The Spirit of Generation Y
Young people’s spirituality in a changing Australia

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Preface

*The Spirit of Generation Y* project, on which this book is based, has been a five-year investigation of the varieties of spirituality among Australian young people.

The project originated in discussions between former board members and staff of the Christian Research Association, and was carried out by a research team from several institutions: Rev Dr Michael Mason (Australian Catholic University), Dr Andrew Singleton (Monash University), Associate Professor Ruth Webber (Australian Catholic University) and Rev Dr Philip Hughes (Christian Research Association).

A list of publications from the project – reports, journal articles and working papers, is on the project website: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/ccls/spir/sppub/sppub.htm and many of them can be downloaded from that site.

*Who are Generation Y? – a special note for all who have read our earlier reports*

In earlier publications from this study, we defined Generation Y as those born 1976-1990. However the Australian Bureau of Statistics has in recent years endorsed the twenty-year period 1946-1965 as the birth years of the Australian Baby Boom generation. Following this authoritative lead means dating Generations X and Y five years later than before, retaining the convention of these generations spanning 15 years each. We have adopted these new age boundaries in the present book: Generation Y are those born 1981 to 1995; they were aged 10-24 at the time of the survey (not 15-29 as in previous reports). So the statistics on Generation Y in this book are not comparable with those given in our earlier reports: they refer to a slightly different group.

Since no reflective person can be neutral on the topic of spirituality, a ‘declaration of interests’ may be in order: Michael Mason is a Catholic priest, Andrew Singleton was raised Anglican, and Ruth Webber is a practising Anglican. Nevertheless this work is not intended as an expression of our personal religious commitments, but as an attempt, utilising the methods of social science, to enhance understanding of the variety of forms of spirituality encountered among Generation Y with a degree of objectivity. Theological and moral judgments are left to the reader.

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Earlier versions of some material included in this book have been published previously in two journal articles and are used here with permission:

Andrew wishes to thank Dr Ceridwen Spark and Dr Arunachalam Dharmalingam for their assistance.

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While the three authors collaborated in planning, thinking through and revising the whole book, primary responsibility for writing the various chapters was divided as follows:
- Chapters 1 to 6, 12, 13 Michael Mason
- Chapters 1, 7, 8, 9 Andrew Singleton
- Chapters 1, 10, 11 Ruth Webber

We have found the experience of working as a team energising, productive and delightful.

Michael Mason
Andrew Singleton
Ruth Webber

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Introduction

Every society recognises that its youth are its future. In ageing societies like Australia, the interest in youth is all the stronger, and takes on a particular intensity in times of rapid social and cultural change.1 What are our young people like? What are their beliefs and values? How are they responding to the changing environment? In what direction will they take our society in the future?

This book arises from Australian society’s interest in its youth. It reports on a study of young Australians in their teens and early twenties – ‘Generation Y’.

Our title refers to the ‘spirit’ of that generation. A person’s spirit is generally understood as their deepest self, their essence or core – what makes them the way they are, what ‘makes them go’. Positively, as when we refer to someone as ‘a person of spirit’, it connotes qualities like courage or determination; or in reverse, someone can be ‘lacking in spirit’ or even ‘mean-spirited’. More recently, the word ‘spirituality’, which used to have a predominantly religious meaning, referring to the interior dimension of a person’s religious life, to their relationship with God, has come to be used more broadly to denote their outlook and values, whether religious or not. In the increasingly secular Australian context, ‘spirit’ and ‘spirituality’ serve to indicate the focus of our inquiry.

The Spirit of Generation Y reports the findings of a five-year investigation of the varieties of spirituality among Australian young people. It arose from the recognition that the key developmental task of the late teens and early twenties is sorting out who you are and who you want to be; how you want to live. It’s like composing your life-story – not just the story of your past, but the story of your future. It’s choosing a view of the world; deciding on values to live by; developing habits by the practices you repeat. The process is not necessarily a highly conscious one, but takes place all the same.

Knowing that a new generation are passing through this stage gives rise to frequently asked questions:

- What are the beliefs and values that young people are adopting, and from what sources are they derived (since it seems that fewer young people than ever before are attending churches)?
- Are today’s young people spiritual seekers, like the youth of the 1960s?
- How much do young people care about others, about their communities and their environment, and what motivates them to care or not to care?

The scene of our inquiry is set by listening, in the first chapter, to the voices of three young people who were interviewed face-to-face at some length, as each describes his or her spiritual journey. Chapter 2 outlines the background of the research project, reviews previous research and theory, and describes the research methods which were employed in the study. Then follows the core of the book, a series of chapters which outline the major patterns and trajectories in the spirituality of Generation Y, reporting the findings of a large-scale, nationally representative survey. Chapters 3-6 describe and analyse various dimensions of traditional spirituality, which in Australia is based mainly on the Christian tradition: Chapter 3 examines the religious beliefs of Generation Y and the denominations with which they identify; Chapter 4 surveys their religious practices, with particular attention to the reasons for the decline in attendance at religious services. Chapter 5 summarises what we have learned about Anglicans, Catholics, members of other Christian churches and other religions among Generation Y. Chapter 6 explores four distinct levels of adherence to traditional religion: Committed, Regular, Marginal and Nominal, analyses the factors which influence youth towards higher or lower levels of belief and involvement, and summarises our findings on the traditional spirituality type, pending fuller discussion and interpretation leading to conclusions in chapter 12.
In chapter 7 we venture into the less well-charted territory of New Age spirituality: a realm containing both the oldest and the most recent religions and spiritualities. Much has been written and theorised about the changing spiritual landscape in late modern societies: the rise of ‘alternative’ spiritualities, the increasing popularity of the New Age, the attraction of Eastern religions, the development of eclectic ‘mix and match’ spiritualities and the emergence of nature religions and Neo-Paganism. This chapter considers the extent to which young people pursue their spiritual quest in these less familiar worlds by accepting new beliefs or adopting new spiritual practices. Chapter 8 looks at those who follow the Secular path rather than a Traditional religion or a New Age spirituality, and at the ways in which Secular young people make sense of their life experiences.

With the completion of our profile of the three main strands in the spirituality of Australian youth, Traditional, New Age and Secular, chapter 9 turns to examine the broader social and cultural influences shaping spirituality: how the societal emphasis on individuality shapes the worldviews of young people, and how cultural resources, such as television, the internet and video games, inform spiritualities, lifestyles and preferences.

What difference does spirituality make to the rest of life? This is the theme of Chapters 10 and 11: the first views the relationship between spirituality and other beliefs, values and attitudes, such as people’s sense of meaning and belonging, the things they consider important in life, the activities they enjoy. Chapter 11 looks beyond the sphere of the individual at how spirituality is related to the ways in which members of Generation Y participate in society – their attitudes to social issues and the extent of their community engagement.

Chapter 12 summarises and discusses our findings in the light of the expectations and research questions arising from our initial review of previous research, and draws together our conclusions.

In an endeavour to assist those who work with youth in various ways to draw out the implications of our study for their own fields of activity, we have attempted, in a final brief segment, chapter 13, to offer some tentative proposals on how the findings of the study might be applied in various types of activities; but these initial suggestions can only fully be put into practice by those with competence in each area of practice – something the authors do not claim to possess.

We believe, nonetheless, that all who work with youth, as well as parents and all those interested in the lives of young people, will be assisted by a deeper understanding of the spirit of Generation Y.
Chapter 1
Voices of Generation Y
Three paths of youth spirituality

This book is about the spiritual lives of Generation Y: young people born between 1981 and 1995. To start, we would like to introduce three young people we interviewed face-to-face, and invite the reader to listen to what they told us about their style of spirituality, the things that influence them, and the way they participate in society.

Our interviews with members of Generation Y were carefully structured. The main aim was to find out about their spirituality, but in a non-judgmental manner. We began by asking about school, university or work, their friends and the types of activities they enjoy. Next, we talked to them about some life-defining experiences, what they valued and asked how they wanted to be remembered when they died. After this, the interview turned to questions about the religious and spiritual beliefs and practices.

Meet Monique, Janet and Michael – three of the many voices of Generation Y.

Monique
Background
Monique, aged 17, is a Year 12 student in a Catholic school, and lives in an upper-middle class suburb. She was born in Australia of an Australian mother and an overseas-born father. He is a finance industry professional, and her mother a secretary. She is one of five children. When she arrived for her interview, she was wearing a necklace and a bracelet featuring the Cross. Her spirituality is traditional, and highly so. She is a member of an Eastern Catholic church, devout, orthodox, and committed.

Spirituality
Monique told us that yes, she believes in God, prays regularly, reads the Bible every few nights. This is what she said about her Bible reading:

Do you read the Bible?
Yeah. I’ve got this new one, little tubby thing … it’s just one of the really easy ones to read. Like, it’s a normal Bible but the passage has got questions that explain it and that.
How do you think it’s helpful?
It just sort of strengthens the connection. Like I mean, it’s not like I go out there and say I’m going to read this, this, this and that tonight. I’ll just open it and whatever it opens up to I’ll read.

The interviewer inquired about some of Monique’s other beliefs and practices in more detail: What happens after death? Monique believes in the traditional Catholic doctrines of Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. When did she feel particularly close to God? When her two sisters were born, she told us. This is what she said about her attendance at church:

So you were saying earlier you go to church every week?
Yep.
How do you find Mass?
It’s relaxing. It’s sort of like therapeutic. It’s like the only place for that one hour where you can think straight and nothing’s going on in your mind except the connection between you and God. That’s how I feel.
OK, so would you get a lot out of the homily and that sort of thing?
Yeah.
I know some people say they’re hard to follow?
No, they’re good. I mean, I understand it and go through them.
Given her strong faith, it was fascinating to see that she jibs at describing God:\(^4\)

_So what do you think God is like?_\(^5\)
I’ve never imagined what God would be like or what he’d look like – he’s just God.
[and later in the interview]

_So what do you believe about God?_
God, he did a lot for us. I mean, he’s God. I get funny sort of talking about him. I don’t know what to say.

Although Monique is clearly uneasy talking _about_ God, her religious practices do not show signs of distance or fear in the relationship. Monique stood out among most of the Generation Y we interviewed, in showing no sign of being influenced by the secularity of Australian society and culture. National surveys of Catholics show that only a minority of Year 12 students in Catholic schools are church attenders; and few retain the full range of Catholic beliefs.

_Influences_
Through her family, she is tied strongly into a Catholic ethnic community; yet even there, although family values would find strong support, there would be diversity in religious adherence, and her suburb, and to some extent also her school, are religiously pluralistic environments.

Monique has never doubted God or the Church, nor dabbled in occult or New Age practices, which she firmly rejects on religious grounds. Although her faith could be described as simple or child-like, in the best sense, there are ample signs of a critical intelligence at work. Asked about the influences on her life, she mentions the media, adding: ‘The media not so much because I’m old enough to know that they exaggerate it and they only tell the public what they want to hear. I’m old enough to know all of that by now.’

She is critical of the portrayals of life in the TV show _The Bold and the Beautiful_, and even in her favourite show, _Home and Away_, which she says reflects but exaggerates teenage life, and is ‘becoming corrupt’. Monique is a great reader, with a strong interest in ancient history, and looks forward to travelling, and visiting Greece, Rome and Egypt.

Her worldview appears to be complete, coherent, comprehensive, highly explicit, articulated and reflective for a year 12 student; and wholeheartedly owned. It is expressed in numerous practices – public rituals, family Lenten fasting and private prayer. She makes a personal statement of her Christian identity through the jewellery she wore.\(^6\)

One of the interview techniques we used, in an endeavour to touch upon the dimensions of spirituality which lie beyond words and concepts, was to show our subjects a small selection of evocative pictures,\(^7\) and ask if any one or two of them expressed something about themselves or their lives. Monique chose a church stained glass window and a small child running towards its parents, commenting:

Well, that one, in the sense of the religious one, because I mean we are a Catholic family and we do all the Catholic things, plus more. Like, we go to church on Sundays. Now that it’s Lent we’re all off meat and fasting until 12 [midday] and we do all of that stuff and we have family gatherings and all of that, but I think that one more, the family picture, the one where the kid is running to the Dad. It just reminds me of our family. My Dad’s very different to other dads. Like, a lot of dads go out there and work and just bring home the money and by the time they come home, they’re tired, especially a lot of dads from our country. Because, like, back home they had to work really, really hard to get the money and by the time they came home they were tired, so all they wanted to do was eat and sleep. But my Dad like even though he’s had to work for it and he’s had to study for his job and all of that, he’s always made time for me and my brothers and my sisters and my Mum. Like, he’s always made time for us and that.
The word ‘family’ recurs constantly in her account, laden with warmth, pride and a sense of security. Asked what gives her life meaning and purpose, she replies:

Like I said before, it has to be family. Without family it’s nothing. Well, for me, family and religion. We’re big on the religion, obviously. And family. So I don’t know, they keep you going... like with me he [my Dad] is always offering to help with assignments and take me places and like nothing’s an effort and with my brothers, every week he’s taking them to football games, wherever they want to go he’ll take them and my younger sister is like if they want to go to the movies, we’ll take ’em. The same thing with my Mum. They’re both pretty good.

By reading those sort of books [on the Middle East] it makes me realise like how lucky I am because to be living in Australia for starters, and to be living with the family I am. Like, even though there’s five kids and both my parents have to work and all that stuff, like, we’re a really close family and we have family values and morals and all of that stuff. And it just makes you realise how lucky you are. You don’t have to go through all of that stuff.

The ‘best fun’ she has is when a group of families, including hers, goes away together at Christmas. When asked who she admires, she said:

It would have to be one of my cousins. I mean, she’s just like – I don’t know, she’s like a big inspiration thing, pushes me through everything and talks to me all the time and makes a point of even though she’s older than me, like makes a point of talking to me and like we go out a lot and muck around.

1. So why is she an inspiration to you?
She’s – she’s from a big family as well so all through her schooling she’s had to work as well, her and her sister have had to work to support the family as well as her parents working and that and she’s also – like, she’d work after school and wake up at 3.30 and 4 o’clock in the morning to study and then she’d go to school and the same routine over and over again.

Her ethos is dominated by family values, the family and ethnic community are her ‘reference group’ – the support base of her worldview; so that although her moral attitudes and dispositions are conservative and strict, the tone and mood of her life is suffused by warmth and a sense of rock-solid security.

Participation in society
What about the world around her? Monique is aware of the advantages that she has in living in Australia and recognises that she fortunate in many ways. She has a strong commitment to her church and cares about what happens in the wider community, but has largely restricted her service activities to those organised by her church or school. She is involved with a social justice program administered by her school and has gone on evening trips to a soup kitchen to feed those who are socially disadvantaged:

I’ve done a couple of Wednesday nights with the school … and we go to the soup kitchen … and we like just feed the homeless and give them drinks, hot drinks, cold drinks, food, sandwiches, donuts, whatever they want. That goes for a couple of hours. I think it starts about 5.30, 6 and finishes about 12.

Does it come easily to you?
No, it’s heart-breaking. Especially with the kids. There’s a lot of kids in the city, especially, that like are crying for food and it’s just heart-breaking.

Monique was asked about whether there were social issues about which she felt very strongly. He answer was not particularly elaborate:

Yeah, I think all this fighting and world peace needs to come in and all this fighting needs to stop. It’s destroying the world. I mean, I think if everyone sticks to themselves, like if every religion say for example, minds their own business and lets each other religion go about their own way then they’ll be fine. Obviously everyone thinks their religion is the right religion, but who’s to judge that a faith isn’t right for them, and Judaism isn’t right for them or that. You can’t judge that. If they think it’s right for them, then it’s right for them. As long as it works for them, leave us alone.
While her views demonstrate a certain naivety, this is not surprising given her age. And although she has concerns about some pressing social issues, she has not become involved in political action to try and address them. She has never been on a protest march or even signed a petition, although she recognises these are valid ways of achieving social change.

As we will see in the next few chapters, people like Monique are rather uncommon among Generation Y. Few – less than 10 percent – are as religious as she is. Although many more identify with a religion and hold religious beliefs, this commitment is nominal or marginal at best.

**Janet**

*Background*

Janet is a retail worker in her twenties; she left school in year 12 and has done no further study. She is one of four children. Her parents are both farmers and she lives with them on the outskirts of a small town not too far from the nearest capital city.

*Spirituality*

We classified Janet’s spirituality as New Age; she holds several New Age beliefs and has engaged in several New Age practices.

Janet held an eclectic mix of beliefs, believing in reincarnation, astrology and the power of psychics. These are her thoughts about reincarnation:

> I do believe in reincarnation but not necessarily that if you’ve been bad in this life then it’s going to come around for you next life, if that makes sense … even people that have been murderers and things like that, I think they get an opportunity – they don’t go to hell, there’s an opportunity for redemption of the soul for everyone so to speak.

In addition to holding such beliefs, Janet also engages in a number of New Age practices: ‘I have had my Tarot cards read. I’ve seen psychics. I have done yoga and I have … I’ve participated in meditation.’ She told us that she had seen a psychic on at least four occasions, hoping to find out things about her family history, her past lives, her future and to gain some insight into her romantic relationships. This is what happened the last time she went to visit a psychic:

She was a healer, like a spiritual healer and she was apparently an amazing psychic and she did a lot of past life stuff. So I went to see her and I don’t know how accurate the past life stuff was, I’ve got nothing to measure it to say well, this is definitely true or not. As part of our session she did numerology, and she was really very accurate with describing my family life, my relationship with my parents and my grandmother and that was really interesting. She actually said that my grandmother and I had been part of each other’s lives and I thought, well, that makes sense to me because my grandmother and I always have had a fantastic relationship. When I was growing up, I really felt that she was probably my best friend. I was not happy growing up, I wasn’t a happy child. I had a lot of happy memories of going to my Grandma and talking to her and spending a lot of time over there, so I thought yeah, well, that rings true to me that she has been someone in my life and always looked after me. The psychic described even my parents’ relationship quite accurately and I’ve been thinking, oh, you are so right.

Janet had also done a Tarot course and was able to perform readings by herself:

A couple of years ago I did a six week course on Tarot card reading. And that was quite interesting, so I’ve got my own cards and I dabble with those. I read for Mary [her friend] quite regularly and that’s nearly always – Mary always finds that’s nearly always accurate. I’ve read for her girlfriend Jasmine and I was absolutely spot on but I don’t do it very often because I’m not confident with it. I have done astrology so I’ve had my chart done and my chart is very, very accurate. It’s a really amazingly accurate reflection of me.
Janet’s Tarot reading, psychic visits and astrology practices are all used to assist her own self-development or to give her greater insight into life matters. She told us:

I don’t believe in the whole ‘this is going to happen to you’ and all that garbage that you get with Tarot. When I read Tarot for Mary I don’t do it that way. It’s more about what’s happening emotionally. The astrological chart that I’ve found to be the most accurate is the one that actually talks about my psychological make up and it was really quite accurate in terms of describing me as someone who is spiritual but has this materialistic side, which I’m quite embarrassed about and it is true!

Most of these practices were done by herself, or in the company of one or two like-minded and trusted friends. A little while before we interviewed her, she had participated in a week-long course that teaches self-esteem techniques and assists participants to find a sense of purpose and direction in life. She also turned regularly to self-help books for guidance. Unlike the traditionally oriented Monique, Janet’s disparate beliefs and practices did not seem to emerge from, or reflect, a particular religious or spiritual tradition. Very much a participant in the ‘spiritual marketplace’, she had simply explored a number of spiritual possibilities and evaluated each experience on its own merits – whatever worked and whatever felt authentic.

Janet was religious when she was younger, attending the Uniting Church, but that was a long time ago. She had her reasons for no longer attending:

I left because they’re so rigid. It was definitely the right thing. It really reinforced for me that organised religion was not the way that I wanted to go …

and

It’s like ‘you should behave this way’ and there’s a lot of hypocrisy. Whatever. So I mean it’s quite an interesting concept that you go to confession and this man absolves all your sins and then you go out and do exactly the same thing again.

As we will see later in this book, many Generation Y who were once religious offer reasons like these for no longer participating in organised religion. Although not religious now, Janet believed in God:

If all else fails, I’ll have a chat to God.
It’s your last resort, is it?
I don’t know if it’s the last resort, but I guess – I think of it more as being – the books that I read are quite spiritual so I guess I refer back to them for inspiration so I guess it’s like well, you know, thinking of it as coming from God, the inspiration that the right book will come at the right time or the right phrase will come out from someone’s mouth at the right time.

This openness to God, in addition to holding a number of other beliefs, is not altogether uncommon among Gen Y; in the later chapter on the New Age spirituality type, we will see that many of those involved in New Age beliefs and practices also hold a mix of conventional religious beliefs, such as a belief in God, angels, heaven and demons.

Influences
What is important in Janet’s life? Like Monique, Janet rates family and friends as the most important thing to her:

The most important thing would be my family and friends as well, but at the moment, the most important thing is my family … I guess your family is your family for the rest of your life. You find that over the years friends come and go and I mean, my friends are important as well. I’ve got a few friends that I’ve kept for over ten years and things like that but at the end of the day, my family is always here for me and we support each other and help each other out and at the same time, you give each other a hard time and you pick on each other and if you’re in a bad mood you take it out on each other, but you’re always there
for each other. My Grandma is part of that family as well, so I guess immediate family are my Mum and my Dad, my brothers, and then going out to my nieces and nephews and my sister-in-law and my Grandma and my uncle. So they’re what I call my family.

However Janet’s spirituality, unlike Monique’s, was not nurtured within her immediate family; it is a far more self-directed affair, perhaps even a reaction to some of the limitations and difficulties of family life.

Participation in society
As for the world around her, Janet’s orientation was to the left of centre; dubious about the ‘War on Terror’, concerned about the gap between wealthy and poor countries. These concerns have not necessarily led to her to take action: ‘So I believe in it. I haven’t done anything about it, but I do, I have a very strong feeling about it that it’s not right.’ For her, volunteer work is something done close to home:

I haven’t done a lot of volunteer work. I tend to find that my life is busy as it is and I guess for me charity has started at home so I go and spend time with my grandmother and I spend time with my family and doing things with those and doing things for my Grandma or being there to help my brother raise his children because their Mum hasn’t been around, so I haven’t done actual volunteer work as such … But I’d like to think that my niece and nephew get a lot more value out of me doing things with them and helping them cook than if we just shunted them off to a childcare all the time or baby sitting and things like that.

As we will see later in this book, only about 4 percent of Generation Y are as ‘New Age’ as Janet. Many more hold one or more New Age beliefs, particularly that of reincarnation, but among this generation, fewer than expected are pursuing spiritual alternatives.

Michael
Background
Michael, aged 23, was born in Australia. His father is a tradesman, Australian-born; his mother was born in an Anglo-Celtic country, and works in education. He attended private schools, has just completed a post-graduate degree in education, and is moving out of home to begin his career as a teacher.

Spirituality
Michael is what we describe in later chapters as a Secular – someone who eschews religious and spiritual beliefs and follows a secular path in life.

Although he says ‘I didn’t grow up in a religious family’, he was christened in the Uniting Church: ‘When I was a baby… That was my parents’ decision, obviously’ and was sent to Sunday school. ‘As an adult, I would never make that choice now’. For a while, at that time, he and his parents attended church. His spirituality now is decidedly non-religious. ‘I’m proud to say I have no religion, I don’t believe in them, I don’t affiliate with the church. I guess it’s pushed me away… I feel very strongly about homosexual rights, I don’t identify as heterosexual myself.’ Asked whether he ‘draws upon the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy’, he responds:

I do – negatively – it informs how I think about things, but in the negative. I see Christianity really negatively because of its extreme stance on things like homosexual marriages, abortion, premarital sex. Things that I think are OK, churches that I have seen on TV seem to condemn. So in that sense I totally distance myself from them… I guess what it is that turns me off most about it is Christian people who I talk to. You know, people who try and harass you about their faith, and also media portrayals of it.

Michael rejects especially the stance on moral issues that he associates with churches. But his rejection of traditional religion is not confined to moral issues; it goes to a more fundamental level: ‘I don’t really believe in God, I don’t believe in some designer or anything like that.’
Michael strongly affirms personal autonomy, especially in the area of sexuality, and he was angry and defiant when he described in the interview what he sees as the moralism of the churches. However, his broader outlook on life is anything but negative. Although he is not drawn to elaborating an alternative to the religious view of the world in abstract scientific or philosophical terms, we saw in his interview that he had a clearly defined set of interests and commitments, which shape his identity and the direction his life has taken.

Of the many issues in his life, one of the most important was that of sexual identity. Asked whether there is an issue he feels strongly about, he responded with deep feeling, referring to a political statement he heard on the radio opposing homosexual marriage:

I feel very strongly about homosexual rights. I don’t identify as heterosexual myself … I never felt more like minority than when I heard him speaking in the car on the radio. That speech just made me feel incredible anger, made me feel really marginalised. I just think it’s incredible injustice, I think that it’s a destructive influence for young people. It enrages me to think that we are still at the point that we can’t acknowledge these life styles or sexuality are equally valid and reflect that in legislation and culture, practice and all sorts of things. I just think it’s incredibly criminal and I don’t think we need to give the church time, and politics time; I think we need to wake up and realise what an injustice it is. So that’s an issue that I feel very strongly about.

