing in position.

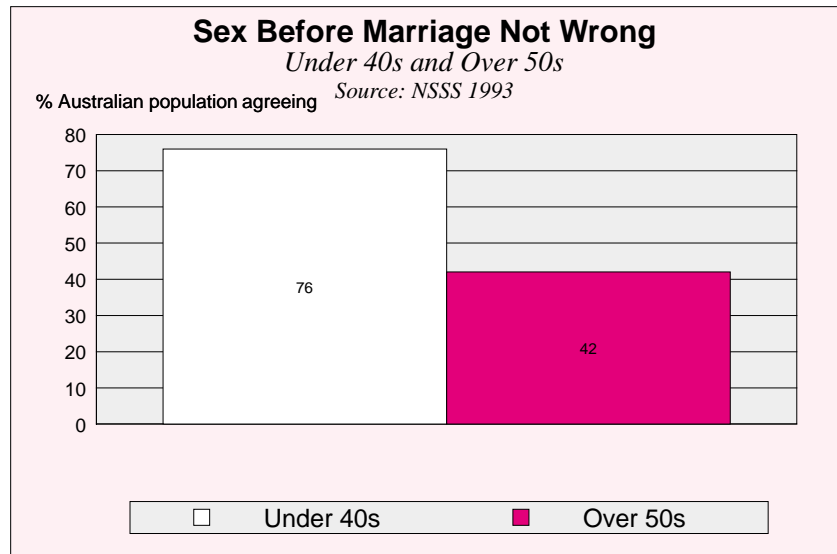
Similarly, God's power is not seen as a demonstration of God's position, but rather as arising out of God's personal will and character. God acts because God is concerned about people.

Traditional worship in most mainline churches expresses something of the order of the world through the order of the worship. The very repetition of the liturgy may be a symbol of the inherent order of the universe: an order that God has established and over which God reigns. The image is almost one of the perfect manager who has established the ultimate system of management. If only we all keep the rules, the world will run smoothly. God's power is displayed in that order.

The image has now changed. Whatever the explicit form of worship, the content of worship is relational. God's power is seen as what God does, what may even be considered as God's interventions in the world and in the lives of individuals. There is a fascination with 'signs and wonders': of particular demonstrations of God's power, from the phenomena of tongues, to healing, even to displays of physical strength. The displays of God's power are seen as important confirmation of God's authority.

Again, the dominant image may be seen as that of a computer adventure game. As one moves through the maze, unknown and unexpected events occur. Some of these are good and beneficial and others are malevolent and can be harmful. One has to cope with these individually using the resources that are available, or gathering further resources. There are no rules which apply to all of these situations. One must cope with each one, one at a time.

God may be called upon to assist in dealing with the individual situation. What I am suggesting is that God is seen not in terms of the great force behind the system, but rather as a power that intervenes in the world.



4. Feelings in Decision-Making

Where the assumptions of a world-system dominate, decisions are made in terms of the system. People are required by the system to make decisions which accord with the smooth operation of the system. They make them according to the perceived rules and regulations of the system and in accordance with their place within the system.

The individual who lives in a web of arenas of competing powers does not have a system in terms of which decisions can be made. The individual must make decisions according to the situation and its particular array of possibilities. Many decisions are made in terms of the individual's personal preferences. People do not decide 'what is good' within some overall view of the world, but what 'I like'.

As we have noted, there are specific arenas in which one must follow the rules and regulations in order to attain the ends one desires to achieve. This may often be the case in arenas of work, and sometimes in those of education. To play the game, even in the leisure context, there are rules by which the players must abide.

However, in the large arenas of personal life, and in the ways in which the individual moves from one arena to another, feelings dominate decision-making. Individuals decide how they will spend their time in terms of 'what they like' rather than 'what they think is good'. Relationships last as long as those relationships are enjoyable.

Even marriage, among those who enter it, is dominated by the ways the partners feel towards each other. The success of the marriage is often measured

by how the couple feel towards each other and continue to enjoy their company. There is little idea that marriage is an institution which demands its own loyalty sense within the picture of the world made up of systems, in which marriage is one sub-system. The smooth operation of marriage may be seen as integral to the smooth operation of the larger world system. In such a world it makes sense to remain loyal to marriage whatever the feelings of the individuals involved towards each other. In the world of competing powers, loyalty to the institution makes little sense. The individual feelings of satisfaction in the relation are the criteria for the continuation of the relationship.