What else is important to him? He has a strong sense of vocation towards the professional role of teaching on which he is just embarking:

It’s a bit weird actually, I’ve wanted to be a teacher since I was 15. I think that’s unusual, I think teaching becomes more people’s choice later. For me it was a bit of a calling. I saw people in my school community and I really wanted to do that. I thought it was a really rewarding profession, so I went to Uni with that as my goal and I’ve come out the other end, believe it or not, with that still as my goal. Issues of education are probably the things that get me most worked up, when people talk about it, perhaps issues of the environment would be second. I think educational policy is really interesting. I get really passionate about equity issues within schools because I can see a whole lot of different things involved. Just being in a profession that engages those issues has always been really important for me. A juicy area to get into.

This is clearly a major component of Michael’s view of himself and his world; he has a set of consistent ideas about teaching, and a strong and enduring attraction to it, which has motivated him through years of university study in preparation, teaching rounds, choosing a career in teaching. His emerging identity as a teacher finds support among like-minded colleagues.

Michael’s creativity and aesthetic sensitivity have developed through involvement in theatre:

I haven’t done [this] over about a year now but there was a good six years there that I was directing youth shows and performing myself, in those community groups and stuff ... I got into it through school about year 10 doing school shows and that led to doing community amateur theatre from there. So I was involved in a lot of youth shows and met a lot of the friends I’ve got now from theatre and stuff like that... [I felt it was] incredibly liberating, because even though I properly don’t like to put labels on this but I think I am a pretty creative person and able to think and be up to do things in that environment. I really liked it because I think some people can do the theatre and that’s where they function and that’s where they shine. I think I was one of these people who really got something out of it. It was a different environment for me to achieving, ... I was never good at sport or anything growing up like that and I always felt intimidated and really turned off by the idea of competitive sports and competition ...So to find a place like theatre that I could be creative and I could do all these wonderful things that I like to do. I found that really stimulating actually.

His involvement with theatre, poetry and his commitment to teaching are all engagements with cultural resources of other kinds, and perhaps have had more than a little impact.
Influences
What influenced his engaged approach to life? It seems significant that, in contrast to most of our other interviewees, Michael identifies his friends as the major source of influence, and his primary support group. He does not mention his family much in the interview, unlike many of the other informants, but he is very clear that his ethos and worldview are nurtured and influenced by interactions with his peers:

But at the moment, most of the young people I associate with as peers all want to do things that are going to change society for the better. Especially doing courses like education and doing the volunteer work.

Most of the other young people we interviewed chose their families as their closest source of support. This difference is probably associated with his age and perhaps also with his sexual identity.

Participation in society
What about the world around him? He is strongly idealistic, highly involved in the world around him, capable of deep commitment, altruistic, generous, non-materialistic and enormously energetic. He is well read and knowledgeable about political structures and current issues. Michael has strong feelings about the injustices he sees around him:

I think to be young is to be obsessed with injustice. And I think homophobia is a really unfortunate thing fully alive and well in Australia. So there is that, I also think Aboriginal people in this country are also unfairly discriminated against. I see it as injustice that there is this, this sort of racist philosophy and throwing money at them and hoping it will be OK. And white Australians talking about them bludging or trying to get benefits off the government I find it’s incredible, incredibly interesting cultural dynamic but it’s also incredibly scary that those sort of views exist. I see a whitening out of the Aboriginal voice, a really huge injustice. I also feel pretty strongly about women too. I don’t like racism either but I guess I would say, homosexuals, women and Aboriginals are my key injustice focus areas.

When asked at the outset of his interview about things he enjoys doing, he replies: ‘I do quite a lot of volunteering. I really enjoy that. I work with people with disabilities, young people, single-parent families, and all that sort of stuff.’ This is no empty boast; Michael is extensively and deeply involved in contributing to the social and political development of young people, and gives substantial time to several other causes, such as children with disabilities and Aboriginal families as well attending protest rallies. His life appears to revolve around helping others and working with organisations for the good of others:

I’ve attended protest rallies just to show my support and gesture, but I guess I take them up in ways you can’t measure success from. Oh right, I say ‘OK, I’ll be involved in this ‘Youth Action Kids Camp’ with young Aboriginal children’ which is something I did, … and just offering a week of experience for them. So I don’t think I can sit back and say yes I achieved something for Aboriginal rights today, but I think I can say, I’m creating something positive in relation to this.

Many of the community activities in which Michael engages require an enormous amount of courage. Yet working for the good of others clearly gives him a great deal of enjoyment as illustrated by this comment: ‘It’s a pleasure going home and being able to say I could have made a difference or that I’ve done something that is important to the community’.

As we demonstrate later in the book, Michael is not typical of most young people. He is far more involved in community participation than most of Gen Y, of whom only 27 percent engage in regular volunteering.

Summary
We selected the interviews with Monique, Janet and Michael to lead the reader into this book because, in the process of sharing something of their spiritual journeys, they have illuminated for us with particular clarity the three alternative, and very different, spiritual paths walked by nearly all young Australians, although few have travelled as far as these three. Monique’s path is defined by a highly traditional religion, Janet’s is an exploration of alternative, New Age spirituality, and Michael has turned aside from these alternatives to pursue a secular course. Their voices set the scene for what follows.

The next chapter provides the reader with some essential background information on the research project, without which its findings cannot be properly understood. It reviews previous research and theory, and describes the methods which were employed in the study.
Chapter 2
Exploring the spirit of Generation Y
Background, theory, research method

Any inquiry must first make clear what is being explored, survey what is already known, and map out a path for the exploration. In this chapter we outline the background of the ideas of ‘spirit’ and ‘spirituality’, review previous research and theory on several key topics relevant to our study, and explain the research methods which were used to discover the spirit of Generation Y. Readers who would prefer to move straight into a discussion of our findings can skip to the summary of key findings at the start of Chapter 12, or to the detailed treatment of traditional spirituality in Chapter 3, and return here later to learn about the background to the study.

We begin by inquiring into the origin of the ideas of ‘spirit’ and ‘spirituality’, because an awareness of how their different strands of meaning have developed helps us to interpret the variety of meanings it has today, and to move towards defining what we mean by spirituality in this study: to choose the meaning that will be the most useful for understanding Generation Y.

Spirituality — a ‘master-idea’ in Western culture
From prehistoric times, ‘spirit’ or breath, has been naturally associated with life in humans and animals, and its absence with death. Invisible, mysterious life-principle, breath appears in the natural world as wind – alternately gentle and life-giving or awesomely powerful and destructive. The philosophers of ancient Greece considered all living things as possessing spirit (pneuma) – the breath of life, and as having a soul, or life-principle (psyche). The unique discovery of the Greeks was the realisation that in humans, spirit / soul also showed itself as mind (nous), which was able to reach beyond, to transcend, the material body, to grasp reality in the form of ideas – to possess consciousness – and even to see itself, to reflect, to be self-conscious. So the human soul was believed to be immaterial, and therefore to survive the death of the (material) body. Spirituality in this sense was the basis of the distinctively human attributes: thought, language, reason. Spirituality – reason – was the core of what it meant to be human.

The rich philosophical tradition of ancient Greece was lost to sight for some centuries after the barbarian invasions of Europe brought about the dissolution of the Roman Empire in the West; but came alive again in the Middle Ages with the rediscovery of Greek philosophy and art, climaxing in the Renaissance.

The 18th century Enlightenment set Reason up as the supreme principle of human life, but narrowed its meaning to include only the processes of logical, discursive, abstract thought – concepts, propositions, judgments, argument. In reaction, the 19th century Romantics used spirituality to re-emphasise aesthetic sensitivity – awareness of beauty – as an equally important dimension of being human. They spoke of the spirituality of a work of art, or of a sensitive person.

‘Spirit’ and ‘spirituality’ acquired from religion a further dimension of meaning. In ancient Israel, as in ancient Greece, humans were seen as having the ‘breath of life’, and the gods were imagined as ‘spiritual’ beings. But Israel’s God came to be understood as radically beyond the material world; and the breath of God, ‘the Spirit of the Lord’ which moved over the waters to bring about Creation, was a manifestation of God’s power and wisdom. In the New Testament, Paul (1 Cor 2: 14), contrasted the spiritual person, animated by the indwelling Spirit of God, with the person existing on the merely natural level.

So through the succeeding centuries of Christianity, ‘spirituality’ implied much more than ‘humanity’ – one if its earliest meanings in English was ‘the attachment to things of the Spirit
rather than to material, worldly things’. The ‘spiritual’ realm was seen as eternal, in contrast to the ‘temporal’, ‘secular’ or time-bound realm of this world.

Influenced by the ‘turn to the subject’ in seventeenth century philosophy, spirituality came to be understood as an individual’s personal way of living the Christian life, and to denote particularly the private, interior, affective aspects of that life: a person’s style of prayer and their relationship with God, in contrast to religion’s public, external and visible world of doctrine, ethics, ritual, communities and institutions.

Even in later uses that no longer refer to religion, ‘spirituality’ still often carries many of these overtones: it is personal, individual, private, interior.

Nowadays, ‘spirituality’ is used to refer to a very broad range of experiences, spanning both the person’s inner world and that which is totally ‘beyond’. Within, the spirit is often identified with the inner self, the core self, the deepest and most personal dimension of selfhood. A group of young Australians surveyed in 2005 pictured spirituality as: ‘a passion or flame deep inside’, ‘something that gives meaning and purpose to my life’, ‘something that enlightens, that is at the heart of my beliefs and values’, ‘the source of my strength and peace’, ‘my source of guidance and fulfilment’, ‘my link with God’. At the same time, the respondents conceived spirituality as beyond: ‘My life source—God directing me, growing me, guarding me, supporting me, empowering me and relating to me’, ‘someone more powerful’, ‘a greater being to confide in’, ‘inspiring’, ‘something we live for’, ‘our religion, faith and beliefs’, ‘transcending material essence and needs’, ‘something more than humanity’.

Spirit/spirituality was seen as experienced especially on particular occasions: ‘both highs and lows’: ‘times of difficulty, stress, aloneness’, of ‘struggle, confusion and grief’; of ‘having fun with mates’ or ‘pondering life decisions’; but also at funerals, in ‘religious experiences and rituals’, in ‘prayer and meditation’, in ‘religion classes and retreats’, ‘when challenged by values and morals’. Particular contexts also seemed to promote such experiences: ‘when secure and positive’, in ‘places of natural beauty’, in ‘art, music and dance’; ‘with significant groups: family, friends, sports teams, church, uni or work’. Some respondents noted a sense of ‘becoming de-sensitized’ to spirituality, of ‘losing connection with it’ as they grew older, life moved faster, and they became ‘more preoccupied with other things’.

Clearly, in the minds of these respondents, spirituality largely overlaps with religion. But nowadays the word is sometimes used in a sense which puts it in tension with religion, especially among those no longer in contact with a religious tradition. Spirituality is seen as self-constructed rather than accepted from a religious tradition; it is free to borrow from various traditions, but is separable from religion, even seen as reacting against it – an alternative to religion. It is closely connected with the core of the self, with self-nurture and self-development. So it is possible for someone to reject organised religion, but still speak of their spirituality.

An awareness of how the different strands of meaning in the term ‘spirituality’ have developed helps us to interpret the variety of meanings it has today and move towards a definition that will be useful for understanding Generation Y.

**Review of previous research and theory**
All worthwhile research builds on what has previously been soundly constructed. The *Spirit of Generation Y* project was oriented in its design and method by surveying previous empirical research and theory related to youth religion and spirituality in Australia and elsewhere. The following brief survey is confined to the research findings and theoretical themes that significantly influenced the development of *The Spirit of Generation Y* project, or with which, despite their
prominence in the literature, we eventually found ourselves in disagreement. In some later chapters, further research literature specifically relevant to the topic of that chapter will be reviewed.

In this chapter, we will review some major contributions to research and theory on four major topics:

- spirituality
- the situation of the individual in late modern society
- the meaning of life
- changes in religion / secularisation

In each of these areas, we will indicate how our research was guided by our reading of previous work, and the research hypotheses to which that reading gave rise – that is, what research questions we were led to explore, and what outcomes we expected.

**Spirituality in recent research**

When high proportions of the population were active in Christian religious institutions, spirituality was the personal dimension of religious faith that shaped people’s spiritual life and practices. Now that such active involvement has greatly declined, especially among young people, does religion continue to influence their spirituality? Are there spiritualities of other kinds? And if not, what has taken their place in providing life’s meaning and shaping the way it is lived? In other words, what are the cultural resources used by Generation Y as interpretive structures for their life-journeys and life-stories?

Scholarly opinion is deeply divided in its evaluation of spirituality, ranging from enthusiastic advocacy of the ‘new’ spirituality in David Tacey’s *The spirituality revolution* and Heelas and Woodhead’s *The spiritual revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality*, to spirituality seen as fraud, sceptically unmasked in *Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion* by Carrette and King.6

**Spirituality as a journey**

Nonetheless, amid a tidal wave of new writing, some key themes expounded by established scholars still claim a hearing. Robert Wuthnow’s *After Heaven* proposed that for today’s young people, spirituality is a journey or quest rather than a home, a place where one settles. The metaphor suggested the fragmentary, temporary, experimental character of the spiritual ‘shelters’ constructed along the wayside by today’s youth.7 Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis had emphasised a similar theme some years earlier in their description of ‘quest spirituality’.8

In a book published the following year, *Growing up religious*, Wuthnow used a United States national survey, supplemented by lengthy interviews inquiring into people’s ‘journeys of faith’, to build a strong case for the proposition that ‘growing up religious’ makes an enduring difference to a person’s spiritual outlook and values throughout adulthood, even if the faith of childhood is later laid aside.9 This thesis is persuasive, and influenced the shaping of the project’s interview schedule and survey towards discovering as much as possible about our respondents’ religious identification, beliefs and practices while growing up, and those of their families.

We expected that respondents who had been raised Christian, even if they later adopted some other form of spirituality, would show differences in their spirituality and in some of its consequences, from those raised secular.

**The spiritual marketplace**

Many authors explored the idea of the late modern or ‘postmodern’ world as a ‘spiritual marketplace’ in which consumers could ‘mix and match’ components of spirituality from a very
wide range of sources, rather than having to ‘buy’ one complete ‘package’. Among those most often cited were Wade Clark Roof, whose *Spiritual marketplace* compared the vitality and growth of alternatives to the mainstream traditional forms of religion whose decline he had been tracing for several decades. There seemed such a wide consensus on this view that we were tempted to expect that an eclectic form of spirituality, largely drawn from non-traditional sources, might well be the dominant type among young Generation Y Australians.

But two considerations made us hesitant to adopt this hypothesis. First, it must be acknowledged that the ‘spiritual environment’ is highly pluralistic. Every variety of spirituality is on display in the media: on television, in magazines aimed at youth, and particularly on the internet. This variety is reflected in the perceptions of individuals as in a mirror. Research that succeeded in harvesting only these superficial perceptions could perhaps mistake the potpourri for the subjects’ own spirituality, which would then be seen as a disorganised collection of spiritual themes, traditional and novel. We believed that researchers should be slow to conclude that this is the dominant form of spirituality among young people until they have explored beyond surface reflections of the environment perceived and reported by the individual, to the level of what is really owned and acted on.

Second, we question whether someone’s spirituality should really be taken to include an idea with which they may toy idly, without much understanding of it, without any specific associated practice, without any significant impact on the person’s worldview or lifestyle. For example, suppose someone says they believe in reincarnation, but knows only that it means being reborn on earth again after death, without this knowledge affecting their actions or practices. In our view, reincarnation should not be considered part of that person’s spirituality. The same is true of mere opinions on issues of religious belief or morality.

Despite these reservations, we expected a fairly strong uptake of New Age forms, and among New Agers, a high level of eclecticism – the tendency to put together non-matching components of spirituality from disparate sources.

*Spirituality vs. religion*  
In contemporary society, where religious and spiritual beliefs and practices are freely available to anyone, whether or not they belong to a particular tradition or community, young people, according to a line of research pursued by church researchers Penny Marler and Kirk Hadaway, have taken possession of their own spirituality. Instead of being imposed on them by religious institutions, spirituality is now part of the creative construction of the self; it may borrow some elements from religious traditions, but stands independent of them, and at times defines itself in opposition to religion. Researchers began to ask young people whether they saw themselves as religious, and also whether they saw themselves as spiritual.

In our pilot-test interviews, we included some questions that explicitly mentioned spirituality, but interviewees, especially the younger ones, were not sure what the word meant. Although we later encountered a few older youth who had read something on the issue, and regarded themselves as spiritual rather than religious, we believe that not many among Generation Y have sufficient interest in the topic to understand this kind of distinction between spirituality and religion, or to have taken a position on it. We conclude that although our findings do show a very strong movement in the direction of a new kind of spirituality focussed on the self, and remote from religious traditions, few young people are likely to think of themselves explicitly as ‘spiritual rather than religious’. The basic insight of these authors seems to hold true among Australian youth, but different questions were needed to establish it.
The Australian cultural theorist David Tacey seems at first to advocate contemporary forms of spirituality which are completely independent of traditions, but concludes that in the end, spirituality cannot be totally invented, created ex nihilo, but needs to draw from the deep wells of the religious traditions, otherwise it may be found superficially relevant but ultimately vacuous. Feminist theologian Sandra Schneiders takes up the same problem from a perspective similarly sympathetic to new spiritualities, but arrives at the same conclusion.

Defining spirituality

Having surveyed the principal alternative approaches to spirituality which have emerged from recent research, we are in a position to formulate our own definition. In doing so, we are not claiming to have discovered the one true meaning of spirituality; nor does our definition attempt to sum up all the varieties of current usage of the word; it simply states what we mean when we use the word ‘spirituality’ in this book.

We define spirituality as a conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent. Now we will ‘unpack’ this definition, explaining each of its components in turn.

A WORLD VIEW AND AN ETHOS

‘Way of life’, firstly, means a worldview and an ethos. A worldview is a way of understanding ‘my’ world and my place in that world, and provides a frame of reference within which I can assign meaning to my experiences. This concept prompts the questions: What is the shape of this person’s life-story? How do they see and project themselves in relation to their world? What beliefs and ideas do they draw upon in interpreting their experience?

In view of the declining influence of religion in Australia, especially in the lives of young people, this investigation includes religious worldviews if they happen to be present, but takes as its object of interest whatever cognitive structures are in place to fulfil the function of providing intelligibility, order and meaning to an individual’s experience.

A person’s orientation in life does not consist solely, or even primarily, of stories or beliefs or ideas; the elements of knowledge are blended with those of feeling and deciding which we call the person’s ‘ethos’: ‘the tone, character and quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood’. Thus, my ethos is infused with affect—with feelings about myself, others, my world—and is expressed in:

- values (more universal or general principles of evaluation)
- attitudes (more particular affective orientations towards specific objects or ideas)
- motivations/dispositions (habitual preparedness to act in a specific manner)
- commitments
- practices.

Practices are the ways in which spirituality is enacted, shaping the lived reality of a person’s life. They may be ritual or non-ritual, collective or private—for example, reading, reflection, meditation, prayer, music, dance, drama. Most spiritualities give a prominent place to ritual, which includes not only ‘liturgical’ forms of worship, but all repeated symbolic actions—as in yoga or Tai Chi or the Japanese Tea Ceremony, or in ‘doing forms’ in martial arts.

Spiritual practices may extend also to acts of altruism or benevolence towards others. This study pays particular attention to the ‘social consequences’ of spirituality: ways in which social interaction is shaped by spiritual beliefs, either consciously or without deliberation.

‘ … based on a transcendent referent.’
'Transcendent' means here a reality which is beyond the individual, either something supernatural/religious/otherworldly, or an ethical ideal towards which a person strives to shape their conduct. For example, forms of spirituality which flow from traditional religions are ‘based on a transcendent referent’ in the sense that their worldview is grounded on the existence of one or more supernatural beings. Non-religious ethical ideals may also derive from sources beyond the individual: e.g. from ‘community standards’. At its simplest, such an ideal may be just the endeavour to live a decent life, or to emulate an admired, exemplary person, perhaps a parent, relative or teacher.

Even if they are not religious, ethical ideals are transcendent in the sense that they call on the individual to aspire to a manner of being and acting which is beyond or higher than his or her present level of existence.

Does the idea of a secular spirituality make sense? An avowed secularist will see notions like ‘spirit’, ‘spiritual’, ‘spirituality’ as metaphorical: from a secular point of view, to speak of a person’s ‘spirit’ is a figurative way of referring to their courage, or independence, or to what is most characteristic of them. And from this standpoint ethics may be seen simply as fidelity to self-constructed standards, rather than to rules of conduct originating outside the individual. Nevertheless, it does seem possible to describe such a secular outlook as a spirituality. While it stretches the term to its limit, and would be rejected by some of those to whom it is applied, there is an element of transcendence in their outlook.

As we imbibe, in early childhood, the worldview of our culture, we acquire an elementary way of transcending or ‘going beyond’ our biological nature, giving us access to a standpoint beyond the self. We take in a set of ideas which we use to assign meaning to our experiences. We start to be aware of a continuously-existing ‘self’, with a past, present and future.²² In sum, any framework of meaning that locates the individual within a wider, more inclusive context involves transcendence, at least in this elementary sense.

A CONSCIOUS WAY OF LIFE
Finally, defining spirituality as a conscious way of life postulates, following Socrates, an element of reflectiveness: not the merely mechanical adoption of a parental or community worldview and ethos, but an element of choice, of commitment; and the capacity to compare one’s day-to-day thinking and conduct with the outlook and norms one accepts. However, the degree of reflectiveness varies greatly with age, or rather maturity, and should be seen as an important developmental aspect of spirituality.

So a person’s spirituality is a way of life – a view of the world and a set of values and practices – which may be based on a traditional world religion, an alternative spiritual path, (or a blend from both traditional and alternative sources); or an ethical principle, or an entirely secular outlook.

The situation of the individual in late modern society
What is new about the situation in which Generation Y are growing up? They are moving into a world very different from that of their parents, featuring the cultural pluralism of late modernity, the information deluge, increased anxiety about personal and environmental risk, precarious employment, increased instability in families, rampant consumerism, greater individualisation and the emergence of the ‘spiritual marketplace’.

Sexual development occurs at an earlier age: in Australia now, puberty typically begins at 11 in girls and 12-13 in boys.²³ Generation Y also commence sexual activity younger than previous generations: median age at first vaginal intercourse declined sharply in the 35 years between 1961 and 1996. For the oldest of the ‘Baby Boomers’, who were born in the late 1940s, and turned 15 in
the early sixties, the median age was 18 for men and 19 for women; for those born 1981-86 (the eldest 6 years of Generation Y) who turned 15 in 1996-2001, the median age for both men and women was 16 years.

The Baby Boomers burst upon the Western world in massive numbers following World War II. Since they began to enter their teens in the sixties, social commentators have repeatedly drawn attention to their ‘individualism’. The same characteristic has been ascribed to the succeeding Generations X and Y. So one of the principal aims of our project was to discover whether this generalisation applies to the current generation of Australian youth.

A number of authors suggest that in the late modern or ‘post-modern’ era, what is seen as individualism may actually indicate a more fundamental change in the relationship between the individual and society.

From the time of sociology’s ‘founding fathers’, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, sociological theory identified religion as intimately involved in the process of socialisation – the process of integrating individuals into society. In traditional societies, religion authoritatively defined the place of the individual in the society: it was the zone of culture containing the ‘master-narrative’ encoding the culture’s worldview, and provided the symbols for expressing the sacred or transcendent, and the rituals and other practices for maintaining the place of the sacred in daily life. Individuals had defined positions in the religious community and civil society; their roles, and the norms governing their actions, were religiously legitimated.

English sociological theorist Anthony Giddens argues that since World War II a ‘post-traditional social order’ has emerged in Western societies, whereby tradition, including religious tradition, is increasingly open to ‘interrogation or discourse’. No longer aligning themselves with any particular institution, tradition, or meaning-making system, individuals make meaning by drawing on an ever-increasing range of resources.

Some European theories of post-modernism take this argument a significant step further, arguing that an even more radical change has taken place in the relation of the individual to society.

A radically changed relationship between individual and society?
In traditional sociological theory, the individual is first initiated into the social world (‘primary socialisation’) in a once-and-for-all manner in early childhood, and will later undergo various kinds of ‘secondary socialisation’ as preparation for specific social and occupational roles. Through these roles the individual is inserted into the network of social institutions, which will organise and structure a considerable proportion of his or her life.

European theories of postmodernity postulate a profoundly altered relationship between individual and society. According to French sociologist Alain Touraine, we are seeing ‘the end of the definition of the human being as a social being, defined by his or her place in society which determines his or her behaviour and actions’. Social action, now, is not regulated by social norms, universal principles expressed in social institutions, but by individuals who insist on their own cultural and psychological uniqueness. This theme of the changed relationship between individual and society, and the new intensity of focus on the individual in postmodernity, is a common feature across the whole range of these theories.

Social theorist Zygmunt Bauman emphasises that ‘individualisation’ is a fate, not a choice. It consists in transforming human identity from a given into a task, and making the individual responsible for that task and for its consequences. The double-edged consequences, for personal
and social life, of this fundamental change in the relation of individual and society are spelled out in chilling detail: the individual’s new ‘freedom’ to define their own identity comes at a high cost.

‘Freedom was desired as an absence of obtrusive and insidious constraints and limits. Our ancestors thought of freedom as a state in which one is not told what to do and not forced to do what one would rather not do . . .’ But we find now that the price of freedom is uncertainty and insecurity.  

Yet even if individuals are more free to shape their own actions, and are required to construct their own identities, there are countervailing forces which limit the scope of these freedoms more closely than before. Postmodernist philosopher Pierre Bourdieu elaborates on the insecurity arising from people’s sense that they are powerless to change the social forces shaping their lives: the controls are out of their reach. He reflects on the conditions necessary for a person to be capable of hoping for social transformation:

To have a well thought-out intention to transform the present, a modicum of hold on the present is needed. But people find that none of the most important levers and safeguards of their current situation come under their control – for example, in the case of loss of employment because of recession in the economy. Any social position is in the longer run precarious. Fear is diffused and ambient; it haunts consciousness and the subconscious. It renders all futures uncertain.

These authors warn that society no longer defines the individual’s identity – that is, it no longer tells the individual who he or she is, no longer gives them a defined place in the world – no longer supports their sense of who they are and where they fit, with well-defined statuses and roles; and on the other hand, the individual feels no longer able to influence society – the two have withdrawn to a greater distance from each other – become alien to each other. This is ‘social alienation’ in its fundamental form.

When stated as abstract and universal principles, these statements sound rather extreme; but in later chapters, we will see evidence of their relevance to Australian young people.

*The threat to shared values and unity in a highly differentiated society*

Niklas Luhmann notes that in the past, ‘participation in society led to the assumption of a minimum of obligation’ – there was a basic social ethic. But society has become more complex and ‘differentiated’ – that is, it has developed more specialised institutions to carry out specific functions, and those who live and work in these different sectors of society come to see the world differently, develop their own special kinds of knowledge and expertise, their own values and practices. One consequence of social differentiation is that the society’s shared prescriptions for action, its norms and values, (what we have been calling its ethos) become more general and vague, and lose their directive power. The structure of shared meaning based on a religious view of the origin and meaning of the world breaks down, and religion is reduced to one social function among others. Ethical and political discourse is not now framed around the concept of the ‘just society’ but around ‘individual rights’. Margaret Thatcher declared: ‘There is no such thing as society’.

Religion has long been held important for the formation of values. In providing an ethical base for society, religion laid the foundation for community life and citizenship. It is not clear whether there is anything in contemporary spirituality that performs this function. What might provide the foundation for public ethics in the future? If individualist and consumerist orientations dominate the spirituality of young people, will they acknowledge only those norms of action which are formulated in specific, limited contracts between individuals, such as pre-nuptial financial agreements, enforceable at law – ‘social contracts’ in a new and limited sense? Will the constantly-expanding claims for a vast range of ‘human rights’ owed to each sovereign individual provide an appropriate foundation for cooperative involvement in society?
In summary, theories that define contemporary Western society as having moved into a decisively new ‘postmodern’ phase tend to define the isolation of the individual and the eclipse of community as socially determined and irreversible. A view such as Touraine’s, taken literally, would seem to make it impossible to speak of ‘society’ any longer, and attempts to formulate social policy would make no sense. At least, postmodernist theories serve as a dramatic metaphor for the changed sense of self, and the pervasive risk of alienation from society, characteristic of late modernity, especially among youth.

The reader might well hesitate at this point: should we accept these radical and rather gloomy prognoses as accurate? Individualism is nothing new; how does this view differ from the classic portrayals of individualism and its social consequences?

*De Tocqueville: a classic portrayal of individualism*

French scholar Alexis de Tocqueville, that amazingly far-sighted observer of American democratic institutions in the early nineteenth century, was particularly alert to the threat that individualism posed to the fabric of society, and foresaw, as its consequence, symptoms of social dysfunction similar to those of today.

Individualism, de Tocqueville wrote, is not moved to act for the common good, or for social justice, but instead sees the only function of the State as to protect the safety of individuals and their possessions. Setting people free, he warned, may make them indifferent to common concerns. The individual is the citizen’s worst enemy. Pursuing only personal or family interests, he does not support the citizen’s concerns.

Is this more moderate diagnosis of the situation of today’s youth preferable? Is it just selfish individualism of the familiar sort that motivates young people to lead socially isolated lives, with little participation in activities which promote the good of all?

*A unified understanding*

An adequate account seems to need elements of both approaches. De Tocqueville pictured individualism as the result of a coldly calculating selfish choice. Although there do still seem to be some choices available to young people today either to be socially involved or to stand apart, some aspects of the isolation of the individual from society seem to be more imposed than chosen. As postmodernist theories point out: when traditional models of what a person should be lose their authority and are no longer inculcated, individuals are left with much less guidance in the task of construction of the self, and being highly ‘individualised’ is then more of a fate than a choice.

Both approaches, traditional social theory and postmodernist theory, serve to warn that today’s young people are growing up in a situation in which the forging of basic social relationships is far more difficult than it was half a century ago.

Religion and spirituality still seem to influence social relationships. No doubt the decline in adherence to institutionalised religious communities and the growth of individualistic spiritualities is mostly a reflection of the changed social location of the individual in post-traditional society: i.e. changes in the structure of society cause changes in spirituality. But culture (in this case, spirituality) is not always dependent on economic and social changes; sometimes it has the power to resist such changes and even to act back on society, to be the initiator of social change. When spirituality remains attached to a religious community, it gains the strength to resist the social forces tending to isolate individuals from each other. ‘Religious institutions tend to promote norms of cooperation, and a worldview that encourages a focus on problems lying outside the self’. For example, religions with a strong ethic of service to others encourage their adherents to act for the
common good of all, rather than being obsessed primarily with one’s own well-being and that of one’s immediate family and friends.

The relationship between spirituality and social concern was a major focus of our study, so we are in a position to test whether the statements in the paragraph just above are true of Australian young people today. This topic is explored in detail in Chapter 11.

Reviewing these theories about the changed social location of the individual in contemporary society led us to expect that Australian youth, especially those without strong attachments to communities, would show signs of being highly individualistic (or individualised), and not strongly influenced by social concern nor involved in citizenship activities.

The meaning of life

Assumed by theists

In most discussions of spirituality and religion from a theistic viewpoint, especially in relation to contemporary youth, there is a very strong assumption that human beings ‘need’ some conception of the meaning of life. On reflection, it is clear that the assumption is a postulate entailed in the religious position itself. If God exists and is concerned with humans, and if humans will continue to exist in an afterlife, a particular significance is thereby attached to human existence, over and above any meaning that humans themselves assign to it. Life’s fundamental meaning and purpose is deemed to stem from the place of humanity, and of individual beings, in the mind or plan or design or purpose of God.

This kind of ‘need’ for meaning is not psychological, but more akin to the ‘need’ for someone lacking vital information to be informed of it: for example: information about their true parentage or ethnic identity.

Often, quite a different kind of assertion of a need for meaning is also made: it is postulated that youth must be in search of the meaning of life; that it is a basic necessity for mental health and psychological wellbeing, for human fulfilment and happiness; but this is an empirical statement, and its force depends on evidence, which is often also assumed and not provided.

Rejected by secularists

While the assumption of both kinds of need for meaning appears universal among writers who take a religious view of life, those who take a secular view vigorously oppose it. Opposition to the notion that life (as a whole) can have meaning comes from several different sources, and is argued on quite different grounds.

It was common for philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition of language analysis to deny that anything as diffuse as life could have meaning, since meaning was a property of propositions. Although this narrowly linguistic conception of meaning has been surpassed, more recent English language philosophy, perhaps over-studiously avoiding the appearance of giving credence to theistic notions, has still been slow to give attention to the issue. Surveying the philosophical literature, philosopher Thaddeus Metz argues that the question of the meaning of life has been unduly neglected in Anglo-American philosophy of the last fifty years, and should be considered a valid and significant issue for philosophers to address.

Post-Christian continental philosophy, from the positivism of Comte to the nihilism of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer and the existentialist tragic view of life portrayed by Camus, also rejects the concept of a given meaning of life, whether the lack of such meaning is evaluated as a triumphant liberation from the shackles of religion (in the case of the first two thinkers) or a pessimistic but brave resolution to make the best of a life in which humans are alone in the universe (as in the latter
two). Post-structuralist philosophy and literary criticism were later to extend the scepticism learned from the ‘masters of suspicion’ (Marx, Nietzsche and Freud) to all texts, and eventually, to all supposed knowledge.

Scientific secularism takes religion as its target, and purports to demonstrate scientifically that the universe does not require a creator or designer; hence neither the universe, nor any individual human life, has a meaning and purpose assigned to it by God.42

Sharpening the question
No one denies that humans can assign meaning to the events in their lives, and even to their whole life-course, in various ways. The controversy is over whether this self-assigned meaning is the only kind of meaning life as a whole can have. A sharper form of the question would be: can human life be conceived as having meaning, significance, value or purpose that is ‘objective’ – over and above the meaning that they might themselves assign to it? And if so, are there ethical requirements flowing from that meaning?

Non-theistic affirmative answers
Although most contemporary atheists and secularists naturally wish to define their position as excluding a religious meaning of life, there have long been non-religious avenues for conceiving a meaning of life. Without any reference to a creator who imposes meaning, one such approach uncovers meaning, purpose and significance in human life by exploring what kind of beings humans are – intelligent, social, able to know, love and communicate – and goes on to consider what kind of fulfilment is appropriate for such beings, seeing the meaning and purpose of life as linked to the pursuit of that goal, in solidarity with others in the human community. A basic human ethic is derived from the same considerations.43

This formulation is also compatible with some of the theistic views of life’s meaning, but does not require any of them. Many non-theists, however, find this line of argument unacceptable because it seems too close to endorsing a metaphysical conception of ‘human nature’.44 Secondly, this type of non-theistic view of the meaning of life implies that humans are radically social beings, highly dependent on social interaction, while contemporary secularism is strongly individualistic, seeking to liberate the individual from the oppressive toils of social convention, leaving them as self-determining centres of thought, feeling and will.

Meaning, happiness and well-being
Despite the disagreement over whether life as a whole can have meaning, all would seem to agree that meaning, in various forms, is fundamental to the life of humans as intelligent and communicative beings. Anthropology, sociology and psychology are in large part devoted to analysing the processes by which meanings are constructed and transmitted. Society is conceived to be based on a minimum of shared meanings and values.

Clifford Geertz argues the fundamental anthropological necessity for meaning systems which are defended at the three key points where events threaten to render humans helpless, unable to cope, to carry on with life: meaninglessness, suffering, and evil. Any religion, however primitive, must somehow deal with these.45 In a post-religious era, the same requirement falls upon secular meaning systems.

Therapist Victor Frankl, on the basis of his experience in Auschwitz, where he observed that those who possessed a rich store of life-meanings were more likely to survive their brutal treatment, famously proposed the search for meaning as a fundamental human drive, integral to the maintenance of mental health.46
Headey and Wearing, in their Australian study *Understanding happiness*, concluded that ‘a sense of meaning and purpose is the single attitude most strongly associated with life-satisfaction’.\(^{47}\)

Eckersley, reviewing a wide range of world research, links morality, meaning and happiness.\(^{48}\) He wrestles with the paradox that male youth suicide is more prevalent in developed countries with high levels of health, optimism, trust and individualism. Evaluating a complex set of causal hypotheses, Eckersley suggests that at the personal level, individualism may result in a reduced sense of personal control of one’s life, and promote social fragmentation and alienation; that individualistic societies may be ‘raising [unrealistic] expectations of virtually unrestrained individual freedom, choice and opportunity, and of the happiness these qualities are supposed to deliver’. There may be ‘a surfeit of choice and uncertainty’;\(^{49}\) the requirement to be free, autonomous and self-determining can be experienced as a threat, increasing the gap between the ideal and the real, leading to dissatisfaction and depression; and individualism’s self-focus may ‘distort the fundamental human need to belong, to form lasting, significant and positive personal relationships’.\(^{50}\)

**The construction of life-stories**

If there is a meaning of life as a whole, it could hardly be expressed in a concept or proposition, since the course of a human life is so much more than any of the events that make it up, and more than the sum of all of them. Perhaps this is the reason why philosophers who resist holism\(^{51}\) have set the question aside as unanswerable. However other philosophers observe that humans have evolved ways of comprehending such complex amalgams of meaning, feeling and intention, not by stepping through their parts using ‘discursive or analytical rationality’, which operates by decoding the logic of propositions, but in a single synthetic act which grasps the entire Gestalt.\(^{52}\) Moreover there are theories of symbols which propose that the function of a symbol is precisely to relate these complex meanings to each other, so that is possible to compare one’s life to a paradigm, model or ideal, and to draw meaning from the comparison.\(^{53}\) So the life of a Buddhist can have meaning to him or her by comparison with the life of Lord Buddha; a Christian’s, by its relationship to the life of Christ.

Looking at how people formulate meaning for their lives, another stream of theory has drawn attention to the role of imagination and narrative.\(^{54}\) For most people, stories embody personal meaning more powerfully and memorably than do abstract ideas, and more readily express the values and evoke the feelings associated with important meanings.\(^{55}\)

Young people make sense of their lives, identities and experiences by putting together a story which fits, an interpretive structure for their personal journey. Making up a story enables a person to order the events of their life in a coherent fashion, relate events to other events, interpret the *why* and *how* of what occurs in their lives by assigning more importance and influence to some people, events or ideas that they have encountered, and creating a sense of biographical continuity for themselves. Like all storytellers, they draw on the stories they have heard, seen or read, borrowing and rearranging, and also inventing, with greater or less creativity.

The cultural stock-in-hand on which individuals can draw for their stories ranges from complex narratives such as religious scriptures, which embody entire worldviews and value systems, through stories accessed on the internet or in movies, television series and ‘soaps’; novels, and popular literature such as adventure stories, popular magazine articles about celebrities, comics; down to single items which can be used to embellish a story: ideas, values and symbols, expressed in language, music, clothing or leisure activities. There are also whole pre-packaged ‘lifestyles’ which can be adopted *en bloc* or piecemeal.
Moreover, people in different social settings access and adapt these cultural materials in different, socially-structured ways, and the kind of picture or story that results has important consequences both for the individual and for the society, because our stories not only depict our past, but strongly shape the living of our futures.

Bauman suggests that a particularly crucial element in people’s stories is what they imagine as the unchangeable conditions of their life – independent of their actions, outside the range of choice. These conditions are likely to be accepted as givens in the living-out of the story, as things that cannot be changed.56

Meta-narratives, grand narratives
A meta-narrative is the deeper story behind the story: a fundamental structure (not necessarily explicitly understood), which grounds particular narratives, and like a matrix or frame, holds their pieces in place. Some meta-narratives are called ‘grand narratives’ – those of unlimited sweep which span different realms of reality such as earthly and heavenly, and extend infinitely into past and future time. Most religions have their grand narrative(s), and deal with the great Transcendences: God, the spiritual world, life, death and afterlife, and the mysteries through which humans participate in this supernatural realm. Examples are creation myths, the Dreamings passed on in Aboriginal initiation, which define a tribe’s identity through the stories of its sacred places and objects, the Epic of Gilgamesh, the Ramayana, or the Christian story of ‘Salvation history’.

If, as many voices assert, the age of grand narratives is past, it becomes important to explore whether a secular meta-narrative is able to provide a stable foundation for social and personal narratives, so that they continue to provide meaning and contribute to identity-formation.

The present study is not a psychological investigation of the inner dynamics of identity-formation, but a sociological exploration of recent changes in the socialisation of young people in today’s Australia: changes in the cultural resources utilised to construct personal stories, and in the way these resources are selected and employed by different social groups.

We expected that most of our young people would find their lives meaningful; that the traditionally religious would derive meaning from their faith, that some proportion would have found meaning for life in alternative spiritualities, and that the non-religious would either have adopted a secular life-narrative, or take a sceptical stance on the meaning of life, and pay little attention to the question, preferring to live immersed in the here and now.

Changes in religion
Major changes in religious practice and belief occurred in Western societies during the second half of the 20th century.57 In Australia, the percentage of the population attending religious services at least monthly has fallen by half from about 39% in 196658 to 20% in 1998.59 Australian sociologist of religion Gary Bouma provides a convenient and up-to-date summary of developments in religion and spirituality in Australia in his recent publication Australian Soul.60

Previous research on religion in Australia
The earliest descriptions of the impact of these changes in religion and spirituality on youth were focused on the ‘Baby Boomers’. Generation Y are their children. Our inquiry is focussed on the lives and experiences of these young people.

Earlier surveys, such as the Religion in Australia Survey, the World Values Survey (WVS) and the International Social Science Survey Australia (IssSA), have explored traditional religion in Australia (though not among younger teenagers); and many qualitative studies have focused on specific target groups, such as students in particular schools.61 The Spirit of Generation Y is the first
Australian study to report on traditional religion and alternative forms of spirituality in the Generation Y population, based on a representative national sample.

The most important survey of Australian society and culture, including some measures of religion, is the International Social Science Survey Australia (IsssA) by researchers Jonathan Kelley and MDR Evans.\(^{62}\) Repeated annually, it draws its sample from the electoral roll, so it includes the older half of Generation Y (those aged 18-24). A book-length review and analysis of its findings on religion, morality, social issues and public policy was published in 2004.\(^{63}\) Across the whole population, the review found little change in religious beliefs between 1984 the early 1990s, with some decline between then and the start of the new century; however in the latter period there was a sharp decline in church attendance, which halved from an estimated twelve times per year to six.\(^{64}\) The authors attribute this ‘striking’ decline not to religious reasons, but to a general falloff in ‘civic engagement’ – participation in voluntary organisations – ‘for reasons that are not yet clear’. They note that the level of church attendance ‘has profound effects on people’s views on many social and moral issues and on their integration with community and nation … effects that are often larger than those of religious belief, social class or family background.’\(^{65}\) There was also a ‘sharp increase over time in the proportion of people becoming unchurched’ (by which they mean relinquishing denominational identification).\(^{66}\)

Since the ‘sharp end’ of these changes in recent times is more likely to be among youth, we were led by these findings to expect that Generation Y would show lower levels of belief, attendance and civic engagement than previous generations. In contrast to the authors of the IsssA, who found little change in religious belief, and doubted that the decline in church attendance was due to religious reasons, we anticipated that there would be evidence of considerable change in belief among teenagers (not included in the IsssA), and that this would have played a part in the decline in church attendance. However, both of these seem likely also to result from the increased ‘individualisation’ we have described in the previous section: this may well be the factor described in the IsssA review as ‘not yet clear’.\(^{67}\)

**Comparison with teenage religion in the US**

The most significant overseas study of teenage religion in recent years is the US National Survey of Youth and Religion, led by sociologist Christian Smith. Findings from the first wave were published in 2005 under the title *Soul searching*.\(^{68}\) The NSYR project is continuing, in a second and third wave of surveys, to trace its participants as they move into early adulthood. The *Spirit of Generation Y* study is comparable at many points with the NSYR – both surveys use a number of questions common in sociological surveys in recent years. There are some marked differences between Australian teenagers and those in the US, but also some strong similarities, which will be noted as we go along, and summarised in our conclusions in chapter 12. We expected that Australian teenagers would be less religious than Americans, but just as individualistic.

**Belief without belonging?**

Grace Davie has pointed to what she called ‘belief without belonging’ in contemporary Europe, where the last fifty years have seen steep declines in the proportion of the population belonging to the churches and regularly participating in religious services, yet an apparent maintenance of the level of belief.\(^{69}\) As we have just noted, Evans and Kelley drew the same conclusion from their IsssA findings.

It has long been a commonplace of sociology of religion that people who do not attend religious services or identify with a religious institution or community may nonetheless continue to affirm some beliefs. ‘You can be just as good a Christian without going to church’ was the often-heard popular justification for non-attendance. But these residual beliefs may have very little religious meaning.
Religious belief or faith is understood, within both sociology of religion and theology, not as a mere set of ideas, but as involving an intellectual, affective and moral commitment of the person to the acceptance of the truths and prescriptions of that religion, to the practice of its rituals and devotions, and to membership and involvement in its forms of social organisation – to Creed, Code, Cult and Community.\(^7^0\)

If you want to maintain a ‘belief’ which is not part of your society’s ‘conventional wisdom’, you need to be part of a supportive group of fellow-believers; otherwise your belief is highly precarious.\(^7^1\)

André Charron, researching the growth of unbelief in Montreal, outlined the following series of ‘stages of distanciation’ – a pattern of progressive unbelief and religious alienation:

i) abandonment of regular attendance at religious services;
ii) alienation from the institutional church, which may be either active or passive, depending on whether a person has a definite objection to the church or is simply drifting with the secularised society;
iii) non-belonging to the church as a community of believers; again some will be more passive and remain merely nominal members, whereas others will cut off their links more consciously, even angrily;
iv) fading of Christian values in practice, where there is no real impact of belief on social commitment or individual morality;
v) collapse of the credibility of Christian meaning for life – often rooted in difficulty with, or rejection of, some specific content of the faith;
vi) withdrawal from belonging in faith to Jesus Christ – this being the point in the process of ‘distancing’ where one arrives at unbelief in the strict sense;
vii) rejection of a personal God, either through agnostic suspension of judgment, or atheistic denial;
viii) apathy at all religious questioning – religious indifference in its fullest sense of a complete absence of interest in the possibility of faith.\(^7^2\)

Of course not all those affected will pass through all these stages – many will stop and remain at some stage; nor will the process always follow this order r– it will be subject to myriad individual variations.

A study in 1998 of the decline in participation in Australian churches by Bellamy et. al. provides evidence of a similar process at work here. The researchers constructed a scale of basic Christian beliefs, affirmed by 70% of church attenders across all denominations. When they looked at responses from those who had ceased to attend, they discovered an interesting pattern:

There is evidence that adherence to conventional Christian beliefs recedes with time away from church. … Among those adults who have ceased frequent church attendance in the last four years, 55% still affirm this range of Christian beliefs. The proportion drops with time away from church so that after 30 years absence from church only 15% still hold the full range of such beliefs. This is evidence that beliefs weaken over time without the support of a church or Christian group. … Church attendance does not appear to be an ‘optional extra’ when it comes to the development and maintenance of Christian beliefs.\(^7^3\)

Irish pastoral theologian Michael Paul Gallagher, a prolific and insightful interpreter of modern unbelief, suggests that it can be attributed to a complex convergence of causes:

Just as Newman liked to present assent to faith not as a matter of logic but as a complex convergence of positive evidence, so one might speak of indifference as connected with various negative convergences. Indifference is a passive happening, a non-decision rather than a choice, and as such it may be understood as the product of a four-fold convergence of
factors in modern life: a) the deadening of the religious search [in the welter of superficial distractions in modern culture] b) the failure of the mediations of religion [such as religious organisations, their language and ritual] to meet and speak with the culture of today; c) the humanist context of values where the notion of God seems alien or embarrassing to the mind; d) the filtering down of the arguments of great atheist thinkers into more popular assumptions.74

The beliefs which survive best ‘without belonging’ are those which are less costly, such as belief in an undemanding, indulgent deity. So if a person’s former faith has dwindled to the point where they now think that ‘on balance there’s probably something out there’ – i.e. that some kind of god most likely exists, but belong to no religious community, acknowledge no religious ethic and engage in no religious practices, their belief is no longer religious in the usual sociological sense of the word. It would seem more accurate to describe such ‘beliefs’ as inconsequential opinions on matters religious. In this light, any sense that the ‘belief without belonging’ phenomenon is something new or significant in the sphere of religion largely evaporates. The contemporary situation may be better comprehended in the old adage: ‘One Christian is no Christian.75

Some who cease to attend may continue to derive some support for faith from family and friendship networks, (especially if they belong to ethnic groups whose identity is strongly linked with religion), by working for church agencies in fields such as education, health or social welfare, or by active involvement in organisations or networks which pursue social justice causes. But such support is partial at best. Nations in which elements of religious traditions have remained embedded in civil and political life are said to have a widely accepted ‘civil religion’, which supports belief in a generic concept of God and fundamental moral principles.76 For some individuals, this residual form of religion may be the terminus of the journey of ‘distanciation’ from their initial faith. But in more secular societies, insistence on the secularity of the State tends to purge religious references from political discourse, and even from public debate.77

Those who formerly identified with a denomination but later repudiate the connection, reject the communal / institutional aspect of religion, and declare themselves free of the obligations attached to membership, but also lose the communal solidarity derived from membership and participation, and the consequences of that solidarity for identity and meaning, for the formation of character and the shaping of life. Of course, this description assumes that participation was working effectively to confer identity and provide meaning. People may nonetheless cease to participate for other reasons, but their doing so may indicate that they were not receiving these benefits, and lose little by ceasing their involvement. In this case, the cause of the decline in participation would lie in the factors which led the religious organisation to be no longer relevant to its members’ lives. This is the subject of the next section of our discussion of changes in religion.