The importance of feelings in decision-making has an impact in areas of church-life and church involvement. Many older people attend church regularly because they believe they have a duty to do so. Some see regular church attendance as one of the rules which God has laid down for the smooth operation of the world-system. Church attendance is required by God. They go because they believe they ought to, whether they enjoy going or not.

Younger people have little sense of duty in relation to church attendance. They attend to the extent they find it enjoyable and personally satisfying to do so. They will move around churches which fill their individual needs and those of the family rather than maintain their allegiance to the local church. They evaluate worship by what they get out of it and how they feel about it.

This tends to place churches in a supermarket situation. They must cater to the feelings of the clientele, or they will lose them. People will go only as long as they enjoy going and personally feel it worthwhile to go. There are no guarantees of long-term loyalty.

5. De-Institutionalisation

As the concept of the world has changed, so have the ways of operating in the world. For many older people, who see the world as a system, it is very important to maintain that system. This is expressed partly in terms of the formal institutions and structures which they seek to maintain.

In the late 1960s, many young people rejected what they saw as the political, educational, legal, ecclesiastical and commercial systems as part of a great interlocking bureaucratic system. They saw the 'system' as oppressing the individual. They saw it as based on commercial and materialistic values of which they did not approve. They saw it as placing

restrictions on the individual quest for human fulfilment.

There has continued to be a suspicion of 'institutions'. As *The Homeless Mind* puts it, institutions have ceased to be the 'home' of the self (1974:86). Individuals no longer locate themselves by their institutional affiliations, or find their identity primarily in relation to institutional roles. Rather than develop formal institutional structures to achieve particular ends, they tend to develop loosely structured *ad hoc* groups which will gather only as long as they are needed to achieve the specific purpose of the group.

The contrast is evident in many church contexts. Older people are concerned about the maintenance of committees, such as the property and finance committee, the parish council, and so on as being at the heart of the institution of the church. They have hospital auxiliaries and women's organisations through which some of their social concerns are expressed. These groups have formal minutes, democratically elected presidents, secretaries and other office-bearers. The younger people, however, are not interested in these institutions. If they see a particular task that needs to be done, they will gather some people around. They will not elect people to positions other than to acknowledge someone as the leader or organiser. Often specific people are delegated to undertake particular tasks, such as writing a particular letter, rather than appointing a secretary. They will not keep formal minutes of the meeting. They will make their decisions by consensus rather than by democratic voting.

Similar changes are found in many social contexts. Younger people focus on individual achievements and dealing with particular situations. They are not interested in maintaining the institution *per se*. Indeed, many would consider that the maintenance of the institution can inhibit the achievement of the goals they are concerned about. The effort which goes into the institution could be better placed directly into the achievement of the particular ends.

Some people see 'the church' as an institution which itself may be bypassed. Worship has to do with the individual and God. Why bring the church into it? Why spend enormous amounts of time and energy supporting an institution, rather than putting them directly into the real end of worship and self-fulfilment? They have not necessarily rejected what the church stands for. Rather, it appears as a clumsy and expensive way of facilitating worship. Others

would go further and see the church as reinforcing institutional values and structures in ways they regard as oppressive. Some are suspicious of the institutional authority some denominational hierarchies have sought to exercise.

Even if a group setting does enhance worship, some people prefer the small group to the formality of the institutional church. Many people today prefer small groups or house churches for the purposes of pastoral care, fellowship, education, and worship. A small group does not need expensive facilities or paid personnel. It does not need rules and regulations, committees or office-bearers for it to operate. It can be flexible and respond to the needs of individuals. However, without some sense of loyalty to the group, it can be difficult for the group to operate satisfactorily. Many groups have contracts of commitment for a specific length of time.

Some Implications

There are numerous ways in which the new set of assumptions has affected the ways in which people live in the world. While changed social conditions have changed the worldview of people, the worldview also changes the ways people act. There is a dialectic between social conditions and the assumptions and conceptions by which people live. Within the context of this paper, we can only examine briefly a few areas in which these changes have had an impact. We shall look at some areas in which there has been an impact in church life.

1. Worship

I have noted above that many people come to worship only in as far as they see it as meeting their personal needs and interests. They are wary of involvement in institutional structures, and prefer either the small group setting, or the church where they can drop in occasionally without committing themselves to the maintenance of the institution.

We have also noted that people see God differently. God is not seen in relationship to a social hierarchy and God's authority is not seen as associated with God's position. Within the context of worship, people look for God's authority to be displayed in the way God interacts with people.

The different views of the world make a very considerable difference to the ways people come to worship and what they expect to happen in worship. The older people who see the world as a closed system, established by and sustained by God, come to wor-

ship to affirm that system. They want to reassert that that system exists and is sustained in a beneficent way by God, despite some evidence to the contrary. They will want to reaffirm the values of that system, and in so-doing, strengthen the community in resisting the breaking of those values. A formal liturgy or structured service fits quite well with this, as, by its own formality, it affirms the system that God is seen as having created.

For those who come to worship with a conception of the world as an arena of competing powers, worship is quite different. There is no system to be affirmed. Rather, they see worship as the gathering of resources. It is a time for building one's personal strength to deal with situations that might arise. Worship provides an opportunity for calling on God's help to deal with immediate and potential problems. It is important that they make direct access to God through which they obtain strength and guidance for navigating in the arenas of life. Formal worship, for these people, means little, for it is the direct and intimate contact that is most important.

Many churches, particularly in the mainline denominations, are finding it hard to attract people under 40, or even under 50, into their worship and other activities. There are attempts to meet the problem by changing the form of worship, making worship more informal, more lively, and including upbeat music. The problem is much deeper, however, than mere form. Even the nature of worship is different for those under 40 and those over 50. I personally believe, that it is very difficult to facilitate worship that is fully satisfying to both those under 40 and those over 50 within the same service.

2. Education

Education used to be about understanding the system of the world and how it worked. The purpose of science was to understand the rules of the natural world. Through understanding, the rules could be applied in technological use and control of the world to make life better for human beings and for society as a whole. Chemistry, physics, and biology were joined by the human and social sciences in the last century, such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics. The paradigm of science was the 'discovery' of the law of gravity, which through one very simple principle suddenly explained a great variety of diverse phenomena. The task of education, from primary school to university, was to understand this system in its complexity and interrelated nature.

Education involved a broad general knowledge of the framework of the system, spatially through geography, temporally through history, in terms of its basic components of matter and force through chemistry and physics. It also involved learning the skills of operating within the system and communicating to other people with language, mathematics, and, traditionally, logic. Other applied skills such as woodwork and technical drawing, accountancy and needlework were seen as additions for those who were interested in gaining such practical skills that might help them find work. Music, art and literature added the cultural dimension, helping students to appreciate the dimensions of human achievement and expression.

After a general framework of knowledge was gained through secondary education, a university education extended that framework in specific areas. Again, education was primarily about understanding the closed system and its rules of operation. University education was oriented primarily to the theoretical description of this system. It was not important that it deal with the details of application. (Actually, the primary work of the universities was research, and only secondarily was it passing on these skills of research to others.)

The situation has changed entirely within the last thirty years. University education has become a part of the mass education system and is no longer elitist, in terms of catering only for the top 2% or so of the population. Because of the demand for mass university education, in practice the focus has changed from research to teaching despite the pressure to justify one's university status by doing research. In the mass system, people come to 'do subjects', pass examinations, get qualifications and get out into the workforce.

The older generations, particularly those with university education, operated in the world primarily by seeking to understand it. Through a knowledge of the underlying theory or rules of the system, predictions could be made, and one may be able to control the system.

For the younger generations, the idea of a general understanding of the world hardly arises. They are interested in gathering techniques which they can use from day to day. They gather resources to cope with life just as the person in a computer adventure game picks up certain tools and implements which may be useful. Education is primarily learning techniques. Thus, they have little interest in underlying theory and little desire to explore the inter-relationships of the system.

Even at the theoretical level itself, this change has been expressed as the chaos theory has come to influence

many disciplines. While the scientific concept of chaos is very different from the personal sense of chaos, there is a link in popular thinking.

Primary and secondary education has moved from establishing a strong framework of knowledge to giving children some basic skills and techniques which they can use in a variety of situations. It has changed from a concentration on general, broad theory to concentrating on skills of language, mathematics and science. There is much more emphasis on the application of these skills in situations which may be relevant to life.

Music, art and literature have also changed. There is an emphasis on performance and creativity rather than on understanding and appreciating the various forms of human expression. There is no sense of there being rules of aesthetics that need to be examined or understood.

When people come to tertiary education, they are looking for a refinement of that process of learning techniques rather than content and theory. They are looking for more techniques in specific areas which may be useful in the workplace. They are seeking to develop skills in practical areas that they can use. They are learning to learn rather than learning to master a body of information.