Theories of secularisation
In most European countries, the Industrial Revolution and subsequent political changes were accompanied by a steep decline in membership and participation in the Christian churches.78 The causes of that decline have been the subject of the ‘secularisation debate’ within sociology over the last fifty years.79 ‘Secularisation theories’ link the decline of institutional religions with the process of modernisation. Modernisation is generally defined as the application of technology to industrial production, together with the development of bureaucratic organisational structures in the civic and economic spheres.80 Both of these processes represent the systematic application of rationality to spheres of life previously governed by traditional norms. These developments are typically accompanied by increased urbanisation and industrialisation.

In the process of modernisation, society grows more complex and ‘differentiated’ – that is, it develops more specialised institutions to carry out specific functions. For example, at an earlier stage of European society, education, health care and social welfare were all under the auspices of
the church, and governed by the same basic norms and values. In the process of modernisation and social differentiation, a multitude of specialised institutions develops to take over each of these functions: in the health field, for example, there arise clinics, hospitals, doctors, nurses, emergency medicine, surgery … and these new institutions tend to migrate out from under the influence and control of religion. Why? The new institutions seek autonomy within their own spheres on the rational grounds that their activities can only be understood within the perspective of their own specialised knowledge, and governed by norms arising from the techniques specific to the field. Further, the traditional religious institutions have great difficulty in maintaining contact with, and control over, a host of rapidly developing new institutions. This is secularisation on the level of institutions.

Institutional secularisation is paralleled by a secularisation of consciousness: areas of knowledge and values within the culture are removed from the dominion of religious symbols. Science, philosophy, art and literature become autonomous disciplines.

What has been described so far is common to most secularisation theories. The most significant criticism of these theories is that they fail to explain the continuing vigour of Christianity in some Western countries outside Europe (especially in the United States), and of other traditional religions such as Islam and Buddhism in developing countries – even among modernised elites.

Contemporary secularisation theorists, for example, Steve Bruce, counter this critique in two ways: first by pointing out that the theory does not predict inevitable decline in religion as a result of modernisation, but postulates a tendency in that direction which may or may not be effectively countered by forces opposing secularisation. The outcome is dependent on local history and circumstances. Second, theorists question whether some of the ‘surviving religious groups’ which are pointed to, are either vigorous or genuinely religious, characterising some Western religions as ‘internally secularised’.

Does modernisation tend, as a general principle, to promote secularisation, or is the latter to be explained solely in terms of variable historical factors in each society?

**EUROPEAN EXCEPTIONALISM?**
The thesis of ‘European exceptionalism’ recently put forward by Davie, among others, claims that modernisation (which by now has extended in some form to almost all societies) has not brought about a decline of religion; that religion is thriving everywhere but in Europe. Thus secularisation theories, which propose a general link between modernisation and secularisation, are said to have been disproved, and the causes of religious decline in Europe must be sought in its unique history.

The rise or decline in religion in different cultures at different times is now universally understood to have multiple causes. No theory survives which successfully explains religion’s decline in modern Europe solely in terms of the progress of modernisation, with its concomitant processes of industrialisation, rationalisation and bureaucratisation. At the same time, there has long been an understandable tension, in the study of contemporary religion, between explanations of religious change which chronicle the myriad contingent historical factors at work in the process (the products of historical research such as that of Chadwick and McLeod and of historical sociology like the work of Martin; and those which seek more general social-structural causes (e.g. the sociological theories of Berger, Luckmann and Bruce).

Despite the tension which makes it appear that they are in direct competition, these different types of explanations are the fruit of different methods, each of which brings to light a different aspect of reality; and each has its kernel of truth, which does not depend on overcoming the claims of the
other. Nonetheless, at the present time it seems that the more specific and limited historical style of explanation is more in favour, and that more general sociological theories are in retreat. Why? Surely not because these theories were advanced (by their best exponents) in simplistic terms which have been falsified by subsequent events; perhaps more because they have been understood simplistically, or because they placed insufficient emphasis on ‘retarding factors’ which can delay or nullify the tendency of modernisation to promote secularisation. Not that it will always and everywhere have a complete and immediate effect – evidently in many situations the effect may be long delayed or even indefinitely postponed by potent countervailing forces.

**EUROPEAN EXCEPTIONALISM REFUTED**

It is against this background that we take issue with the thesis of ‘European exceptionalism’. We propose, on the contrary, that ‘moderate’ secularisation theories such as that formerly proposed by Berger or Bruce’s more recent variant, are essentially correct. We hold that the continued high levels of religion in some modern societies can be quite sufficiently explained by the operation of counter-forces which can delay for a time, or indefinitely, the tendency of some of the components of modernisation to secularise those societies. (An adequate account of these counter-forces, however, would take us well beyond the scope of this book.) And further, contrary to the specific claim that Europe’s secularity is exceptional, we will show that modernised societies outside Europe, such as Canada and even the US, are undergoing marked declines in religious beliefs and practices, especially among youth. We shall compare our own findings with these when drawing our conclusions in chapter 12.

**WAS THERE A CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN THE 60s AND 70s? THEORIES ON THE STAGES OF SECULARISATION**

Among those theorists who agree that there has been a significant degree of secularisation in Western societies over the last century, not only on the level of institutions, but also on the level of consciousness, resulting in a decrease in individual religious beliefs and practices, there are still differences of opinion on the stages of this development – particularly on whether a major change took place in the 1960s and 1970s. Lechner, reviewing religious change in the Netherlands, uses the term ‘cultural revolution’ to describe the changes during that period. Brown comes to a similar conclusion for the case of Britain. Voas and Crockett, also focussing on Britain, prefer to explain the decline as the result of a breakdown in the transmission of religion from one generation to the next, extending from World War 2 onwards; however they concede:

… the decline apparently accelerated over the course of the post-war period, with the youngest cohort (consisting of people who were children in the 1960s and 70s) showing a particularly large difference from their predecessors.

In the case of Australia, there is a similar diversity of opinion: Evans and Kelley, relying principally on the apparent maintenance of continuing high levels of assent to a set of basic ‘beliefs’, see little evidence of secularisation in Australia. However, they did not survey teenagers, and do not examine changes among the youngest cohort in their sample (18-30). Moreover, although they document large declines in attendance and increases in the number who profess no religion rather than identifying with a denomination, they interpret these changes as not stemming from religious causes, (because of the maintenance of basic beliefs), attributing them instead to a general decline in voluntary associations, which they confess they cannot explain. We have argued in the section on the ‘belief without belonging’ thesis above, that maintenance of individual beliefs is quite compatible with major religious decline.

In contrast, Bellamy et. al. assert that, in Australia:

… major cultural changes took place particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, changes which have been described as movement from a ‘traditional’ society, in which culture and religious identity were largely
handed down from one generation to the next, to a ‘post-traditional’ society, in which people construct their lives drawing on many cultures and traditions.\footnote{89}

We thought it probable that major secularising changes in Australian culture (‘a cultural revolution’) took place in the 1960s and 70s; and consequently expected to find a fair amount of similarity in levels of religious belief and practice between our youngest respondents in Generation Y, and the Baby Boomer members of our control group, indicating that all three generations were maintaining a considerably lower level of religion than the generations which preceded the Boomers. We expected to find that there had not been further major or sudden declines, but rather, smaller incremental changes with successive generations.

The secularisation debate continues, but it is not appropriate to attempt a more comprehensive review of it here. It will be more profitable to examine in more detail one theory which is highly relevant to our theme, since it discussed the consequences of profound religious change for the development of identity by youth.

\textit{Luckmann on Religion and Identity Among Youth}

As long ago as 1967, sociologist Thomas Luckmann, in a prescient and influential work, \textit{The invisible religion}, analysed the declining social influence of Western Christianity. In the course of its unique historical development, religion in the West (and only there) had become confined to specialised institutions – churches – which were now just one organisation among others, and could not remain relevant to all of the many highly differentiated sectors of modern complex societies. Church-religion no longer held sway in the political or economic spheres, but was increasingly confined to the private sphere of personal and family life.

It is these structural tensions which shape the late modern predicament of religion:

\footnote{90} We cannot naively attribute the decline of Christianity in its traditional forms to the advance of secular ideologies, atheism, Neopaganism and the like. The contemporary marginality of church religion and its ‘inner secularisation’ appear, rather, as one aspect of a complex process in which the long-range consequences of institutional specialisation of religion and the global transformations of the social order play a decisive role.

Luckmann showed how, in a society where social differentiation has given rise to many different versions of the worldview, varying according to people’s different social location, the single official model of an institutionalised religion can no longer provide a ‘sacred cosmos’, a set of symbols of ultimate significance, which fits all these varied forms of the worldview. He argues that, especially under conditions of rapid social change, the official model, although it is continually adapted by religious professionals, inevitably lags behind changes in individuals’ systems of ultimate significance, and is threatened by the competing secular systems of meaning which operate in people’s non-religious roles.\footnote{91}

\footnote{91} What the fathers preach but do not practice will be internalised by the sons as a system of rhetoric rather than a system of ultimate significance . . . Specifically religious beliefs will be compartmentalised into opinions which will have no direct relation to individuals’ effective priorities and everyday life conduct.

Even within the private sphere, church-religion has difficulty, in an environment of rapid social change, in adapting to the varied circumstances of individual lives. As a result, said Luckmann, the effectively dominant contemporary ‘religion’, still intimately entwined with the formation of personal identity, was now restricted to the private sphere, and centred around the values of personal autonomy, self-development and self-realisation. In the title of his well-known book, he called this \textit{The invisible religion} because it was not expressed in the visible institutional form of a church or religious community.\footnote{91}
Luckmann’s paradigm appealed to many because it offered a fundamental theoretical approach to the changed situation of religion in the modern world, and disclosed the role played by social-structural changes in opening the way for the kind of ‘individualism’ or ‘individualisation’ that we see today.94

‘Individualism’, in Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of the formation of identity, is a consequence of unsuccessful socialisation – that is, socialisation which does not confer a single clear identity. When there is no single prescribed (or trustworthy) worldview, the individual must choose between several incompatible ‘worlds’ and consequently, between several different identities. One of the ways in which this can occur is when there are discrepancies between primary (early childhood) and secondary (later) socialisation. This results in people adopting components of their identity with a certain detachment:

[In] a society in which discrepant worlds are generally available on a market basis ... there will be an increasingly general consciousness of the relativity of all worlds, including one’s own, which is now subjectively apprehended as ‘a world’ rather than ‘the world’. It follows that one’s own institutionalised conduct may be apprehended as a ‘role’ from which one may detach oneself in one’s own consciousness, and which one may ‘act out’ with manipulative control ... Individuals ‘play at’ being what they are supposed to be. This situation is increasingly typical of industrial society.95

As young people pass from older childhood into adolescence, traditional worldviews and values, inherited from family sources, are not only questioned, but also frequently suspended. The outcome in young adulthood depends on each individual’s social context – particularly their ‘personal network’ which has grown in influence as the shaping power of local community and organisations has declined.96

Conclusion
In an uncharacteristically blunt assessment which echoes this analysis, Wuthnow states that the new interest in spirituality is evidence of weak religious socialisation and the dominance of everyday life by the secular.97

We firmly expected, on the basis of theory and previous Australian research on secularisation, to find the process continuing at an advanced pace among Generation Y.

Throughout this review of previous research and theory, we have seen one theme common to all of the many theories purporting to account for the modern situation of religion and spirituality among youth: the theme of the new situation of the individual in the late modern world. It is not merely a question of ‘individualism’ as previously understood, but a new relationship between the individual and society. It is explained in quite different ways, and evaluated more positively by some and negatively by others. But its relevance to the topic of this project is inescapable.

We found reason to anticipate that the trend towards individualisation would be strongly manifested among the youth of Generation Y; basic research questions of the study were structured around this theme, as were the methods employed in interviews and the survey.

We turn next to an outline of the research methods which were employed in exploring the spirit of Generation Y.

Research method

Who are Generation Y?
As was noted briefly in the Preface, the boundaries defining the post-World War II generations – the ‘Baby Boomers’ and Generations X and Y are debated. In earlier publications from this study, we dated the Baby Boomers as born 1946-60, Generation X as 1961-1975 and Generation Y as
1976-1990. Allocating a span of 15 years to each ‘generation’ had become conventional. These boundaries are still being used by a number of authors. However the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has in recent years endorsed the twenty-year period 1946-1965 as the birth years of the Australian Baby Boom generation:

Baby boom refers to the large and sustained increase in the number of babies born between the end of World War II and the mid-1960s. In Australia, the terms baby boom generation and baby boomers generally relate to all Australian residents born in the years 1946 to 1965.

Following this authoritative lead from ABS means defining Generations X and Y five years later than before, retaining the convention of these generations spanning 15 years each, as other authors are now doing. We have adopted this dating in the present book.

- Baby Boomers: born 1946-1965
  aged 40-59 yrs in 2005

  aged 25-39 yrs in 2005

  aged 10-24 yrs in 2005

Those who read earlier reports from the Spirit of Generation Y project will note small differences in percentages in most of the findings reported in this book because ‘Generation Y’ now refers to those aged 13-24, whereas our earlier reports included those aged 25-29. Our study does not include the youngest three years of Generation Y as it is now defined: those aged 10 to 12 – they were not part of Generation Y as it was previously defined, nor, in any case, would it have been practicable to attempt to reach them by using the large-sample telephone survey technique. Hence references to Generation Y in this book include only those in the twelve-year age span 13-24, with the minor exception that a few of the lengthier face-to-face interviews were with 12-year-olds.

Aims
The objective of The Spirit of Generation Y project was to enable all those who are engaged with youth to develop a sound understanding of the spirituality of Australian young people.

To this end, the project was designed to explore:
- the ‘varieties of religious and spiritual experience’ among young Australians in their teens and early twenties; the ways in which they are constructing their life-stories, defining themselves and interpreting their lives, the worldviews and value-systems they are adopting or developing, and the practices in which these are expressed;

- the range of cultural resources which influence young people’s self-understanding: the master narratives and dominant metaphors, their vehicles in the mass media and popular culture, and particularly the ways in which these influences are filtered and selected by the individual’s social context;

- the relationship between these self-understandings or styles of spirituality, and young people’s attitudes to themselves, to others and to participation in society; the consequences for their social ethic, their attitudes of civility and sociability, their social and political awareness and participation. Do the current forms of spirituality in Australia promote social participation, or are they focussed on the individual in a way that tends to lower the
The significance of taking part in the life of one’s community? Do they encourage pro-social or anti-social behaviour? What are the consequences for social capital, civility, citizenship, for voluntary organisations?

The research took place in three stages between July 2003 and June 2006.

The purpose of the multi-stage design was to enable an optimal blend of research methods: the extensive interviews in the first and third stages put individuals’ spirituality under the microscope: they permit the researcher to probe issues at greater depth; the national-sample survey in stage 2, a wide-angle photo of the whole of Gen Y, provides less detail, but enables us to generalise our findings to the whole group.

**Stage 1: Interviews**

In the first year, 91 extended interviews were conducted. The sample was designed to include a diverse range of young people, including high school students, tertiary students, young workers, the unemployed, and people from both high and low socio-economic backgrounds. There were equal numbers of males and females, and respondents came from a mix of rural and urban environments. Interviewees were recruited through schools, centres for higher education, church groups, social groups and places of work located in all states of Australia.

This kind of ‘sample’ can never be properly ‘representative’ of Generation Y – that is not its purpose. The idea is to get a sense of the variety of types of spirituality to be found among these different groups. The interviews provided an account of these forms of spirituality qualitatively far richer than anything obtainable from survey research.

The face-to-face interviews lasted from thirty minutes to an hour. The transcripts of the more extensive interviews ran to sixteen pages or more of single-spaced type.

Interviewing was supplemented by observations made by the interviewer of the subject and the setting. All of the interviews were face-to-face and all were transcribed verbatim from audiotapes or digital recording devices.

The results provided the basis for the design of the telephone survey in Stage 2 of the project. Findings generalisable to the population require a large-scale, nationally representative sample. Surveys on this scale are very expensive, and so are limited in what they can explore. To enable the formulation of well-targeted survey questions, it has long been a standard part of survey research method (perhaps more honoured in the breach than the observance) to precede the survey with a smaller-scale, qualitative investigation, to explore at greater depth the phenomena to be investigated, in a limited number of cases.

Qualitative research of this kind has significant advantages compared with large-scale, quantitative surveys: it allows us to mine the levels beneath the surface that surveys can only map in a more superficial manner. A range of techniques is available: interviewing respondents face-to-face and at length, employing a looser structure which leaves the interviewer free to follow up leads arising in the interview, making field observations of the respondents in their natural settings, and exploring their family and social networks.

**Stage 2: National survey**

In February and March 2005, a national telephone survey was conducted. Respondents from all Australian States and Territories were selected randomly using both listed and unlisted telephone numbers, and 1619 completed survey interviews were conducted.

*Age distribution of the survey sample*
In the life-stories of young people heard during the Stage 1 interviews, it was repeatedly noticed that they told of important changes in their spiritual outlook and practice, many of these changes occurring at turning-points marking entry into a new life-stage. For example: the transition from primary to secondary school around age 12, which also roughly coincides with the onset of puberty; a less-clearly-marked transition point from early to late secondary school around age 15 or 16 years; leaving school at about 18 and entering the world of tertiary education or starting to look for a job; and entering the ‘emerging adult’ phase in the early twenties.

To enable exploration of each of these life-stages, the survey sample was designed so that it would contain a sufficient number of respondents from each of them for statistically valid conclusions about the group at that stage to be drawn. This required ‘oversampling’ some age groups – including more members of that age group than the proportion naturally occurring in the population.

Further, so that Generation Y could be compared with the two generations before it, a control group from the age range 25-59 years was selected.

The age structure of the sample is shown in Table 2.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-15 years</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18 years</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24 years</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-59 years</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1619</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Altogether, there are 1219 cases from Generation Y (aged 13-24) and 400 from the control group (aged 25-59).

How closely does the survey sample match the population? When the achieved sample was compared with population data from the ABS Census on key characteristics such as age, gender and residence in a capital city or in the rest of the State, the match of sample and population was very close.

The ‘participation rate’ (completed interviews as a percentage of eligible respondents [or their parent] contacted) was 80.3% – unusually high for telephone surveys. One-fifth of refusals were attributable to parents not granting permission to interview a child, usually because of the child’s study commitments. Only 26 respondents who started on the main body of the survey did not complete it.

Demography of Generation Y
The demographic characteristics of Generation Y are recorded in a series of tables in Appendix II on the project website. Included are: age, gender, State of residence, State and region (capital city/rest of State), country of birth (85% of Gen Y were born in Australia), parents’ countries of birth, relationships in household, employment, intended occupation, parents’ occupations, level of education completed, educational status in 2004 and 2005, type of secondary school (government or private), and religious/denominational affiliation of private school. The following two characteristics are particularly important:
From the Census, we know that 62% of 17 year-olds were attending secondary school, but by age 18 years, 84% of young Australians were either in post-secondary education, or in the labour force, employed or looking for work.

A measure of ‘family intactness’ was constructed for those aged 13-17, and proved useful in later analysis. 65% of those aged 13-17 were living with both biological parents, and 28% had experienced a parental death, divorce or separation at some stage during their childhood.

Since we will often make comparisons across age groups in later chapters, let us take a moment to describe the age groups most often used in these comparisons. Generation Y is divided into the following subgroups, which correspond to important changes of environment for most young people:

- 13-15 year-olds are in the early to middle years of secondary school. The transition from primary to secondary school, and the experience of the first few years in that new environment, are often accompanied by major changes in outlook, beliefs and values.
- 16-18 years: most Year 11 and Year 12 students are 16 and 17; some turn 18 in Year 12; sometimes students change to another new school for years 11 and 12. In any case, moving into one’s late teens is an important transition educationally and personally.
- 19-24 years: after the big break from the protected environment of school, these are the years of university or other post-secondary education, or the first years of work or unemployment / job searching; of leaving adolescence behind and becoming an ‘emerging adult’; by the end of this phase, most have completed post-secondary education and are trying to establish careers; many are entering longer-term personal partnerships, some (but by no means all) have moved out of the family home.

We will compare these subgroups within Generation Y, then Generation Y as a whole with the two previous generations: Gen X and the Baby Boomers.

Major topics in the survey questionnaire
The survey questions covered the following topics: demographics, media use, self-development activities, activities related to seeking peace and happiness, the meaning of life, values, social concern, altruistic behaviour, volunteer activities, decision-making, religious beliefs, identification with a religion/denomination; attendance at religious services of the respondent, family and friends; religious practices and experiences, practices specific to a particular religion; alternative spiritualities: beliefs, exploration, involvement; the perceived influence on the person’s spirituality of school, subjects studied, religious education.

Stage 3: Interviews
In the third stage of the research, a second round of twenty-six personal interviews was conducted – fourteen face-to-face, and twelve by telephone. Interviews varied in length from fifteen to forty minutes.

All were re-interviews with respondents who had participated in the project at an earlier stage: nineteen had been interviewed in Stage 1; seven others had taken part in the survey.

All had given permission for the researchers to contact them again. Only a little more than a year had elapsed since the survey, yet often significant changes had taken place during that time, such as the transition from school to university. More than two years had gone by since the Stage 1 participants were first interviewed.
Although the number of these follow-up interviews was relatively small, their aims were very specific and varied. Many respondents were chosen because of the type of spirituality they had exhibited earlier, which the researchers wanted to fill out in some respect. Most were chosen also because they had been through a significant change since they were first interviewed (such as leaving school or university). Analysis of the survey had given rise to some new questions which the data to hand did not answer satisfactorily. Alternative hypotheses were formulated, and often a small set of interviews with carefully chosen individuals enabled a judgment to be made about the more probable answer to the research question.

**Spirituality types**

The search for a satisfactory classification of the various forms of spirituality encountered among Generation Y preoccupied the research team from the start of the project to its conclusion. The initial classification was derived from theory and previous research, then refined repeatedly in the light of the data, so that the final set of types has been shaped by both.

The following chapters of this book are structured around the main types of spirituality. So in this introduction, we will outline what is meant by spirituality type, and describe the set of types which emerged from our research. A detailed description of each type will be provided in chapter 6.

The classification of spirituality into different types takes account both of the *worldview* underlying a form of spirituality, and also its *ethos*: the values it contains and the practices in which they are expressed.

Our analysis revealed three major types of spirituality among Generation Y:

- **Traditional**: grounded in the tradition of a major world-religion;
- **New Age**: non-traditional religions or spiritual paths;
- **Secular**: based on human experience and human reason, rejecting both Traditional religion and New Age spirituality.

Those whose spirituality was of the traditional type were predominantly Christian; a small proportion within this type belonged to other world religions (mainly Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism).

Table 2.2 shows the distribution of these types of spirituality within Generation Y.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPIRITUALITY TYPE</th>
<th>% of GEN Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional (Christian)</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Percentages in tables may not add to 100 because of rounding, or because small proportions of 'Don’t know' and 'No answer' responses have been omitted to simplify the table. The percentages are 'column percentages' - e.g. in this table, the number 17 in the column headed 'Gen Y' means that 17% of Gen Y were of the 'New Age' spirituality type - not that 17% of those in the New Age type belonged to Gen Y.
The Traditional - Christian spirituality type includes 46% of Generation Y. The other major types New Age (17%) and Secular (28%) account for nearly all the remainder. The group labelled ‘Other’ includes followers of other world religions (6%) and ‘Theists’ (3%). The spirituality of those who belong to other world religions is of course of the Traditional type, but their religious worldviews are so different from that of Christianity that it makes no sense to group them together with Christians. The group we have labelled ‘Theists’ had little to say about their spirituality other than that they believed in God, so could not be classified into any of the larger groups.

Within all worldviews, it was discovered that the corresponding ethos varies considerably – that is, the worldview may be expressed in values and carried into practice at a higher or lower level of intensity or commitment. The level of ethos, the degree to which the worldview is lived, the level of effective influence it exercises over a person’s life by shaping values and practices, is of capital importance. It makes the difference between the committed living-out of an ideal and merely having an opinion on some religious or spiritual issue, or acknowledging a residual connection with an organization – an association which is ‘cost-free’, imposing no obligations.

The level of interest in spirituality of all varieties is generally low among Australian young people. The majority of those under the age of twenty-five have little interest in the spiritual trajectory of their lives. Only a minority (about 41%) of Gen Y are seriously involved in one of the three major types of spirituality: about 17% of Generation Y in Christianity, 6% in another traditional world-religion, 4% in a New Age spirituality, and 14% in a Secular worldview. We could say of all these that they are ‘engaged’ with spirituality. The remaining 59%, while generally oriented in one of these directions as a result of early childhood socialization within the family, have only a low level of commitment to their inherited worldview, and only marginal or nominal involvement in groups or organizations which embody it. They usually do not engage in any associated practices. Their interests lie elsewhere.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Engaged</th>
<th>Unengaged</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next chapter, we begin our exploration of traditional spirituality. In Australia, this type of spirituality is based mainly on the Christian tradition.
Chapter 3
Belonging and believing the traditional way
Religious identity and beliefs

The predominant spirituality type within Generation Y is Traditional – based on a world-religion. 46% of Gen Y identified with some variant of the Christian tradition, and 6% were followers of one of the other world religions. This chapter will describe these forms of spirituality, particularly the way in which young people identify with a religion or denomination (or do not), and their basic beliefs. Our review of previous research on religion in Australia, detailed in the previous chapter, showed that there were conflicting views: some saw religious affiliation and belief remaining as strong as ever; others saw evidence of decline. Our own view was that we would find evidence that considerable change has taken place in these two characteristics over the past fifty years, and was continuing.

Religious identification
Respondents to *The Spirit of Generation Y* survey who were aged 13-24 identified with various religions or denominations as shown in Table 3.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion/Denomination</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian not further defined</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witness</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neopagan</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religious identification</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There are probably more followers of other world religions than appear in the table. Even the Census undercounts these groups: some of their members prefer not to state their religion, either because they fear persecution on religious grounds, or because they do not wish to draw attention to their immigrant status. In the atmosphere of multiculturalism, non-Christian groups gained in confidence and felt greater freedom to disclose their religion: the number of Buddhists and Muslims increased markedly over several censuses; however there is most likely still some underestimate.

Even the smaller Christian denominations were present in the sample in approximately the expected proportions. Pentecostals, however, were more numerous than expected. It is also likely that a proportion of those who said they were Christian, but did not know anything further about their denomination, were associated with Pentecostal churches. A further proportion of those who said only that they were Christian were most likely affiliated with Evangelical churches.

Tables showing denomination in the remainder of this book use a smaller number of categories, as shown in the following table, because of the need to have sufficient numbers in each group as a base for reliable percentages.

Table 3.2 shows the denominational composition of Gen Y in condensed form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian*</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion**</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religious Identification</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Other Christian’ includes (in descending order of size): ‘Christian’ not further defined, Uniting Church, Pentecostal, Orthodox, Baptist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, ‘Evangelical’, Seventh Day Adventist, Churches of Christ, Salvation Army, Jehovah’s Witness, Mormon.

** ‘Other Religion’ includes (in descending order): Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Sikh, Neopagan, Other.

Figure 3.1 Generation Y (13-24): Religious groups
Comparison of religious identification in the Gen Y survey and the 2006 Census

It is illuminating to compare the religious identification of the respondents to the Gen Y survey in 2005 with responses to the religion question in the ABS Australian Census of 2006 (Table 3.3). The closest comparison possible, using the limited data as yet available from the 2006 Census, compares census data for those aged 15-24 years in August 2006 with survey data on respondents who, eighteen months earlier, when the Generation Y survey took place in February 2005, were aged 13-22 years.

Table 3.3 Comparison of religious group by age group in Census 2006 and Gen Y Survey 2005

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion/Denomination</th>
<th>Census 2006 Age 15-24 %</th>
<th>Gen Y Survey Age 13-24 %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relig Identification / Not stated</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculated from Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007 ©ABS.

No other individual denominations or religions had sufficient numbers in the survey sample to make comparisons with the Census reliable.

The percentages of Anglican and Catholic are lower in the survey than in the Census – Anglicans about 6% and Catholics 5%, while the percentage of ‘No identification / Not stated’ is 13% higher. Since the survey sample matches the population closely in other respects, it is clear that a considerable number, for whom a religious identification of Anglican or Catholic was stated in the Census in 2006, did not state that religious identification in the survey. The Other Christian and Other Religion categories, however, were nearly the same in the survey as in the Census.
How do we explain the lower proportions of the two large denominations in the survey, compared with the Census? A number of factors may be contributing to the difference.

Within families, the Census is usually filled out on a family census form by a parent, so religion/denomination is ascribed to children and teenagers by someone else rather than filled in by the children themselves. Eighteen months earlier, when interviewed personally, some of those teenagers did not identify with a religion/denomination.

For those completing their own census return, the religion question is one among many others on quite different topics, and is probably filled out by most respondents without giving it much thought. Answering the same question in the telephone survey, after fifteen minutes of reflection about one’s beliefs and values, is quite a different experience. Young people had the opportunity, through this reflection, to consider whether they really did now identify with a denomination in which they might have been baptised, whose church they might have attended in former years, but with which they now had little connection. It seems likely that this more reflective answer is a better indication of their religious or denominational identity than ticking a box on the census form.

A contrary argument was suggested in discussions with users after the release of the project’s final report: the survey figures may be underestimates, because, in the increasingly secular Australian cultural environment, it may be easier to own a religious identification on a written questionnaire than in a live phone interview. Perhaps this was a reason why a few avoided acknowledging that they belonged to a denomination; however we have direct evidence from two sources – the Census and the survey itself – that many young people have abandoned their former religious identification.

Young people who abandoned their previous religious identification
Analysis of youthful age cohorts within denominations in the 1996 and 2001 censuses shows that in the three largest Christian denominations, Anglican, Catholic and Uniting Church, significant numbers in the age cohorts 10-14 and 15-19 years have abandoned their earlier religious identification from one census to the next, as shown in Table 3.4. The percentages shown are based on the entire age cohort: that is, 19% of the Australian population aged 10-14 in 1996 were identified as Anglican; but five years later in 2001, only 17% of this cohort, now aged 15-19, identified as Anglican.

Table 3.4 Selected denominations by age cohort in 1996 and 2001 Censuses
(Percents of age group at date of census)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>244,212</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>225,181</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>381,725</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>372,499</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>99,853</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87,012</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>238,893</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>197,061</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>361,542</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>323,751</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>88,820</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>62,543</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More decisive than any of these indications is the fact that the survey itself provides direct evidence of young people abandoning a former religious identification. Respondents were asked whether they had always belonged to their current denomination (or had always had no religious identification), or whether they had changed their religious identification since they were 12 years old. If they had, they were asked which religion or denomination they were raised in. Further, those who had previously stated that they did not believe in God, were asked whether they had done so at an earlier age, and if so, whether at that time they belonged to a particular religion or denomination (from here on, ‘denomination’ for short). 7

Comparison of young people’s current and previous denominations in Table 3.5 reveals that considerable change has taken place since age 12 years.

Table 3.5 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Current and previous denomination (percentages - see text below table)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Previous</th>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Percent Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religious ID</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table is read as follows: the figures in the column headed ‘Previous’ are based on information from respondents about the denomination in which they were raised; those in the column headed ‘Current’ refer to the denomination with which respondents said they now identify; all percentages are percentages of the whole of Generation Y. Thus 11% of Gen Y said they were raised Anglican, and 8% of Gen Y said that they now identified themselves as Anglican. 8

Table 3.5 reveals quite dramatic losses of young members by the Anglican and Catholic churches, and sheds further light on the difference noted above between the percentage of Anglicans and Catholics in the Census and the lower percentage in the survey. 9 The large increase in ‘No Religious Identification’ leaves little doubt about the main destination of the exodus from these two denominations. Census results for the whole population have shown No Religious Identification (labelled ‘No religion’) to be the fastest growing category in recent years. Religious identity is obviously even more volatile among the young than across the whole population.

More detail on these changes of denomination is shown in Table 3.6, which cross-classifies previous and current denomination, showing not just the gains and losses, but which denomination people changed ‘from’ and ‘to’.

Table 3.6 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Current by previous denomination (percent of previous denomination)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This table is a little more complex to read, so we will explain in detail what it tells us. Look at the column headed ‘Anglican’: 69% of those who were raised Anglican, said that they still identify as Anglican; 1% had become Catholic; 5% of those who were raised Anglican identify now with one of the denominations in the group we have labelled ‘Other Christian’; 26% of those raised Anglican now do not identify with any denomination. 76% of those raised Catholic still identify as Catholics; 2% identify now with one of the Other Christian denominations; 1% with a non-Christian religion; and 20% of those raised Catholic do not now identify with any denomination. 80% of those who were raised in one of the Other Christian denominations still claim membership in one of these denominations (though not necessarily the same one). But even in this Other Christian group, in which the level of commitment is generally so high, 17% of those raised in one of these denominations have later moved to not identifying with any denomination. 94% of those who did not belong to any denomination when they were growing up, still do not belong.

Now let us look at the row of the table whose label (at the left side) is ‘Other Christian’. The 5 in the first column means that 5% of former Anglicans later joined an Other Christian denomination, and if we look across the rest of this row, what we are seeing is the previous denominations that people belonged to, who later joined an Other Christian denomination. 2% of former Catholics became Other Christian, and 3% of those who previously had no religious identification. There were some small gains also for Catholics: they gained 1% from each of the following groups: Anglican, Other Christian, Other Religion and No Identification. None of our sample indicated that they had moved to become Anglican. But the small numbers moving into the three denominations did little to offset the large numbers who moved from Anglican, Catholic and Other Christian to ‘No Identification’.

No Religious Identification
Since a surprisingly high proportion of Generation Y (48%) indicated that they did not identify with any religion or denomination, it may be well to examine this group more closely before moving on. The respondents in the ‘No religious identification’ category are those who did not regard themselves as currently (at the time of the survey) identified with any religion or denomination. There are also a few who did not respond to the question on denomination, plus a number who, having stated earlier that they did not believe in God now, and had never done so, were not asked their denomination. Naturally, most of those whose spirituality type is New Age or Secular fall into the No Religious Identification category.

Table 3.6 shows that nearly all of those raised without any religious identification remained so, and the group increased by the addition of about one-fifth of each of the other religious groups. Since the age of 12 years old, many who had been Anglican or Catholic or Other Christian or Other Religion, had abandoned these forms of religious identification.

In fact, 20% of those raised as Christian have already, before reaching the age of 25, rejected membership of any church. In our lengthier interviews, we spoke to many of these. In most cases, the link to church was never very strong; there was little involvement with the church on the part of either their parents or themselves.

Abandoning a previous religious identification
Those who had previously identified with a denomination but no longer did so were invited to share their reasons for the change in a series of open-ended questions, breaking away from the more structured survey format. The question took the following form:

‘We’re interested in the reasons why people who were raised in a particular religion no longer identify with that religion. What is the main reason why you no longer consider yourself (religion / denomination)?’ If this question was answered, they were asked ‘Were there other reasons?’; if answered, this prompt was repeated; then respondent was asked:

Apart from the things you’ve just told me about… are any of the following also reasons why you no longer consider yourself (religion / denomination)?

- Don’t accept some of the beliefs;
- Don’t accept some of moral teachings; or
- Don’t agree with some of the policies or statements of the organisation or its leaders.

Half of those who had previously identified with a religion but no longer did so were male and half female. 138 people from this group answered the question by giving reasons why they no longer identified. Those who provided verbatim answers were mainly raised in the following religions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination in which raised</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah's Witness</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian nfd*</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neopagan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>138</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*‘Christian nfd’: not further defined - those who answered ‘Christian’ but were unable to give any further information on their denomination.

Reasons given for no longer identifying
The responses to open-ended questions are classified here together with responses to the reasons suggested in the last part of the question.
The major reasons people gave for no longer identifying with any religion or denomination are *issues with the church, issues with religion generally* and *issues with God*. These are discussed below.

**ISSUES WITH CHURCH**
This was the major reason given. The issues raised were: church failings (68 responses in this subcategory); don’t accept policies (5); don’t accept moral teaching (103); don’t accept beliefs (69). The *church failing* most noted was the alleged hypocrisy of church people. This is what three former Catholics said:

- Primary school was a Catholic school and I witnessed the hypocrisy and I am not impressed with the general history of the church.
- Hypocritical behaviour in other people who practise that religion.
- I find them to be hypocritical to the original message of the religion.

Other prominent church failings mentioned were: ‘moralising by church folk’ and the fact that the ‘church is out of touch with people’s lives’.

The *moral teaching* most often objected to was the church’s attitude to homosexuality. Again, former Catholics were most likely, by far, to identify this reason. This is what three of them told us:

- They teach to be open and accepting but they discriminate against certain people like gays.
- They teach that Jesus accepted everyone but they don’t accept gay people.
- Homosexuality is not accepted by the church but I accept it.

Teachings about homosexuality were also the major reason, across all categories, young people (13-24) gave for not identifying with a religion (13 responses). Other notable moral teachings people disliked included the church’s attitude to women, especially the ordination of women, rules about sex before marriage and the prohibition of abortion.

Among those who didn’t identify because of certain *beliefs*, most nominated that they ‘didn’t believe in the Bible’. Two former Anglicans said:

- Impossibility from a science perspective of the things referred to in the Bible.
- I find it hard to accept everything in the Bible, how accurate is the Bible, too much emphasis on the Bible and not the moral issues of the world today.

Many also claimed simply not accepting most religious beliefs as a reason for not identifying.

**ISSUES WITH RELIGION**
This was the second major reason people no longer identify with a religion. Informants feel that religion is a regressive form of social control (12 responses), that there are too many religions with contradictions (10), or they have formed their own, alternative worldview that precludes a ready identification with a religion or denomination (12). Catholics and Anglicans were almost even in identifying religion as a form of social control, and all but one person putting forward this reason were aged between 25-59. One former Anglican told us:

- Education influenced me to see that religion just controls people’s lives, and religions don’t have the best interests of people in mind.
**ISSUES WITH GOD**

This was the third major category of reasons adopted by our informants to explain why they don’t identify with a religion. In this category, the most popular response was that many simply didn’t believe in God (16), with numbers being the same for those aged 13-24 and 25-59. This is what some of the 13-24 year-olds told the interviewers:

- I don’t believe in God.
- I don’t believe there is a God in particular.
- My Dad doesn’t believe in God and disagrees that I should go to a Catholic School and I’m on Dad’s side.
- Not sure whether I believe in God – I don’t believe in the resurrection of Jesus.

Others were not sure about God, or couldn’t accept that God allows suffering.

Young people tended to nominate ‘don’t accept beliefs’ (belief in Bible, most teachings), ‘moral teachings’ (homosexuality, attitude to women) and ‘issues with God’ (not sure, just don’t believe) as the major reasons why they don’t identify.

**Overall impressions**

In reading through the verbatims, one quickly forms the impression that those who no longer identify with a religion are people who have ‘issues’ with the church – mostly the Catholic and Anglican churches – rather than those who were once heavily involved and experienced something specific that made them turn away. By way of illustration:

- A statement the Pope made in 1999, when he said that anybody who quits smoking before the new year will have their place in heaven …

- Some of their rulings like you must attend church to be close to God...

- I don’t believe you have to give money to church and I don’t believe they’re setting a good example (i.e. paedophilia and other scandals)... You can be close to God anywhere you are.

At the end of the next chapter is an extended discussion of reasons people gave for not attending church services. Following the description of these reasons, there is some reflection on how these responses should be understood. The considerations offered there apply equally to the responses summarised and analysed above.

**Religious beliefs – evidence from the national survey of Generation Y**

In the following profile, Gen Y traditional spirituality will be outlined, using denominations as the basis of comparison. When differences by age provide interesting contrasts, they will also be shown.

**Beliefs about God**

Respondents were asked: ‘Do you believe in God or not, or are you unsure?’ Their responses are presented in Table 3.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Believe in God</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The proportion affirming belief and the proportion who were unsure varies considerably by denomination. The Other Christian group, predominantly conservative Protestant denominations, contained only 11% who were uncertain; this rose to 28% of the Anglicans, with Catholics in between at 23%.

Only 35% of those with No Religious Identification stated that they did not believe in God. Although only 21% affirmed belief in God outright, a further 44% were uncertain.

Clearly, owning no religious identification does not mean rejecting every aspect of the religious view of the world. And it is a little too simple to label this group as having ‘No religion’ (as the Census does). On the other hand, what some authors call ‘belief without belonging’ was discussed and critiqued in Chapter 2. We argue that for the ‘uninvolved’, mere opinions on religious issues are not religious beliefs in any strong sense. We shall see that very few of those with no religious identification are actively involved with Christian communities, and we have already discussed the evidence that residual beliefs fade over time when not reinforced by active involvement with a community of believers. In chapter 11, we will also see that the retention of a few ‘low-cost’ Christian beliefs does not make much impact on a person’s disposition to be of service to others.

The question of belief in God is fundamental to traditional spirituality. For some, a positive answer to the question indicates not merely an intellectual conviction, but a life-commitment; while for the religiously uncommitted, ‘Yes’ may mean only that they incline to the opinion that on the balance of probabilities, there’s something out there, but it doesn’t matter too much either way.

Looking at Gen Y as a whole: the column at the right of Table 3.8 shows that half believe in God, one-third are uncertain, and 17% (about one in six) do not believe in God. The answer given to this question influenced what further questions were asked. The term ‘unbelievers’ is used to denote those who said they did not believe in God.

The high incidence of unbelief and uncertain belief in God

Why do non-belief in God, and uncertainty about belief, appear so high? The explanation that first comes to mind is that this is an ‘age effect’ – typical of the tentativeness of adolescence, a time of experimentation with identity and beliefs, with an inevitably higher level of accompanying confusion. As they mature, runs this line of reasoning, they will ‘settle down’ to more certainty and confidence. Well, if that is the case, the older generations should show more certainty in their belief in God. The reader will recall that we included older generations in the survey. So let us look at these groups. Table 3.9 shows, first, percentages of believers in the age groups within Generation Y; then, at right, a comparison between Gen Y as a whole and the two older groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Do you believe in God?’</th>
<th>Age groups within Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Boom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What of the suggestion that the high level of uncertainty about belief in God in Generation Y was a quite natural result of being young, and not yet ready to make a commitment in faith? Table 3.9, comparing belief in God across age groups, shows only a slight reduction in uncertainty which could be a result of people’s beliefs firming up as they move from their early teens into their mid-twenties, but among those aged 40-59 years, there are still 26% who are ‘unsure’. So the idea that uncertainty regarding belief in God is only an effect of youthfulness, is not plausible. A substantial level of uncertainty runs right across the three generations.

The 40-59 age group is particularly interesting for two reasons: they are the ‘Baby Boomers’, born between 1946 and 1965, who in their youth were involved in major social and cultural changes in Western societies; and they are the parents of Generation Y. The project included this ‘control sample’ of the generations before Gen Y precisely in order to avoid attributing to youth, characteristics that are more widely shared.

What we learn from this table is that Generation Y reflect their parents’ belief in God. There will be many more findings presented that underline this similarity. But we shall show that the generation before the Boomers had considerably higher levels of belief and practice. These findings tend to provide strong empirical support for the theory that a ‘cultural revolution’ took place in Western societies in the 1960s and 70s, a significant advance in the ‘secularisation of consciousness’, which has impacted on all those who have grown up in ‘late modernity’, since the early 1960s: the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. We defer full discussion of major theoretical themes of this kind until chapter 12, since they affect many individual findings, and repeated references to the larger theme become tiresome and distract from the particular finding under consideration at the time.13

**GENDER**

Does gender make a difference to belief in God? Within Gen Y, younger teenage boys (44%) were less likely to believe than either girls or older young men (55%). But there was no difference between young men and women aged from 19 to 40. This finding also is of momentous importance, and will be examined more comprehensively in Chapter 12.

Comparing Gen Y as a whole with the two older generations showed no difference among males; but two-thirds of women aged 40-59 were believers, compared with half of the women belonging to the two younger generations.

**FORMER BELIEF IN GOD**

Those who responded to the Gen Y survey question that they did not believe in God, or were uncertain, were asked a follow-up question: ‘Was there ever a time in your life when you did believe in God?’ The results are shown in Table 3.10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Ever believed in God</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Xn</td>
<td></td>
<td>22</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oth Relig</td>
<td></td>
<td>47</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Rel ID</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y</td>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.10 Gen Y (aged 13-24) not believing in God or uncertain: ‘Formerly believed’ by denomination (percent of denomination)
Nearly half of those who, at the time of the survey, did not believe in God, or were unsure, had previously believed in God: 89% of the Catholics, 78% of Other Christians, 59% of Anglicans and even two-fifths of those with No Religious Identification.

Reasons for Non-Belief in God
At this point in the telephone survey, we interrupted the question-and-answer format to ask those who said they did not believe in God if they would like to share their reasons for non-belief. These were typed into the interview record, and proved a rich source for the understanding of young people’s thinking on this topic. There were so many non-believers that they constitute a distinct spirituality type, which we have called Secular. Chapter 8 explores their outlook in detail, including discussion of their reasons for not believing in God.

Before the survey, in a face-to-face interview, we talked to Stuart, a young man of 16 whom we met at the Youth Voice conference; he was highly involved in community service, did not believe in God, but had clearly given the matter some thought:

If there is a God I don’t see why he would allow such extreme inhumanity to exist in hell. Under Christian circumstances for example if you don’t admit all your sins to a priest then you are going to hell and I think that is a bit harsh. I think a lot of Christians or Catholics themselves don’t believe such things are entirely true. In English we have just studied one of John Donne’s poems and he says, “what if I admit all my sins and then do something and die although I was fully religious and followed God as much as I could. It is within human instincts to commit sins and should that instinct make me go to hell for the entire eternal life?” That is one of the reasons that I don’t believe in God.

Belief in a higher being or life-force
Those who responded to the survey question on belief in God by saying that they did not believe in God or were uncertain, were asked further questions along the same line of inquiry. If not God in the conventional sense, then did they believe in some other kind of higher being or life-force?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believe that there is a higher being or life-force</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost two-thirds of those who did not believe in God or were uncertain (and much higher percentages of Christians), affirmed belief in some alternative kind of higher being, indicating that their previous statement of unbelief or uncertainty was not a radical rejection – on, say, scientific or philosophical grounds—of the entire notion of a higher being or power in the universe, but had more to do with what they understood by ‘God’. From responses to later questions, it seems most likely that it is precisely the God of the Bible, the God of Christianity, that is rejected, since people often cited criticisms of the Bible as reasons why they had rejected belief and / or church membership or attendance.

Does the higher being or life-force care about us?
Continuing the follow-up, those who did believe in a higher being or life-force were next asked: ‘Do you believe this higher being or life-force cares about us, or not?’ The aim of this question was to distinguish between two kinds of higher being. The first is the classical Deist ‘Divine
Clockmaker’ – a higher power, perhaps even an impersonal force, which sets the universe in motion, but does not intervene further, nor relate personally to humans. The alternative is a higher being who cares and has ‘personal’ characteristics akin to the God of most of the traditional religions. Over two-thirds of those in Gen Y who believed in a higher being considered that the higher being ‘cares about us’. The youngest teenagers were the most likely to hold this view. But when we look to the older generations, those in their forties and fifties were more evenly divided between a caring and an uncaring higher being.

A God who relates personally?
A slightly different series of questions was put to those who affirmed belief in God. First, whether God relates to us in a personal way, or is more like a cosmic life-force. Table 3.12 shows responses to this question according to denomination.14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbeliever or Uncertain*</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not personal</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ‘Unbeliever or Uncertain’, (sometimes abbreviated to ‘Unbel/Uncert’), will be used in some tables as shorthand for those who had said that they did not believe in God, or were uncertain, and consequently were not asked this question.

There is no difference by age in responses to this question across the entire age range of Gen Y and the older control groups; but there are significant differences by denomination.15 By this time, the reader will have observed a consistent pattern in responses across denominations to a variety of questions, and will not be at all surprised to see that the Other Christian group lead the field in affirming the traditional personalistic image of God, followed by Catholics and Anglicans. Women (43%) were significantly more likely than men (35%) to see God as relating personally, but the difference was not large.

Closeness to God
The last question in the series about God was: ‘On a 1 to 5 scale where 1 is ‘not at all close’ and 5 is ‘very close’, how close do you feel to God most of the time?’