This change has meant that it is no longer appropriate to distinguish between universities and institutes of technology or applied sciences. This change in worldview has allowed many former institutes of technology to be called universities and to give 'university degrees'.

Similarly changes have occurred in relation to education in the church. Few people express much interest in having a systematic and in-depth understanding of theology, church history, or even Biblical literature. Rather, there is much more interest in how faith applies to life and what ramifications Christian teaching has for the ways in which one should live.

There has been a movement in focus from 'pure knowledge' to the 'applied'. People are more interested in the outworking of the faith, rather than in any theoretical formulations which might underlie it. 'Pop psychology' is a common element in modern Christian education, helping people to deal with the immediate and personal. There is a strong focus on dealing with themes such as anxiety and depression, or building relationships.

There is a search for techniques rather than a general understanding within some areas of Christian educa-

tion.. Meditation has recently gained some attention within a Christian context as well as in secular settings. It too can easily be reduced to a series of techniques beginning with breathing control and muscle relaxation.

3. Theology

I have noted the secularising effect of living in multiple arenas of life. We have also noted some effects that the change in worldview have had on religious belief. For example, younger people do not see God as the One who sustains the system. Rather, God is seen in more personal terms, as a powerful, beneficent friend and resource. They see God as involved in the events of daily life rather than sustaining the world processes in which we live.

We have also noted the change in the understanding of evil. Rather than consisting primarily in the breaking of the rules of God's system, evil has become the nature of some of the powers which impact on people. Thus, evil has become something more objective, and more easily personified in 'the devil'. Sixty percent of church-goers under 40 affirmed belief in the devil, compared with 46% of those over 50.

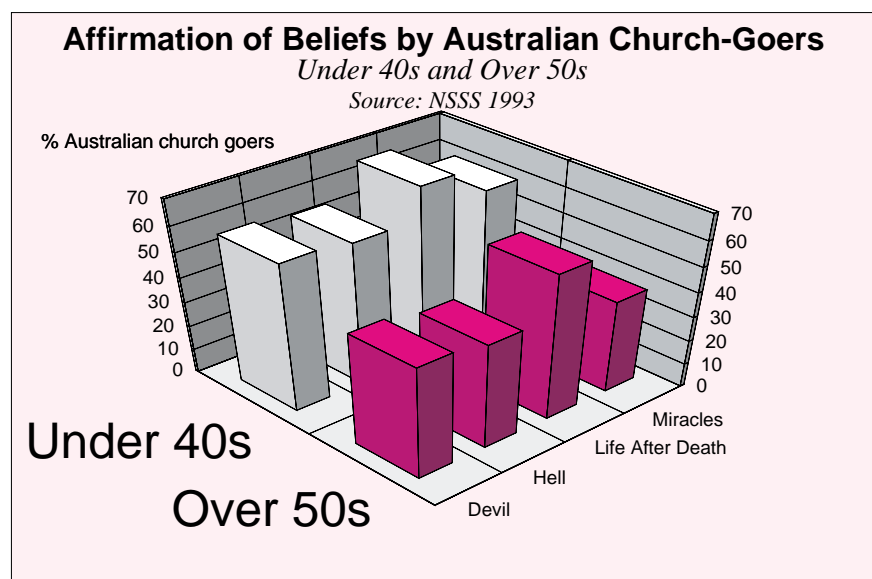
There is a range of other changes which appear in the survey data. The younger church-goers affirm more strongly belief in hell, and in miracles. For example, around 60% of people under 40 affirmed strongly a belief in religious miracles, compared with around 38% for those over 50. It is much easier to locate supernatural phenomena if one does not have a view of the world as a closed system.

We find that there is a very substantial difference between the young church-goers and their older counterparts in their affirmation that there has been a specific turning point in life when they made a new and personal commitment to religion. Thus 74% of church-goers in their 20s and 71% of church-goers in their 30s affirm that they have had such an experience, compared with around 50% of church-goers over 50. Many of those people would also describe themselves as having been 'born again'. Fifty-three percent of church-goers under 40 describe themselves as having been 'born again' compared with 40% of church-goers over 50.

Such ideas as God intervening in the daily events of life do not fit well with many older people - or theological institutions. One might argue from a theological perspective that there is a real possibility of making God an actor within creation rather than the Lord of creation. It is a very different idea from that of God as 'the ground of our Being' which Tillich made popular.