Responses are shown in Table 3.13.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbel/Uncert</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Not at all close</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Very close</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Often, when reporting results, variables are ‘collapsed’ to make a table simpler and more readable, by combining responses like ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘Agree’, and ‘Strongly disagree’ with ‘Disagree’. But if it were applied to this table, that procedure would ‘smooth out’ some interesting differences across denominations in the percentages of those who feel ‘very close’ to God. The difference between ‘4’ on this scale and ‘5 – Very close’ seems larger than the arbitrary numbering might suggest. It is an ultimate, an end-point, a ne plus ultra. Those who choose it want to say that they feel about as close to God as one can be. Most of those with No Religious Identification did not encounter the question at all, but among those who did, few (2%) located themselves at this level of intimacy with God.

Catholics, at 7%, were the next lowest (on the percentage saying ‘Very close’) after those with No Religious Identification, although a hefty 28% were hesitating on the threshold at the level just below. This must sadden those Catholics who remember the affective warmth of Catholic devotional life in the era before the Second Vatican Council. Here is empirical support for the theologians and spiritual writers who have spoken of a ‘piety-void’ among Catholics opening up over the last forty years.

Anglicans show somewhat more strongly (13%), although the difference from Catholics is not quite significant statistically; both groups are lower than Other Christian in the proportion of their members who feel ‘very close’ to God. The Other Christian group, in which conservative Protestant denominations predominate, stands clear ahead of all others on this measure – ecstatic worship is especially associated with Pentecostal churches, and popular, emotive religious music with Evangelicals. Followers of non-Christian religions took a middle position with 14%. All of the non-Christian traditions have devotional components in their spirituality; our survey sample, however, does not represent them strongly enough to permit generalisations about their Australian members.

In the past there would have been a major difference between men and women on a variable so laden with affect; now, there is no significant difference within Gen Y between the sexes on the proportion who felt close or very close to God.

**Beliefs about religion and its place in life**

Several questions dealt with religion and its place in life. The first of these was asked of all respondents:

*Is only one religion true?*

Some people’s view of the world is influenced by what they think of religion. Which of the following statements comes closest to your own views about religion?

- There is very little truth in any religion
- Aspects of many religions may be true
- Only one religion is true.

The results are shown in Table 3.14.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>One or many religions true</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ‘unidentified’ are the most sceptical, and Other Christians, as one would expect, are most likely to insist on ‘One Way’, according to the slogan once in use, but even among them, it is not the majority view. The Anglican and Catholic groups show something of the tolerance characteristic of larger, more inclusive religious bodies which in the past have managed to embrace a wide range of internal diversity, and in the last half century have turned their backs on sectarian rivalry to reach out towards other Christian denominations in ecumenical fellowship and towards other religions in mutual respect.\(^\text{17}\)

Two-thirds of Gen Y as a whole preferred the view that aspects of truth may be found in many religions, one-fifth are sceptical of all religions, and 14\% believe that only one religion is true.\(^\text{18}\)

**Picking and choosing beliefs**

Most religious groups have worked out a more or less unified, theologically coherent body of teachings, often expressed in a creed or confession of faith, and proposed for the acceptance of members as a minimum or essential set of beliefs integral to membership. The extent to which this is imposed, and deviations negatively sanctioned, varies widely from denomination to denomination, and also over time. In recent years, much has been written about the loss, especially among younger members, of regard for the unity, and obligatory character, of such a body of beliefs. Put differently, are Generation Y ‘religiously individualistic’, and is this new? A direct question on the issue was asked; it only made sense to put it to those who currently believe in God or did so in the past: ‘Do you agree or disagree that it is okay to pick and choose your religious beliefs without having to accept the teachings of your religion as a whole? / Is that strongly (agree / disagree) or just (agree / disagree)?’. Responses are shown in Table 3.15.

**DENOMINATION**

**Table 3.15 Gen Y (aged 13-24): ‘Choosing among beliefs’ by denomination (percent of denomination)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>OK to pick and choose</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbeliever</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding, and omission of small numbers of ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘No Answer’ responses.

‘Disagree’ (combining the responses ‘disagree’ and ‘strongly disagree’) is the more orthodox position for most denominations. It is the much higher percentages of agreement that are perhaps of more interest. Here we touch for the first time on a fundamental theme that we will see recurring in many Gen Y responses – but which will also be shown to extend well back beyond this generation: individuals are deemed to have the absolute right to believe whatever they choose in the sphere of religion, without any need to accept a set of beliefs, whether on the grounds of coherence of belief or of conformity with any external authority.
Traditionalists of all denominations, who would agree at least that the authority of Scripture should be acknowledged, will no doubt be surprised and dismayed by the strength of support for the right to ‘pick and choose’ in matters of faith, as illustrated by the lower row of the table above (Table 3.15). Those for whom doctrinal orthodoxy has been a major concern may be even more appalled. It would have exceeded the time limitations of survey interviews to go into whether this applied to all the teachings of one’s religion, or just the less basic and essential ones. The impression from interviews was that this distinction would make little difference to the replies that would be received. More than one-third of Gen Y as a whole agreed with the statement, but this percentage is artificially lowered by the high proportion of the non-identifying who were uncertain about belief in God and so were not asked; they would almost certainly agree; if we add them, agreement for the whole Gen Y group would stand at about 82%. Around three-quarters of Anglicans and Catholics agreed; but a significantly smaller proportion of conservative Protestants.

The implications of this strong theme of personal choice in matters religious will be fully discussed in chapter 12, in the context of other findings which help to illuminate it. It is important to note that denominations have a core of committed participants who disagreed with the statement; it was those from the much larger group of the less committed who agreed.

**AGE**

It is perhaps even more surprising to learn, as Table 3.16 shows, that the generation over the age of forty are more likely to agree with picking and choosing than Generations X or Y.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It is okay to pick and choose religious beliefs without having to accept the teachings of one’s religion as a whole</th>
<th>13-15</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>25-39</th>
<th>40-59</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbeliever</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding, and omission of small numbers of ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘No Answer’ responses.

As in the previous case of the growth in uncertainty of belief, it seems most unlikely, for the reasons given previously, that we are looking at an ‘age effect’ here: that people grow more sceptical as they age. It is far more likely that it is again a case of a ‘period effect’ impinging on those of all ages as they live through a particular era. And if this is the case, obviously the uncertainty previously discussed is closely related to some late modern conceptions of freedom and truth as they affect religious belief, which have impinged on people of all ages.

**Morals are relative**

For those who embrace a religious tradition, moral values also are derived from their religious faith. Among Australian young people, how is morality related to faith? From our data, it is clearly governed by the same understanding of ‘personal freedom’ as matters of belief. Everyone was asked: ‘Some people say that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody. Do you agree or disagree?’

**Denomination**

Table 3.17 shows responses according to denomination.
Table 3.17 Gen Y (aged 13-24): ‘Morals are relative’ by denomination (percent of denomination)28

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding or omission of small numbers of ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘No Answer’ responses.

Few were undecided; 56% of Gen Y as a whole agreed. The only groups in which a majority disagreed are Other Christian and (surprisingly) Anglican. Anglicans are a very large denomination with great internal diversity, including a vigorous and growing evangelical wing. While deferring a good deal to personal judgment on doctrinal issues, Anglicans as a whole were as conservative as other Protestants on morals. By contrast, over half of the young Catholics agreed that morals were relative, in the face of their own church’s strong insistence in recent years on the ‘objectivity’ and universality of moral truth. But this proportion is smaller than the proportion of Catholics in Gen Y who insisted on ‘freedom’ in beliefs. Those from other religious traditions were consistent: about the same proportion agreed on the relativity of both beliefs and morals. It would not be unexpected that a higher proportion of non-identifiers would regard morality as relative.

**Age**

Table 3.18 shows responses to the same question, this time according to age group.

Table 3.18 (aged 13-59): ‘Morals are relative’ by age group (percent of age group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morals are relative</th>
<th>13-15</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Boom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Columns may not add to 100 because of rounding or omission of small numbers of ‘Neither agree nor disagree’ or ‘No Answer’ responses.

Here also there were some fascinating effects: the oldest generation were less likely to agree with this statement! On beliefs they were highly permissive; on morals, they seemed to want to hold a line. Within Gen Y, there was no difference by age, and little difference by gender, except that the youngest girls aged 13-18, tended to be more likely to agree with the statement than boys.

Taken together, these twin rejections by a majority of Gen Y, of the authority of religious traditions in matters of belief and morality, tend to characterise the generation. In a later chapter, the influences shaping this part of their outlook will be discussed.

**Importance of faith in life**

In personal interviews, teenagers reveal busy lives that often leave little room for even thinking about religion, let alone practising it. In this context, the following question takes on added significance. It is somewhat surprising that, as shown in Table 3.19, so many rate religious faith as important (or very important – the two are combined here) in shaping how they live their daily lives.
Table 3.19 Gen Y (aged 13-24): ‘Importance of faith in shaping life’ by denomination (percent of denomination)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of religious faith in shaping how life is lived</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unbeliever /uncertain</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not important</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (3 on scale of 1-5)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One-quarter of Gen Y considered religious faith important or very important in shaping the way they live their daily lives; half as many considered it not very important or not at all important, (and half the group, having said they did not believe in God or were uncertain, were not asked, but most can be presumed to belong on the side of ‘unimportant’). Denominations within Gen Y differed markedly, in the order that readers will by now have come to expect.  

There was no difference by age or gender on this item within Generation Y, and males aged 40-59 were no more likely than the youngest group to rate their faith important in life; but women in the parent-age Boomer group once again showed some difference from all the other groups: they were significantly higher than all other age/gender groups in the importance they attributed to living one’s faith (39%).

**Other traditional beliefs**

For Christians, some form of belief in Jesus is so universal that, rather than obtain a unanimous and uninformative response to a ‘minimal’ question on Jesus, a more demanding form of the question was posed, that would discriminate between traditionalists and liberals: ‘Do you believe that Jesus was truly God and rose from the dead?’. Only those who identified as Christian (or who indicated that they had formerly done so) were asked this question. Responses are shown in Table 3.20.

The two older generations show similar results, except that the ‘fathers’ of Gen Y (the males in the 40-59 age group) were lower in their belief in Jesus than women the same age and younger folk.
Several other traditional beliefs were asked about. Only the percentages of those who said they ‘definitely believed’ are shown in Table 3.21.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Definitely believe in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibility of miracles worked by God</td>
<td>56 59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life after death</td>
<td>63 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angels</td>
<td>51 61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demons/evil spirits</td>
<td>35 39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Other Christian group were by far the strongest believers in the possibility of miracles. Among Gen Y Catholics, members of the church most likely to formally recognise and proclaim miracles, only 59% definitely believed, and a similar proportion of Anglicans. There were no major differences by age or gender within Gen Y or between Gen Y and the older groups, except that men aged 40-59 tended to be less likely to believe in miracles worked by God.

Within Generation Y, a majority believe in life after death; but the proportion declines for belief in the existence of angels to 44%, and to 35% for the existence of demons or evil spirits. Those with No Religious Identification have the lowest proportion of belief on all items. Among Christians, about two-thirds believe in life after death, but lower percentages in angels and evil spirits. Only in the case of conservative Protestants was there a majority who believed in evil spirits.

Belief in life after death showed a clear and consistent trend, among males only, to decline with increasing age: from 57% in the 13-15 age group who definitely believed, down to 32% of men aged 40-59 years. Belief in angels and demons did not vary much at all by age or gender.

**Conclusion**

We have seen that fewer Gen Ys than expected identified with a denomination, and that a significant proportion no longer considered themselves part of the denomination in which they were raised, for a variety of reasons. Only half of them confidently believed in God and in Jesus, which closely reflected the current strength of these beliefs among their parents’ generation. Even fewer believed that God related to humans in a personal manner, and only a small proportion felt ‘very close’ to God most of the time. Few believed in one true religion, and the ‘supermarket’ approach to beliefs and morality was strongly in evidence. Belief in life after death, compared with other beliefs, was surprisingly high.

Belief is an important part of a person’s spirituality, but far from the complete picture. Our model of spirituality assigns considerable weight and significance to the practices through which the person’s beliefs and values are expressed. So we devote the next chapter to exploring the religious practices associated with traditional spirituality.
Chapter 4
Living out the faith
Religious practices

Continuing the analysis of the traditional type of spirituality among Generation Y, we next consider the religious and spiritual practices in which they engage. On this point, previous research was less ambiguous than it had been on the issue of belief: attendance at religious services, for instance, had been closely measured and shown to have declined markedly. Not all agreed on the reasons for this change, so we attempted to discover as much as we could about these.

Attendance at church services
The practice of ‘true religion’, as is often emphasised, does not consist solely, or even primarily, in attendance at church services. It is mentioned first here among religious practices, not to imply that it is most important, but because for many, it is the only direct way in which they come into contact with a community of believers. As a result, attendance at religious services has consequences for religious identity and its support which reach far beyond the individual act of worship or the fulfilment of a duty.

Denomination and attendance
Table 4.1 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Frequency of attendance at religious services by denomination (percent of denomination)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of attendance</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbeliever</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain re God</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not attend</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice a year</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally; less than monthly</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About once a month</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or three times a month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More often than once a week</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So that the percentages will be based on all Gen Y members in each denomination, those who were not asked the question on frequency of attendance are included in the base of the calculation of the table percentages. The multiple levels of attendance shown make this table less easy to interpret, and many percentages are so small as to be trivial. A more condensed version is shown below; but some items of interest can only be seen in this more extended format: the percentages of those who said they did not attend at all (not even on popular occasions like Christmas and Easter) were 18% of Anglicans, 11% of Catholics, 10% of Other Christians and of those of Other Religions.

It is very improbable that unbelievers attend religious services, except on social occasions like weddings or funerals (and the question was framed so as to exclude this type of attendance). Most likely a high proportion of those uncertain about God should also be counted as non-attenders. On the other hand, some whose belief in God wavers do attend services, perhaps even regularly.
At the other end of the scale are those who attend religious services more often than once a week. They comprise 13% of Other Christians, 7% of Anglicans, 1% of Catholics, and 3% of Other Religion.

We can say little about those who belong to religious traditions other than Christianity, because they comprise only a small proportion of Gen Y, and are distributed across a range of traditions with different customs and patterns of gathering for religious services. A minority, especially more recent immigrants, live in geographically-concentrated ethnic communities with ready access to a place of worship; for others, distance would inhibit frequent attendance. Whatever the reason, although this group rivalled Other Christian on many measures of belief, a much smaller proportion regularly attend religious services.

The Christian denominations vary in their expectations regarding attendance. 20% of Gen Y Catholics report that they observe the practice of weekly attendance (a serious obligation in Church law); 18% of Gen Y Anglicans report attending weekly, and a much higher 40% of Other Christians. In some of the stricter denominations in the latter group, maintenance of membership in good standing may require attendance at several services on Sunday, and also at a weekday Bible study.

Self-reports compared with counts of attendance

These self-reported levels of attendance will likely seem to experienced pastors to be higher than actual attendance. In many cases, the lower level of actual attendance is conclusively demonstrated by head-counts. Inflation of self-reports of attendance is a well-documented phenomenon in many countries. Acknowledging this does not imply accusing respondents of overt untruthfulness. It seems likely that ‘social desirability bias’ plays a part: people’s self-reports are drawn, not fully consciously, in the direction of what they think they ought to be doing rather than what they actually do. Or people who state (optimistically) that they attend every week actually miss some weeks because of absence from home, illness or other commitments. It would seem that the same caveats should be applied to self-reports of frequency of other practices such as prayer or Scripture reading.

Simplifying Table 4.1 on frequency of attendance for greater ease of comparison:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Unbeliever / Uncertain]</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month or more often</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We would, of course, expect that attendance of teenagers at worship services would be no higher than that of parents. The parents’ pattern of religious practice is the strongest influence on that of children and teenagers: it takes a very determined younger teenager to attend church regularly when parents do not. Even if they have learned to dance to a different tune, there are the practical problems of transport to church, and of synchronising with other family activities.

But what of the anecdotes that used to be heard, of regularly attending parents whose children had ceased to attend, and the anguish this caused to traditionally-minded parents? We started to hear
those stories forty years ago when the Boomers were in their teens, struggling with their more religiously conservative Pre-Boomer parents! And the struggle continued as a source of tension between Generation X and their (also largely Pre-Boomer) parents. But there was little evidence of this pattern between Generation Y children and their Baby Boomer parents. Concern at Gen Y’s non-attendance is now more likely to be coming from (Pre-Boomer) grandparents. As Table 4.3 shows, the Baby Boomers are no more likely to be regular attenders than their children.

**Age and attendance**

Table 4.3 All (aged 13-59): Frequency of attendance at religious services by age group (percent of age group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of attendance</th>
<th>Age groups within Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Boom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[Unbeliever /Uncertain]</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month or more often</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparison of attendance by age group reveals that Gen Y scarcely differs from the two older generations; *a generally low level of attendance prevails across the entire age range 13-59.*

**Gender and attendance**

There is no significant variation among Gen Y by gender (not shown in the table), but amongst the Boomers, men are less likely to attend regularly (17%) than women the same age (27%), or than younger folk of either gender. It follows that women Baby Boomers are more likely to attend than men the same age, but not significantly more often than youth of either sex. We have seen this gender pattern now on several different measures: the Boomers are the last generation in which women are clearly more religious than men. After them come Generation X, in which the women have about the same rate of attendance (17%) as the men (13%).

We heard accounts, in face-to-face interviews, of how one or both parents used to attend more regularly when the child was in primary school, and of how children moved into their teens and stopped attending, with the result, in several accounts, that the parent(s) also ceased to attend, explaining that they had only been doing so for the sake of the children.

**Young people’s experience of the church they attend**

Popular opinion attributes the low level of attendance among young people to their not finding the services engaging, or the church welcoming to those of their age. Is this true? The survey asked those who attend (even if they attend only once or twice a year): ‘Does the church feel like a warm and welcoming place for you?’ Only those aged 13-24 were asked. Responses are shown in Table 4.4.

**Denomination and sense of church as welcoming**

Table 4.4 Gen Y attenders (aged 13-24): Church feels welcoming by denomination (percent of denomination)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church attended feels like a warm and welcoming place</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
83% of Gen Y folk who attend at least occasionally found their church ‘warm and welcoming’. The high percentages across all denominations (and even among those who attend, but do not identify with any denomination) make it clear that very few of those who attend complain of not feeling welcome. The question that immediately occurs is: do only frequent attenders have such a positive experience? This can be tested by showing how welcome both frequent and infrequent attenders felt, as in Table 4.5.

Do only frequent attenders find their church welcoming?

Table 4.5 Gen Y attenders (aged 13-24): ‘Church feels welcoming’ by frequency of attendance (percent of attendance level)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of attendance</th>
<th>Church attended feels like a warm and welcoming place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less than once a month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those who attend more frequently do find their church more welcoming than those who go less often, yet 71% of the less frequent attenders are positive in their assessment of how comfortable they feel in their church. There was virtually no difference on this variable across the age groups within Generation Y.

Do younger attenders find church services boring?

What about the services? Do young people find them ‘boring’? We had heard from some younger interviewees that this was so. Bethany was aged 13 and regularly attended church:

Our minister just left and I thought he was really, really boring. It’s all got to do with the style of the voice. I like listening and everything, but the services, they can be good and they can be bad. If they’re bad, they’re done by one particular person, but I’m sure some people listen.

*It’s because what they’re saying is not relevant or a monotone voice or - - ?*

It’s the tone of voice. Sometimes they can captivate me and make me listen. Sometimes I just get bored by it. Ministers, if they’ve got - - like, their voice can be really draining, even if they talk about something really interesting. It can sound really boring and it just makes me go to sleep.

Adam, 15 seldom attended – ‘maybe at Christmas and Easter’:

*Okay and how do you find it when you go? Interesting?*

A bit boring, probably, yeah.

*Okay, so what’s boring? How do you reckon?*

Just the sermon. Is that what it is? They just talk for ages, and you just have to sit and listen. If it’s more interactive, I find it a lot more interesting. It’s a big part of it.

Table 4.6 shows responses to the survey question. Apparently, not everyone found the services quite so bad; the responses were surprisingly positive.
This was a more challenging test. Even while feeling comfortable with the church community, some respondents found the services usually boring. This was true for more of the non-identifiers, but also for a substantial proportion of Catholics and Anglicans. Boredom was a little less commonly acknowledged by adherents of Other Christian denominations. On the other hand, adding together those who rarely or never found the church services boring totals 40% for Anglicans, 38% for Catholics, 52% for Other Christians, 51% for Other Religions, and even 35% for those with No Religious Identification. Table 4.7 shows how these responses relate to frequency of attendance.

As one might expect, there is a somewhat stronger association than was evident with the ‘welcoming’ variable: 37% of less frequent attenders found the services usually boring; only 13% of those who attended once a month or more often, did so. There are no differences between men and women within Gen Y, and little difference by age: attenders in their early twenties tend to be less often bored. But then there are probably still some 13-15 year-olds who would really rather not be in church, which is not likely to be the case with young adults.

### Table 4.6 Gen Y attenders (aged 13-24): ‘Services are boring’ by denomination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4.7 Gen Y attenders (aged 13-24): ‘Services are boring’ by frequency of attendance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of attendance</th>
<th>Less than once a month</th>
<th>Once a month or more</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely, or</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
attended (or attended more often) in the past. In every denomination (but not among the non-identifiers) at least two-thirds of those who now do not attend, or attend infrequently, had attended (or attended more often) in the past. At what age, they were next asked, did they stop attending, or stop attending regularly? In every denomination, and across all age groups, the time of life when people were most likely to have stopped attending was when they were in their teens. 53% of those whose attendance had ceased or declined indicated that this had occurred between the ages of 13 and 18. This was true even for those aged 30-59, relatively few of whom had ceased attending later in life. Age 7-12 was the next most likely stage for attendance to have declined (16%).

Once a survey participant had revealed that he or she had previously attended religious services more than once or twice a year, but now no longer did so, a set of open-ended questions invited them to share the reasons for this change. Whatever they said was taken down verbatim. These more extended comments from interviewees on non-attendance or reduced attendance will now be described, analysed and compared with several other research studies on the same topic. Then, in Chapter 6, a full analysis of the factors which influence young people towards or away from active involvement in traditional spirituality (including church attendance) will be presented.

Reasons given for non-attendance, or reduced attendance at church services

Some participants in the survey were asked if they would like to share their reasons for non-attendance, or reduced attendance, at religious services. Since many had already told us that they had never believed in God or had anything to do with religion, we didn’t risk annoying them by asking them this question! Those who were asked:

- had told the interviewer that they believed in God,
- that they identified with a religion or denomination, or had done so at some stage previously
- that they were not now attending religious services more than once or twice a year –they either had never done so, or had previously attended when they were younger.

Survey questions to non-attenders

These respondents were asked:

- What are the main reasons why you don’t attend very often / as often as you did previously?
- What other reasons do you have for not attending … (as above).
- If this question was answered, it was repeated.

- Then the interviewee was asked:

  - (Apart from the things you’ve just told me about) Are any of the following (also) reasons why you don’t attend very often / as often as you did previously:
    - you don’t accept some of the beliefs of that religion?
    - you don’t accept some of moral teachings?
    - you don’t feel comfortable with some of the people?
    - you don’t find the worship services helpful?
    - other activities are more important than attending worship services?

So there were three open-ended queries and a set question with five responses, all of which could be chosen. It was possible to give eight different reasons; of course, most were content with one or two.

Survey participants who responded to questions on non-attendance

There were 363 people, (146 males and 207 females) who were believers, identified as members of a particular religion or denomination, or had done so in the past, and who either had never attended, or no longer attended more than once or twice a year, but had previously done so. Given the close link between attendance of parents and that of children, responses from those aged 25-59, in the two control groups, are also included here. 328 people provided at least one reason why they
nowadays did not attend. The denominations to which they belonged at the time of the interview, or had previously belonged, are listed in the following table.

### Table 4.8 All (aged 13-59): Number of participants in a denomination who provided at least one reason for not attending (Count)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthodox</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniting Church</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Religious Identification</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>328</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Main themes in the reasons given for non-attendance**
The explanations provided in response to the non-attendance questions have been grouped under ten themes, listed in the following chart in order of frequency. If the same reason was given twice by the same person, it was only counted once. If someone gave two different reasons in response to the one question, both reasons were noted.

**Figure 4.1 All (aged 13-59): Type of reason given for Non-attendance**

There were differences in the way people responded according to gender, age and denomination.
**GENDER AND NON-ATTENDANCE**

More women responded than men. In these ‘verbatim’ responses, women were more likely than men to say that they did not attend because the churches’ moral teachings were too strict: for example, on homosexuality, sex before marriage, celibacy, abortion; or because there was no-one their age attending, or because they had moved to a new area. Women were also much more likely to say that they did not attend because they believed that they did not need to go to church to have a personal relationship with God.

Almost twice as many women as men claimed that the main reason for non-attendance was related to unpleasant encounters with church people who were unwelcoming and unfriendly. Males were more likely to say they did not attend, or had stopped attending, because they were no longer forced to by their parents or school, or because of the negative publicity about priests or religious involved in sexual abuse. Males were also more likely to disagree with the churches’ teachings on matters other than moral issues.

**AGE AND NON-ATTENDANCE**

Often the first reason given for non-attendance in response to the open-ended questions, especially by the youngest age group (13-15) was that they had other priorities, like spending time at sport, work, study, or with friends or family.

> I am moving on in my life and finding other aspects of my life that are keeping me interested… working, socialising, are more important as I basically need to get ahead in my life and do things for myself, again I don’t believe as strongly as I used to (Male, aged 23 Anglican)

Obviously, it was also younger respondents who mentioned feeling isolated in a congregation with few younger members. Older respondents were more likely to disagree with the churches’ attitude to morality or with other church teachings.

**DENOMINATION AND NON-ATTENDANCE**

Catholics were more inclined than Anglican or Uniting Church members to cite negative publicity about clergy and more likely to cite disagreement with church moral teachings as a reason for non-attendance (e.g. contraception, sex before marriage, homosexuality). About a quarter said that they did not attend because ‘you do not need to attend church to have a personal relationship with God’. Catholics were also more likely than Anglicans or UCA members to say that church was boring and not fun but were no more likely to say that that they had had unpleasant interactions with church people.

The style of worship and the type of music played in churches received only 12 comments. More attention was focused on negative experiences as members of a church and ‘out-of-date’ or ‘irrelevant’ church teachings (respondents use these terms to indicate teachings or practices that they feel ‘most people’ would disagree with).

**NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES OF CHURCH AND LACK OF YOUNG MEMBERS**

Many of the young people who had ceased attending had negative experiences of church and church attendance: they experienced the environment as unwelcoming, or felt as if they didn’t fit in or belong. The following quotes demonstrate a range of negative perceptions and experiences of the church.

> We haven't had much luck in the past and there was a lot of gossip and judgmental people in the church when we went in the past when I used to be with a youth group; they used to go overboard with things and I didn’t really fit in, they were too immature, that’s all. (Female, aged 23, no religious identification)
Although they are very welcoming, you and your family have to be a certain way, the family has to be together, in my area you need to have a certain amount of wealth. I don’t find it very spiritual; more rote religious. I’ve seen other priests do it much better, in my area it’s more about the way you look and what your status is. (Catholic, Female, aged 18)

[I stopped going because] I found it boring, I thought the church could make it more relative to today. (Catholic, Female, aged 18)

I sometimes find people who go to churches a bit hypocritical, as in they don’t practice what they preach, they follow but don’t actually do their faith. I prefer to have a simple belief in God on my own. (Male, aged 23, Anglican)

My primary school was a Catholic school and I witnessed the hypocrisy and I am not impressed with the general history of the church. (Catholic, Female, aged 23)

Many young people felt alienated and lonely going to church. They claimed that there were few others their own age there.

Well, a lot of the people there are very old and none of the people that pray are younger. The older people are negative to the younger people that go there. (Male aged 15, Presbyterian)

Many said that they were made to go to church when they were at school but once they left school their parents couldn’t make them go any more so they stopped going.

When young people moved to a new area, they never connected to the church in that area. They might have gone once and didn’t feel welcome and did not return or never attended at all – just drifted off. Family disintegration also was a contributing factor for some who said that once their parents divorced they stopped going to church. For some, arrangements for access of parents to children made regular attendance at church difficult. They also felt less welcome.

I felt less accepted at the local church when my parents got divorced (Female, 18, no religious identification).

The negative publicity about sexual abuse by church personnel was also noted by many participants.

DISAGREEMENT WITH CHURCH MORAL TEACHINGS
Many were critical of what they saw as the dogmatic and uncompromising approach of the church, or disagreed with moral teachings.

I do not accept the ‘no sex before marriage’ and disapproval of contraceptives by the church; I don’t accept the [church’s] abortion laws, where they define that life begins [at conception] (Catholic, Male, aged 18)

I don’t believe in Adam and Eve’s fig leaf; and the fact that women can not have abortion. If a woman was raped she should have the option to have an abortion. The right for women to have the abortion was not accepted in church. Relationships without marriage should be accepted by the church, other religions have accepted it. Going to work and seeing family members are more important to me (Male aged 18, Catholic).

One reason is the exclusion of gays and people with differences in sexuality; women can’t be priests and priests can’t marry. And they’re against pre-marital sex or remarriage after divorce.

I don’t pay attention specifically to those [some of moral teachings] and the not allowing contraception and all that, I didn’t agree with that before they accepted it (Catholic, Female, aged 20).

DISSATISFACTION WITH OTHER CHURCH TEACHINGS OR PRACTICES
Quite a number were critical of the restricted role of women in their church, or felt that the church was out-of-step with society and unrealistic.

It was a good influence when I growing up, but now there are other influences and I guess I can do it on my own now. Some of the beliefs don't seem practical, when I was younger I could relate to them more, but now not so much. Some of the moral standings on releasing refugees from detention centres doesn't seem practical. They take everything very seriously, and I'm heading in a different direction from the majority of the people. (Male aged 21, Uniting Church)

I don’t believe the Bible is true to fact, I don’t believe you need to have a ‘Sacred Heart’ in your house, the priest is wrong on this.

I can’t accept the contradictory way Jesus is depicted in the Bible and in worship services.

I no longer follow Anglicanism. Ten commandments still apply, but church should be more in line with modern thought. The church should pay more attention to environmental issues. It is too repetitive, I found it difficult to relate to. (Male, aged 23, Anglican)

I believe the end of the world is coming and the devil will deceive the heads of the church. I don't want to learn about lies, the devil knows the Bible better than any of us and he can deceive us through the Bible. They think they are so super spiritual, they think they are better than everyone else and they stick to themselves rather than going into the world. (Male, aged 19, Pentecostal)

[I don’t like the way that] the Church tries to run us, and the way they try to tell you to believe things – the rules and so on. [I don’t like their teaching about] the Bible – I don’t believe that you should follow it, or worship everything about it. I don’t think you should have to go to confession and all that, and all the seven rites and Confirmation and blah blah blah. (Catholic, Catholic school, Female, aged 20)

I am not a big fan of the Jesus the prophet thing, people 2000 years ago were not that advanced so I think it could be untrue.

And the whole female priest thing, not allowing that, I didn’t agree with that.

**Attendance not believed to be necessary**

There were numerous comments about not needing to go to church to have a personal relationship with God. For these participants, their personal and private relationship with God was all that was required; belonging to a community of believers or partaking of the sacraments did not appear relevant to them.

I don’t feel I have to [go] any more, I feel you don’t need to go to church to have faith, if you carry the faith within yourself, you don’t have to go to church. I don’t accept the ‘no sex before marriage’, ’no drinking’; I also don’t accept, I don’t believe you should have to preach the word of God. (Catholic, Female, aged 23)

Many claimed that they did not think that there was only one route to God and were disturbed that churches were not more accepting of other religions and alternative spiritualities.

Reading these comments on why young people do not attend church now may be salutary, but does not provide much comfort to church communities. Perhaps these young people may return to the church as they get older and have families of their own, but there are no indications of that outcome in the reasons they gave for non-attendance.

**Gen Y non-attenders and those from older generations**

NCLS Research conducted a wide-ranging survey on religious topics in 1998. Bellamy and colleagues analysed the survey data on attendance at religious services across all denominations and published a useful study on the topic in 2002, entitled: *Why people don’t go to church.* The sample was drawn from the electoral roll, so the youngest were aged 18 in 1998. The reasons for non-attendance most commonly stated were (in order of frequency): boring or unfulfilling church
services, church religious beliefs, church moral teachings, lack of a sense of need to attend, a preference for other activities, weaknesses of the person’s beliefs, the way churches are organised, competing commitments (including work), bad experiences with, or discomfort with, church people.

In 1996, the Catholic Church Life Survey included a questionnaire sent to parents of children attending Catholic schools, asking amongst other things about attendance at religious services. Many parents attended seldom or irregularly. Their ages ranged from the thirties to the fifties – corresponding to the Baby Boomer group. Although the distribution of this particular questionnaire was haphazard and the response rate rather low, over 4,000 respondents selected, from a list of 19 proposed items, the factors which they saw as contributing most to their non-attendance or low level of attendance.

Respondents could choose three reasons and also indicate the most important one. The commonest choice, both in frequency of mention and in rating as most important, was ‘No longer feel that being a committed Catholic requires going to Mass every week’. Next was disagreement with Church teaching on issues of sexual morality; then disillusionment with the Church because of revelations of sexual abuse by church personnel, and other demands on weekend time such as family space, children’s activities and weekend work / household chores. The only other items to attract mention by ten percent or more of the respondents were: having a partner of a different denomination; no longer accepting many Catholic beliefs; and no longer finding the service or the sermon meaningful. There were comparatively few mentions of personal conflicts with church personnel or of feeling a stranger in the local congregation. These reasons are closely similar to those voiced by older participants in the *Spirit of Generation Y* survey.

A study conducted in 2005 by Dixon and others, based on intensive interviews with 41 Catholic former attenders developed a list of 10 ‘reasons why people stop going to Mass’, seven of which were ‘Church-centred’ and three, ‘participant-centred’. Three-quarters of those interviewed were in their forties and fifties – again, Baby Boomers. The method of selection produced a group who were not typical of either attenders or dropouts: few had been ‘Sunday-only’ participants; half had been heavily involved in parish life; they were more educated than average, and more likely to have spouses who were not Catholic. Virtually all were concerned to continue to nurture their spirituality.

The most prominent reasons stated in these very detailed accounts were:

- Disagreement with church moral teaching, especially on issues of sexual ethics such as contraception and premarital intercourse; both participants and researchers described this as the ‘irrelevance’ of the church to modern life;
- Dissatisfaction with church leadership at many levels: problems mentioned included especially sexual abuse, authoritarianism, discrimination against women, poor homilies, unenlightened policies; a perceived lack of tolerance; also problems with particular priests;
- Dissatisfaction with community life in the local church: experienced as unwelcoming, unfriendly, having declined in community spirit;
- Feeling excluded by church rules and policies on marriage – some particularly Catholic issues here;
- Family issues: moving house and not making a good new connection with the local church; children reluctant to attend as they grow older; competing priorities for weekend time, especially family activities and work;
- Crisis of faith: loss of belief in church and its teachings but not because of science; confusion from the multiplicity of religions.
Four-fifths of those interviewed retained strong connections with other Catholics and with church organisations (which meant they were known to parish councils, and so were recruited into the study).

**Similarities between reasons given by Gen Y and older non-attenders**

If we now compare the reasons mentioned by youthful participants in the study of Generation Y with those mentioned by (predominantly older) participants in the three other Australian studies we have just reviewed, we find that reasons given by both Gen Y and older people were:

- disagreement with church moral teachings;
- non-belief in the church and doctrinal teachings;
- unsatisfactory church services;
- not considering attendance necessary;
- the scandal of sexual abuse;
- competing priorities at weekends, and
- not feeling comfortable in the local congregation (though for different reasons).

All of the reasons cited in the NCLS study were represented in responses from our study of Generation Y, and the four most often cited (at the top of the list just above), were also among those most frequently mentioned by Gen Y non-attenders.

**Differences between reasons given by Gen Y and older non-attenders**

Several reasons were issues for the older age groups, but were not necessarily shared by Gen Y non-attenders. These were:

- Dissatisfaction with church structures, leadership and community life, and discrimination against women; or problems with marriage law and conflicts with particular church personnel, had not occurred so often at the Gen Y stage of life. Further, participants in the Dixon study, who had been much more involved in the life of the local church, were also more likely than other non-attenders in their age-group to have experienced and reflected on their dissatisfaction with church leadership.
- Conflict between science and religion was not an important factor in loss of faith for the Boomers; but young people often mentioned it – understandably, since they are learning science at school and just forming their picture of how the world came to be.
- Most of those interviewed in the Dixon study had spent many years as practising Catholics; they had ceased to attend only in more recent years; their identity and associations as Catholics were deeply rooted, and not completely rejected.
- The Boomers in the Dixon study had previously been convinced believers; for many youth, this stage had probably never been reached.
- Most Boomers in the Dixon study continued to retain strong connections with other Catholics, and with Catholic groups and organisations; youthful dropouts had none of these associations.
- Most Boomers in the Dixon study were concerned to find some alternative form of continuing nurture specifically for their Christian spirituality; youth were much more likely to move to New Age or Secular alternatives, and most likely to disappear into the mass of the unengaged.
- Perhaps because of age, or filtering in the recruitment process, strongly negative emotion is uncommon in the Dixon study interview excerpts; it was more often present in accounts from the general population, both younger and older, in the Gen Y study.

**Reflections on the reasons given for non-attendance or decreased attendance**
The ‘reasons’ people give for ceasing to attend may or may not be the actual causes of such a change. In listening mode during the survey interview, it was of course not appropriate for interviewers to question any of the reasons for non-attendance presented by respondents. The purpose of this part of the interview was to learn about respondents’ own perceptions, to encourage them to share the story they tell themselves and others which accounts for their actions.

To engage afterwards in critical reflection on what was said does not imply questioning either the honesty or the sincerity of the respondents. On the contrary, it is an essential task of the researcher. It is reasonable to ask:

- How plausible are the reasons given as explanations for reducing or abandoning attendance at religious services? Some research of the ‘opinion polling’ kind takes such reasons at face value without further exploration, and assumes that they are accurate descriptions of motives, and sufficient to explain behaviour. Organisations which take up these shallow findings and use them as a basis for policy can be seriously misled.
- Some reasons given by respondents cite alleged facts, or make judgments, which can be independently verified; do these statements square with established knowledge? For instance, in some cases, respondents erroneously attribute to their churches doctrines which those churches are known not to hold.
- More generally, how well do people understand the reasons for their own actions, or for changes in their pattern of behaviour?

Possibility of ‘projection’
Sometimes people grasp these reasons very well, when they clearly recall the moment of a critical event or decision. The responses we heard to the attendance question which referred to a specific personal experience have the ring of authenticity about them. ‘Feeling less accepted’ (at the church after parents had divorced) is convincing, and every individual is the best witness to what he or she feels. Without questioning the feeling, one may suggest a possible alternative interpretation of the situation to that assumed by the respondent. It is common in such situations for people to be hypersensitive to others’ reactions, and via the well-known mechanism of ‘projection’, to ‘read into’ the attitudes of others, a lack of acceptance which may lie more in the anticipation of the person whose parents had got divorced than in the thoughts and feelings of others. But this is not necessarily the case; sometimes there is in fact a drawing away from such families, exactly as the respondent reported. There were many other responses referring to clearly remembered experiences, which deserve to be taken at face value.

Rationalisation or lack of reflection
In other cases, those who have not reflected much on why they stopped attending – especially when the matter seems to them of little or no significance – may not themselves understand very well the underlying motives of their behaviour. Self-knowledge is an arduous task, and most of us ordinary people achieve it at only modest depth. Well-known psychological mechanisms also come into play, and need to be taken into account in any attempt at a social-scientific explanation which utilises this kind of evidence. We humans readily ‘rationalise’ our faults, preferring to blame something ‘out there’: another person, or an institution such as the church, rather than acknowledge, especially to a stranger, a personal moral weakness or mere conformism in behaviour. If I engage in behaviour which is contrary to my church’s moral teaching, it is easier to condemn the teaching as ‘out of touch with today’ than to acknowledge any failing on my own part. Human beings also seek the comfort of a certain cognitive and emotive consistency in their attitude towards themselves: it is difficult for us to maintain an attitude of moral disapproval towards some aspect of our own current and continuing behaviour. If we don’t choose to change our actions, we tend to nudge our self-evaluation towards neutrality or approval.
To be asked for reasons for behaviour that one has not much thought about can prompt a quick search for whatever reasons come most readily to hand. The reader cannot fail to have noticed the numerous reasons given which refer to matters currently prominent in the mass media, or which repeat without much conviction or evidence of personal experience, the age-old taunts against religion which gain stronger currency and publicity when the attitude of the dominant culture, voiced by influencers and opinion-leaders, is hostile to religion. So there are some reasons given which, while they may be perfectly genuine and actual motives, sound second-hand, matters more of hearsay than experience, and less plausible as accounts of personal motives. Without much deeper knowledge of the circumstances of individuals, and much more searching inquiry, it is not possible to arrive at firm conclusions on their explanatory value.

**Supremacy of individual authority**

Nonetheless, there is a recurring theme in very many responses – perhaps most, which is highly significant as an indicator of a key characteristic of Gen Y spirituality. It is the supremacy of the authority of the individual’s personal experience and personal judgment of all matters, doctrinal or moral, and a vigorous rejection of the authority of religious institutions, of their right to impose or urge their teachings on their adherents or on society more generally. Of course this is not new; the steady swing of the balance against the authority of tradition, and towards that of personal judgment, has been noted and commented on for at least the last hundred years, and historians of ideas would locate its roots three or four hundred years further back, in the Renaissance and the Reformation. But it seems to have reached a certain completeness, the level of an absolute and taken-for-granted truth, only over the last three generations. The implications of this change for individual identity and for religious institutions are discussed in our conclusions in Chapter 12.

**Church ‘Irrelevant’?**

The issue most commonly mentioned was the ‘irrelevance’ of the church to life today: the church was ‘out of touch’, ‘unable to connect with people today, with the modern world’. These terms are very frequently used in critiques of the church, and deserve careful consideration. It was often clear from the context that what was complained of was not that the church’s teachings do not deal with issues with which today’s people are concerned, but that they do so in a way that runs counter to majority opinion, and that respondents disagree with.

The results for social inquiry of these questions on why people chose not to attend religious services were mixed, containing some gems which could not have been discovered in any other way, and other material which was more difficult to interpret. These considerations also apply when assessing the results of two further questions asked at later points in the survey, which used the same open-ended technique: why some people no longer identify with a denomination, and why they no longer believe in God.

**Private prayer**

After attendance at worship services, personal prayer is one of the commonest religious practices. How often do Gen Y young people take a moment by themselves to pray? The question specified ‘by yourself’, to exclude family grace before meals and the like. Those who did not believe in God were presumed not to pray to God; those uncertain about God were not asked this question. Responses are shown in Table 4.9.

**Denomination**

Table 4.9 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Frequency of private prayer by denomination
(percent of denomination)
The proportion of all groups (except non-identifiers) who prayed at least once a day was surprisingly high – rising to half of the Other Christian group. It is still high in the Other Religions group, and both of these groups had very small proportions who never or rarely prayed. Fewer Catholics and Anglicans prayed daily; but when the percentage who said they prayed between once a month and a few times a week is added to those who prayed once a day or more often, the totals are higher than the levels of religious belief in these groups would have led us to expect.

In table 4.9 above, those who pray once a day and those who pray more than once a day are combined. If these two categories are separated, we find that in the Other Christian group, 29% pray once a day, and an additional 20% several times a day. The denomination within the Other Christian group which had the highest proportion of adherents who prayed several times a day was Pentecostal. In the Other Religion group, 23% pray once a day (predominantly Muslim or Hindu), and an additional 11% several times a day (all of the latter were Muslim).

Age
There were only small differences in frequency of prayer across age groups, except for the significantly higher proportion of the 40-59 age group who pray once or more a day. As we would guess, these are slightly more likely to be women than men.

Scripture reading
In some religions, private reading of, or meditation on, the scriptures is a prominent feature of personal piety. The survey question on this practice was adapted to the religion of the interviewee. Christians were asked: 'How often do you read the Bible when you are by yourself?' (for Muslims, 'Bible' was replaced by 'Koran', etc.). Responses to this question according to denomination, and collapsed from more detailed categories, are presented in Table 4.10.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unbeliever/uncertain (not asked the question)</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never to less than once a month</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month to a few times a week</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One or more times a day</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most denominations in the Other Christian group are churches of the Reformation, for whom the scriptural Word has unchallenged supremacy as the sole norm of faith. This emphasis in teaching is reflected in the practice of their youngest adherents – a majority read the Bible at least
occasionally, and more than one-third, at least once a week. By contrast, much lower proportions of Catholics and Anglicans read the scriptures privately as often as once a week. There were no significant differences by age, but the usual trends are showing: Boomers, and especially women in that age group, tend to read scripture more often.

Other religious practices
Respondents were asked whether, in the last year, they had: prayed out loud or silently together with one or both parents (or, for those over age 24, ‘with any other member of your household’), other than at mealtimes or at religious services; chosen to wear jewellery or clothing that expresses religious or spiritual meaning;\(^\text{10}\) listened to religious CDs or tapes by a religious music group; or taken part in a group associated with a religious organisation, such as a youth group, a music group, a study group or a prayer group. Responses by denomination are shown in Table 4.11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>In the past year, respondent has</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prayed with family other than at meals or religious services</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worn religious jewellery, clothing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listened to religious CDs or tapes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken part in a religious group…</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: this is a different kind of table from the foregoing ones: there is no row of ‘100s’ at the bottom because the table shows only the percentages who engaged in each of 4 different practices. So 45% of Other Christians prayed with the family, (and the rest of the Other Christians in Gen Y did not); 19% of Anglicans have worn religious jewellery or clothing in the past year, and so on.

Other Christians are far ahead of other groups on all of these practices except for the wearing of religious emblems. Their use of Gospel music is well known and its appeal to their members is clear from the table. These practices are typical of their religious style. The relatively much higher level of participation in youth groups (no doubt Bible Study groups figure prominently here) is a key to the consistent strength of evangelical and Pentecostal churches within Generation Y, that we have now seen demonstrated across a whole range of beliefs and practices.

Catholics are rather higher on family prayer and the use of religious emblems than their performance on other measures would have led us to expect. Apparently their tradition of praying together as a family retains some strength. A third of Catholic respondents have in the past year been involved in some kind of religious group. The Catholic Church also maintains a large network of schools, which succeed in attracting about half its school-age members. These were chosen long ago as the spearhead of Catholic pastoral strategy for the religious socialisation of school-age youth, rather than Sunday schools or youth groups.\(^\text{11}\)

None of these ‘other religious practices’ is really characteristic of Anglicans, but they have the same proportion of their youth who have been involved in religious groups as Catholics (one third).

For young Generation Y Christians, there is a very strong association between involvement in a religious youth group, music group, study group or prayer group, and all the other measures of belief and commitment, although it is impossible to determine which of these factors influences the other, and most likely the causality is mutual: that is, belief and commitment lead someone to join one of these groups, and their involvement in the group strengthens other forms of commitment.
The Other Religion group does not have many of its young members involved in group activities. This is easily understood: most of those in this group would be children of fairly recent immigrants, and their religious bodies have not had the chance to put in place the infrastructure and leadership support necessary to develop a network of youth groups. The Christian denominations have had more than two centuries of lead-time on this task in Australia.

**Religious experiences**

Unfortunately there was little time in the survey for investigating the fascinating topic of religious experience. However, a few short questions were included, with respondents being asked if they had ever: ‘had an experience of spiritual worship that was very moving and powerful’; ‘experienced a definite answer to prayer or specific guidance from God’; ‘witnessed or experienced what [they] believed was a miracle from God’; or ‘made a personal commitment to God’. The last item was intended to include the ‘born-again’ experience and similar experiences on the part of those who would not use that term. Table 4.12 shows religious experiences according to denomination.

**Denomination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Respondent has experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving, powerful spiritual worship</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer to prayer</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miracle from God</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal commitment to God</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an era when the authority of personal experience has superseded that of tradition, of religious organisations, community elders and family, the significance of experiences such as these can hardly be overestimated.

Almost two-thirds of the Other Christian group – participants in what are pre-eminently ‘religions of experience’ – had at some stage made a personal commitment to God. High proportions of the group also responded positively on the other three items. Perhaps the only surprise in this set is the 41% of Catholics who said they had made a personal commitment to God. This seems high in the light of their responses on other belief and practice items, but recall that the question asked: ‘Have you ever...’. On all of these items, respondents may be recalling an experience from a more fervent phase of their past – not necessarily something typical of their current spirituality.

**Age and gender**

Analysis by age and gender shows a pattern which by now is very familiar: no significant differences between age groups, or between men and women, except that the women of the Baby Boomer generation (40-59) are about twice as likely as their menfolk, and significantly more likely than either boys or girls within Gen Y, to have had all four of these experiences.

Obviously, respondents from this eldest of the three generations have had a greater length of life-experience within which to have ever had the experience in question, but this has not resulted in the Baby Boomer men’s scores being higher than those of Generation Y males except on the experience of worship (22%).
The small proportion of 13-18 year-olds who have ever made a commitment of their lives to God (23% of boys, 31% of girls), and the even smaller proportion who have ever had a ‘moving and powerful’ experience of worship (13% of boys, 17% of girls), is remarkable, given that research on religious experience since the time of William James has identified this stage of life as one when experiences of religious conversion frequently occur. Perhaps worship in many churches nowadays is designed or conducted in a way that does not facilitate an affective impact – or not on any youth who happen to be present.