While some may want to be critical of the idea of God intervening in the events of daily life, one must ask whether we are observing a natural process of the 'indigenisation' of theology? Missionary literature has long recognised, and often affirmed, this process of indigenisation, in which the Christian faith is re-expressed within the culture of a society to which missionaries take Christianity. A similar process is occurring within our own society. The culture provides us with the images and the concepts that we use in understanding the world around us and our religious faith. We naturally assimilate the ideas that we receive to the framework of ideas with which we work. We learn one word's meaning in terms of the meanings of other words we already know. This is the process occurring here. Such a process also occurred when Tillich took the terms 'being' and 'ground' and used them in a way that provided a powerful image of God for many people.

The process reminds us that all theological expressions, both of professional theologians, and those who sing a well-worn chorus, are always and necessarily inadequate. They will always reflect our cultural boundedness. The very nature of theology as the expression of faith must necessarily be one of process, in



which the tools of human language, arising out of human culture and expressing human experience, are employed in pointing to what lies beyond any human expression. Theology must take seriously the symbolic world in which people live. But it must always seek to be self-critical, discovering its own weaknesses and pointing beyond.

Theology must seek to take seriously the world of the people in which it is produced. Part of the task of theology is to engage people and take them on a journey. It is not appropriate to produce a theology as a systematic set of conceptions which is imposed on people. At the same time, it is also important that the process of theology does not just reflect the beliefs that people have and the assumptions with which they operate.

There needs to be a process of dialogue and development of relationship through which people grow, both as individuals and in community. Thus, the churches need to allow the younger generations to develop their relationship with God and to facilitate the process of expressing it. We need to help each other to develop self-critical skills that we might continually clarify our misty images.

Both the world as a system and the world as an arena of competing powers can be found within the Scriptures. The book of Proverbs, for example, reflects an ordered world in which there are principles which operate in a regular and reliable way. The concept of 'wisdom' as developed in Biblical and extra-Biblical writings generally reflects a systematic world which God has ordained.

Many Psalms, on the other hand, picture an unstable and unpredictable world: a world of competing powers. We find all types of human struggles in the Psalms, dealing with both internal and external 'enemies'. Frequently we find cries for God to intervene in the world and help the Psalmist deal with specific challenges.

Throughout history, both types of worldview have dominated from time to time. The transition we have experienced over the last thirty years is reminiscent of the transition experienced at the end of the seventeenth century. As the agricultural revolution displaced people from the rural areas of Europe, the stable world order promoted by the thinkers of the Enlightenment no longer seemed tenable.

Religious expression changed considerably at that time. The charismatic nature of the religious revival

in which the Wesleys were leaders bears many resemblances to the development of the charismatic movement in our own times. It reflected then a change in worldview from the stable system to the arena of competing powers, as it does today.

On a day to day basis, the weather often seems quite unpredictable, particularly in the temperate zones. The sky looks like an arena of competing powers. The winds blow. The clouds come and go, sometimes dropping their cargo of rain, hail or snow. The sun shines and the rain dries. The clouds melt away.

If one takes a longer and more general view of the weather, however, one can discern patterns. The colder weather of winter gives way to the warmth and, often, the variability of spring. It is not long before we experience the warmth of the summer, which in turn gives way to autumn. While the daily weather is unpredictable, the twelve month cycle of the seasons is as sure as the rotation of the earth on its axis as it travels around the sun.

So it is in many fields of life. If we take a close view, it is impossible to make predictions. As we take a longer perspective, the chaos of the immediate and superficial gives way to the stability of the larger patterns.

This paper takes a long perspective. It has painted the patterns of cultural change in broad brush strokes. It is totally inadequate for portraying the thoughts or actions of any individual. Rather, it has attempted to stand back from the apparent chaos of individual days of weather and discern the patterns in the cultural seasons.

References

- Bentley, Peter, 'Tricia Blombery and Philip Hughes, 1992. *Faith Without the Church? Nominalism in Australian Christianity*. Kew: Christian Research Association.
- Berger, Peter L., Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, 1974. *The Homeless Mind*, London: Penguin.
- Blombery, 'Tricia and Philip Hughes, 1994. *Australian Families: Practices and Attitudes*. Kew: Christian Research Association.
- Hughes, Philip and 'Tricia Blombery, 1990. *Patterns of Faith in Australian Churches*. Kew: Christian Research Association.
- Mackay, Hugh, 1993. *Reinventing Australia: The Mind and Mood of Australia in the 90s*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- National Social Science Survey, 1993. (NSSS). Evans, Mariah and Jonathan Kelley, National Social Science Survey data file. Canberra: Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University.