Conclusion
Surveying religious practices in this chapter, we found that attendance at religious services was quite low, even among those in Generation Y who are believers and are adherents of a religion or denomination; however that of the parents’ generation was even lower at their current stage of life. There is evidence both of a sharp decline having taken place in the 1960s and 70s, and of further decline since the Baby Boomers were in their youth. It is difficult to see any likelihood of youth seeking spiritual nourishment from most of the churches as they are now, so many are the points at which the doctrines and style of religious organisations conflict with strongly-held beliefs and values entrenched in the Generation Y worldview and ethos. Nonetheless, a significant minority of young people clearly found the communal life and activities of their churches highly attractive. Those who did take part, even occasionally, strongly affirmed that the church community and its services were welcoming and helpful. These are not the dissatisfactions leading youth to withdraw from active involvement.

Several kinds of personal, private religious practices, on the other hand, were maintained at a much higher level than institutional involvement. There appears to be a still strong level of personal ‘spiritual consciousness’ which youth do not see as related to what goes on in churches – there is too wide a gap between elementary experiences of transcendence and the elaborate systems of doctrine and worship which evolved over centuries during which everyday life was saturated with religious symbols.13

We were fortunate to encounter an interviewee, Fiona, 18, who despite insisting that she was an atheist, revealed a much more complex awareness. Here are her comments made while looking at a series of pictures:

*I’ve got these photos, I’ll lay them out, so could you tell me which one says the most about your life and why?*

[Looks at picture of hiker] It’s hard because as I said before I’m a bit materialistic and am kind of more like computers and books and debating rather than hiking or being outdoorsy, I’m not interested in that. Science and technology is really my thing but a lot of the time it isn’t really. [Business scene in office] Like that one, the commerce one is probably what my life is, on one level and what it might seem, because money matters a lot and just having that kind of success and probably being a perfectionist. [Picks up photo of church stained glass window] It’s funny actually, that one, I’m not religious in any way at all I’m really atheistic but I don’t know, just how it is beautiful. I don’t understand it, I mean that kind of thing like trying to figure out why I’m not religious or what I do believe in is a big part of my life because I have got so many people telling me that they are not religious or they believe this and they believe that. So many of the international stuff, it’s conflict over religion, and I just don’t understand how people can believe certain things. So maybe like a culmination of the two, that’s probably what it is, the bare bones and then trying to figure out what that means.

The smaller churches, mostly Protestant and conservative, comprising the Other Christian group, very clearly excelled the much larger and older denominations in achieving the participation of young people from Generation Y and developing their spirituality. They may have found ways of taking today’s youth as they are, connecting with this ‘spiritual consciousness’ at a level which does not assume too much, and inviting them forward from that point in small and appropriate steps.
Helen, aged 15, was excited when relating her discovery of a church that she felt was really in tune with what she was looking for:

My friend from school actually brought me to the church once, and I enjoyed it. I’ve been Christian my whole life, I’ve been brought up as a Christian and so I really wanted to go because it was more up beat and it had a live band and music, which my other church doesn’t have and then she kept telling me about events and stuff, and I wanted to try out the cell groups, which is more like a prayer group. You all get together and pray and one person preaches and you worship as well, and it sounded really interesting, and I wanted to go.

To view these findings as a crisis of church attendance among Generation Y, as some churches reportedly have done, would be to take a superficial view, mistaking a symptom for the cause. At the very least, it is a question of a more fundamental crisis of faith, which, we shall argue, has its roots even deeper in the lack of a coherent Christian worldview and ethos, and in the radical individualisation of young people.

We have seen many ways in which denominations differ in their appeal to Gen Y, and encounter different obstacles in ministry to them. So the agenda for the next chapter is to look more closely at individual denominations and the differences between them, in relation to Generation Y.
It is time to step back from the mass of detail and gather together the findings so far presented. In this chapter, we synthesise what has been learned about the main denominations and religious groups.¹

We begin by unpacking the ‘Other Christian’, and ‘Other Religion’ groups, to shed some further light on the Christian denominations and other religions grouped under these headings.

**Other Christian and Other Religion**

Throughout the two previous chapters, many smaller religious and denominational groups of particular interest to some readers have remained veiled within these two aggregate categories. The reason for this was mentioned at the outset: the numbers in such groups are relatively small, and when further subdivided (e.g. across the different responses to a question), produce percentages based on numbers too small to be reliable as a basis for comparison.

**Comparison of religiosity of all groups on the belief scale and the practice scale**

However, we can shed some light on the characteristics of these smaller sub-groups by looking at the average score for each group as a whole on each on two scales – the first, a composite measure of beliefs, and the second, of practices (see Table 5.1). ² Both measures have a range of 1-10. Only those who said they believed in God were assigned a score; those who did not believe or were uncertain (about half of Generation Y, including most of those with No Religious Identification) were not asked many of the questions which are components of the scales. Scores have not been calculated for groups whose numbers are not large enough to give reliable results. These are marked NA in the table. The two denominations numerous enough to have been explicitly identified throughout the chapter – Anglican and Catholic – have been left in the table so that they can be compared with the sub-groups within the Other Christian and Other Religion categories.

With one exception, the scale items are not specific to any religion, but consist of the beliefs and practices discussed in the two preceding chapters, which are largely common to most religions – the place of religion in life, attendance at religious services, prayer. The exception is the question about belief in Jesus, which was not asked of those who identified themselves as belonging to a religion other than Christian.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christian denominations:</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Churches of Christ</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1 should be interpreted with caution. Because of the small numbers in many groups, few of the differences in scores are statistically significant; however some clear trends are evident.

Members of Pentecostal churches responded positively to more of the belief and practice items than did members of other denominations. Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and those who identified as ‘Christian’ without further specification had a similar pattern of responses. These five conservative Protestant groups together make up 10 percent of Gen Y and are largely responsible for the pre-eminence, on so many measures, of the Other Christian group. Uniting Church members (2.5 percent of Gen Y) have lower scores on both scales than the group of denominations just mentioned, and higher scores than Anglicans.

Among other religions, Muslims stood out as having a high proportion affirming traditional religious beliefs. They were comparable with the Other Christian group in this respect.

**Differences between men and women**

The chapters on religious beliefs and practices noted occasional differences between the responses of men and women, particularly within the 40-59 age group. These differences do not hold across the whole range of beliefs and practices, but are confined to just a few items – so they do not appear when men and women are compared on the belief scale and the practices scale.

**Comparison of Gen Y and the two older generations**
In the same way as was done for denominations, mean scores on the belief and practice scales were constructed for each of five age groups: the age groups within Generation Y and the two older generations.

Table 5.2 All (aged 13-59): Belief and practice scales by age group (mean score on each scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Belief scale</th>
<th>Practice scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-39 (Gen X)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59 (Boom)</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are no significant differences between age groups on either scale. Two striking findings emerge from this table. Although partly shown in previous tables, findings are much more obvious when the two summary scales are analysed by age group. First, there is very little variation by age within Gen Y. Second, in terms of spirituality based on traditional religion, across a wide range of beliefs and practices, Gen Y believers are hardly different at all from the believers among their parents’ generation, the Baby Boomers.

But this similarity must not obscure an even more important difference: a lower proportion of Gen Y are Christian than was the case with the Boomer generation when they were this age. We have to hold the following two facts together: they are logically compatible, despite the apparent clash:

- Gen Y believers are very similar in their style of spirituality to those of the 40-59 generation who have remained Christian, and a similar proportion of Gen Y and Boomers are Christian now: Gen Y (46 percent) Boomers (49 percent);

- But the spirituality of Gen Y as a whole is very different from that of the Baby-Boomers thirty-five years ago, when they were about the same age as Gen Y are now.

The Census of 1971 recorded the percentages of the whole population belonging to various denominations; it is instructive to compare them with the corresponding figures for 2006.

Table 5.3 Population of Australia: Selected religious denominations at the Censuses of 1971 and 2006, all ages. (percent of Australian Population) (©ABS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Census 1971</th>
<th>Census 2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPRC / Uniting*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Christian</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'No religion'</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that the proportion of the population who are Christian has declined by 22% over the last thirty years, especially among Anglican and Uniting Church adherents. Not shown in the table, but of interest: when the number of Pentecostals was first reported separately in the 1976 census, they were 0.3 percent of the population; by 2006, they had grown to well over 1 percent.³

So Gen Y are beginning at a lower starting point. If they continue to abandon Christianity at the same rate as the Boomers have over the past thirty years, Gen Y will contain many fewer Christians by the time they are 30 years older. Significant proportions of Gen Y former members of each major denomination or group have already disassociated themselves from membership before turning 25.

The following chapter will provide further analysis and interpretation of these and other major changes.

A doubt may well linger about the similarity of Gen Y and ‘Boomer’ Christians asserted above. There may be little difference by age across all religions and denominations, but some may wonder: ‘Could there have been significant changes across age groups within our denomination – changes that are obscured by lumping all denominations together’? Are older Anglicans, Catholics, Other Christians really much the same as the youngest ones? And are they similar on the really important questions? A lengthy table was produced for each denomination, listing the main questions and the responses from Gen Y and the two older age groups separately. There were so few significant differences that the tables are not reproduced here. Those differences which were found, are mentioned in the summaries for each denomination, which follow shortly.

**Features of Gen Y traditional spirituality compared across denominations**

Table 5.4 is a summary providing a comprehensive view of the proportion of each major denominational group who affirm particular beliefs or perform various practices. The more important items which have been discussed separately in previous chapters are brought together here for convenience and ease of comparison, but do not require further comment.
Table 3.14 Only one religion is true  
| 20 | 11 | 39 | 17 | 4 | 13 |

Table 3.15 OK to pick and choose beliefs  
| 76 | 71 | 54 | 68 | 6 | 37 |

Table 3.17 Morals are relative  
| 44 | 59 | 40 | 51 | 63 | 56 |

Table 3.19 Faith (V) important in shaping life  
| 26 | 37 | 61 | 43 | 5 | 25 |

Table 3.20 Jesus was God and rose  
| 52 | 57 | 67 | NA | NA | 56 |

Definitely believe in:  
- Table 3.21 Miracles  
  | 56 | 59 | 78 | 57 | 12 | 39 |
- Table 3.21 Life after death  
  | 63 | 69 | 70 | 72 | 42 | 56 |
- Table 3.21 Angels  
  | 51 | 61 | 70 | 56 | 24 | 44 |
- Table 3.21 Demons / evil spirits  
  | 35 | 39 | 60 | 41 | 23 | 35 |

Table 4.2 Attend svcs once a month/more  
| 27 | 36 | 61 | 32 | 3 | 24 |

Table 4.4 Attenders: ch usually welcoming  
| 82 | 81 | 86 | 92 | 72 | 83 |

Table 4.6 Attenders: svcs usually boring  
| 21 | 14 | 19 | 24 | 11 | 17 |

Table 4.9 Private prayer: 1/mo - few/wk  
| 35 | 50 | 34 | 31 | 7 | 18 |

Table 4.9 Private prayer: 1/day - few/day  
| 23 | 21 | 49 | 34 | 2 | 17 |

Table 4.11 Prayed with family  
| 17 | 35 | 45 | 27 | 5 | 21 |

Table 4.11 Wore religious jewellery, clothing  
| 19 | 40 | 38 | 44 | 6 | 22 |

Table 4.11 Listened to religious CDs/tapes  
| 23 | 25 | 59 | 37 | 4 | 21 |

Table 4.11 Took part in a religious group  
| 31 | 32 | 57 | 27 | 5 | 23 |

Table 4.12 Have ever had experience of:  
- Spiritual worship  
  | 16 | 23 | 58 | 36 | 5 | 21 |
- Answer to prayer  
  | 29 | 30 | 58 | 32 | 7 | 24 |
- Miracle from God  
  | 25 | 23 | 46 | 34 | 5 | 19 |

Table 4.12 Personal commitment to God  
| 40 | 41 | 64 | 44 | 8 | 29 |

Note: This summary contains most, but not all, of the tables by denomination in the previous two chapters.

Anglicans, Catholics, Protestants: a profile of each group

The most basic finding concerning denominations within Christianity, explored at the start of chapter 3, is that members of Generation Y identified themselves with a religion or denomination in much lower proportions than the Census would lead us to expect, and almost half of the Gen Y sample indicated that they did not identify with any denomination.

Further, we were able to show that significant proportions of former members of each major denomination or group had later disassociated themselves from membership.

Here are some of the main findings that have emerged concerning each denomination within Gen Y (and the Other Religion and No Religious Identification groups).

Anglicans

Anglicans constitute 8 percent of Gen Y, which is 6 percent lower than the Census indicated for this denomination within this age group in 2001. Twenty-six percent of former Gen Y Anglicans said in the survey that they now had no denominational identification.

Looking at the collected findings on this denomination in Tables 5.1 and 5.4 above, it appears that Anglican members of Gen Y are less likely to affirm religious beliefs or engage in religious practices than Catholics or members of the conservative Protestant denominations in the Other Christian group. There are some exceptions: Anglicans were more likely than
Catholics to say they felt ‘very close’ to God, and less likely than Catholics to say that ‘morals are relative’.

Although we did not administer survey questionnaires to the parents of individual Gen Y survey respondents, we surveyed a sample from the generation to which most of their parents belong – now aged 40-59 years. Strictly speaking, there were no significant differences between Anglicans in these two groups. However, there were a number of trends worth mentioning, with the caution that they are not hard and fast conclusions.

In comparison with Anglicans of their parents’ generation, Gen Y Anglicans tended to be:

- more likely to attend religious services a little more often;
- less likely than women in the older generation ever to have had a powerful experience of worship; and
- more likely to have made a commitment to God.

Catholics

Catholics make up 21 percent of Gen Y, 5 percent lower than the Census indicated for this denomination within this age group in 2006. Twenty percent of Gen Y former Catholics said in the survey that they now had no denominational identification. On nearly all measures of belief and practice, the denomination was positioned between Anglican and Other Christian – closer to the former. Only on belief in life after death did the proportion of Catholics approach that of Other Christians (and, as we shall see, Catholics’ high score on this item is not a testimony to their orthodoxy, but to their propensity to believe also in reincarnation, and generally to combine eclectically a range of New Age beliefs with their continuing Catholic beliefs and identification.) On the belief and practice scales, Catholics scored lower than conservative Protestants.

Compared with their parents’ generation – those now aged 40-59 years – Gen Y Catholics were very similar on most items of belief and practice, with the following exceptions: they were:

- more likely to affirm that God relates to us as a person;
- less likely to find it ‘okay to pick and choose one’s beliefs’ (both of these differences are striking, because they show Catholics aged 40-59 as more extreme in their rejection of some traditional beliefs than Generation Y);
- the younger Generation Y Catholics were more likely than Baby Boomers to agree that ‘morals are relative’; and
- less likely to claim that faith was important or very important in shaping their lives.

Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches: the question of boundaries

Between them, these three churches, as of 2006, still included 50% of the Australian population and 79% of Christians. They are accustomed to being numerous and well-endowed, and to playing a role in civic and political life. Over many years, they have developed extensive infrastructures providing a wide range of services to their own members, and also to the public in the areas of education, health and welfare. Their memberships were not confined to any social class; they attracted adherents from the most advantaged to the most disadvantaged in Australian society.

Over the last forty years of the twentieth century, as the sectarian bitterness that marred previous eras ebbed away, these three churches embraced a new spirit of ecumenical inter-church cooperation. The same spirit of large-heartedness and tolerance characterised these
churches’ attitudes towards their own members and towards the wider Australian society. In practice, they were not highly demanding when it came to regular attendance or contributions, and gave their ‘grey sheep’ the benefit of the doubt. However all three have in recent years experienced plunging attendance rates, and successive censuses show declines in membership for both the Anglican and Uniting churches, while the formerly vigorous growth of the Catholic church as a percentage of the population has begun to decline. The fate of all three churches is similar to that of other ‘mainline’ churches in Western countries whose membership is declining as that of evangelical and Pentecostal churches grows. They face a new challenge on the question of boundaries.

A strategy of inclusiveness, even if adopted on high principles of charity and respect for individual differences, may attract disproportionately those who prefer a style of faith that makes fewer demands. High-demand groups, in contrast, have a greater internal strength and cohesion which is strongly attractive to many potential recruits. In the conclusion to his *The faith of Australians*, sociologist and pastor Hans Mol offers some sobering reflections on the need for ‘strong boundaries’ if churches are to survive. Churches which have weak boundaries between themselves and the surrounding secular culture, Mol concluded, make little impact on that culture, but themselves become secularised, lose their distinctiveness and are no longer attractive to adherents. For churches with stronger boundaries, the reverse is true. The high quality of Mol’s scholarship, his insight into the theological as well as the sociological dimension of his findings, and the sage and still valid reflections which, as a committed Lutheran, he was able to offer on the implications for churches of a rapidly changing religious situation, give his work enduring value. Although the religious situation in Australia has changed considerably in the past twenty years, it has done so in the directions he anticipated, and many of his interpretations of the underlying trends in Australian religion remain relevant to the contemporary situation. His predictions are confirmed by the decline of the ‘big three’ churches and the growing strength of churches in the Other Christian group.

**Other Christian / Protestant**

Members of the Other Christian group of denominations, which consists almost entirely of conservative Protestant churches, account for 17% of Gen Y, the same proportion as the Census indicated for this denomination within this age group in 2006, despite the fact that seventeen percent of former members of Other Christian denominations said that they now had no denominational identification. It follows that these losses have been equalled by the recruitment of new members – a remarkable feat in the present climate. Looking back to Table 5.4, there is only one measure of belief or practice on which this group scored significantly lower than any other: wearing of religious jewellery or other symbols; some conservative groups regard this practice not as religious but idolatrous. On most measures, they were markedly higher than all other groups. Although they constitute only one in six members of Gen Y, the Other Christian group undoubtedly contains the most vigorously alive churches in spiritual terms.

When Other Christians aged 13-24 were compared with those aged 40-59 years, there were more significant differences than was the case with similar comparisons within the other denominations, but all differences favoured the younger generation!

Gen Y Other Christians, compared with Baby Boomer Other Christians:
- attend church services more frequently;
- are more likely to say they feel close to God (and about as likely as the older group to say they feel very close);
have a higher proportion affirming the divinity and resurrection of Jesus; and
have a higher proportion praying between once a month and once a week (and
about the same proportion as their elders praying daily).

Thus the Other Christian denominations are unique in another respect: they do show
differences from their parents’ generation, but all in the reverse direction from what many
expect of today’s youth: they are more religious. There are a number of possible explanations
for this ‘trend-bucking’ phenomenon:
- Is the style of religiosity of these denominations particularly well suited to youth,
  and less so to adherents as they age and are subjected to secularising influences in
  the realms of work and public life? Recall that 17% of former members of Other
  Christian denominations said they had later ceased to identify with any
denomination. This was a lower percentage than other denominations, and the
loss was recouped by growth, but it is still large. If it is true that religious style of
these denominations suits youth better than older adults, the challenge for these
churches will be to adapt to the different and more complex religious needs of
maturing members as they grow older.
- Alternatively, are we seeing the results of effective campaigns of evangelism in
  recent years aimed at Generation Y?  
- Or is there some combination of both sets of influences?

Deciding between the two explanations would be assisted by a historical study of former
generations in these churches to see if they, when youthful, were similarly more religious
than their parents. If so, the ‘age effect’ explanation is more probable: the religious style of
these churches suits youth better than mature age members. Or a group of current young
members could be monitored as they move into their middle years, to see if their enthusiasm
cools. If international comparative data were available, and countries could be identified
with similar cultural and social conditions where there had not been a recent emphasis on
youth-directed evangelism, yet the same phenomenon was seen (youthful adherents more
religious than older ones), this would also favour the ‘age-effect’ hypothesis. Further
exploration of either potential explanation of this intriguing finding lies outside the scope of
the present study.

Other Religions
Followers of religions other than Christian were found to constitute 6 percent of Gen Y,
which is only 1 percent less than the Census indicated for these religions within Gen Y in
2006. It is inevitable that in a survey, they will only be present in very small numbers.
However, the Census records their substantial and growing numbers in the population. They
are predominantly from the Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu traditions, with very small numbers
(in our sample) from Judaism and Sikh religion. The majority, except for those who are
Jewish, are the children of parents born in overseas countries, and are much more likely than
those of other denominations to have been born overseas themselves.

Although estimates are less reliable for this small grouping, it seems that about 19% of
former members of religions within the Other Religions group no longer identify with any
religion. It follows that these losses must have been more than compensated for by the
addition of new members. Immigration is one obvious source – the proportion of Buddhists,
Muslims and Hindus among immigrants is much higher than in the Australian population; but
there have been converts from the Australian-born population also.
The religious fervour of the youthful followers of Other Religions (only the three just mentioned were present in appreciable numbers in the survey sample) was found to be at a very high level.

In Table 5.4, the proportion of followers of Other Religions responding positively to many items exceeded the level of Catholics and Anglicans, and often rivalled that of Other Christians. On one item, belief in life after death, the Other Religions group had the highest proportion of believers – Buddhists and Hindus believe in reincarnation, and Muslims in Paradise. The 92 percent who found the community at their place of worship usually welcoming was apparently the highest across all religions/denominations. Of course, in their case, meeting for worship fulfils many functions other than the strictly religious. Since most are of immigrant stock, religious gatherings are also a convocation of their ethnic group, gathering for fellowship and collaboration in what to many is still a strange land.

Yet these young people also show signs of belonging to their adopted abode, and to the same generation as other young Australians. They favour ‘picking and choosing’ among religious beliefs and assert the relativity of morals in about the same proportions as the more lackadaisical Christians – almost certainly thereby evoking severe disapproval from their tradition-minded elders! They will hear a fiddler on the roof!

No attempt to chart the relationship between the beliefs and practices of the Gen Y followers of Other Religions and 40-59 year-olds from the same religions could succeed, because there are practically no representatives of those religions in that older generation in our control group sample, and not many in the Australian population.

**No Religious Identification**

To the surprise of the researchers, as many as 48 percent of Gen Y stated that they did not consider themselves to belong to any Christian denomination or other traditional world-religion. This figure is 13 percent higher than indicated in the 2006 Census, even if we count those who do not state a religion in the Census as having no religion. Only 6 percent of those raised without any religion, said that they had later joined one; 94 percent stayed as they were.

The category ‘No Religious Identification’ (NRI for short) held particular interest for this study, and two later chapters of this report are devoted to those who belong to it: they are either New Agers or Seculars. We have already discussed at length the characteristics and motivation of the large number of former Christians who have moved away from identifying with a denomination, examining the reasons they provided for this reorientation.

The NRIs appear to have the most effective ‘evangelistic’ campaign of all: their growth rate far outstrips that of all other groups, and not content with relying solely on the time-honoured strategy of recruitment by procreation, they have successfully ‘converted’:

- 20 percent of former Christians in Generation Y
- 38 percent of former Christians in Generation X
- 29 percent of former Christians among the Baby Boomers

– these are the percentages of those age groups who were raised Christian, but in 2005 stated that they did not identify with any Christian denomination or other religion. The churches would surely be pleased to emulate the evangelistic success of these ‘children of this world’.
A high proportion of this group said they had never believed in God, followed any religion, or attended religious services (apart from occasions such as weddings or funerals). However those in the group who previously identified with a denomination retained some vestiges of belief: in God, and several other Christian teachings. A majority of those who did not believe in God opted for some higher being or life-force. 42 percent of this group believe in a life after death; for many who accept New Age beliefs, as we shall see, that means reincarnation on earth. Is this evidence of the ‘belief without belonging’ phenomenon? As we indicated in our discussion of this theory in Chapter 2, we doubt that ‘belief-lite’, even from a purely sociological point of view, is religious in character; ‘religious opinion’ would describe it better, and it seems to have few practical consequences in terms of impact on a person’s life. On all the measures of religious practice, the NRIs were of course, very low.

In the following chapter we explore the various levels of commitment, then turn to a more analytical task: seeking to discover the underlying factors which influence the beliefs and practices of traditional spirituality. We then draw our discussion of traditional spirituality to a conclusion with a summary of findings, before moving on to explore the other two strands in the spirituality of Generation Y, New Age and Secular, which stand in stark contrast with the more familiar traditional type with which we have begun.
Chapter 6
Searching for Gen Y high and low
Committed, Regular, Marginal and Nominal Christians

Having completed the task of mapping the landscape of traditional spiritualities in Generation Y we turn to a new task: more mining than mapping: analysing the different levels of commitment within traditional spirituality. After examining these different levels or sub-types of traditional spirituality, we will explore the factors which influence people towards higher or lower levels of commitment, and finally summarise our findings concerning traditional spirituality in Generation Y.

Figure 6.1 shows the whole set of spirituality types.

Figure 6.1 Gen Y (13-24): Spirituality types (percent of Gen Y).

Other
The small segment labelled ‘Other’ at the top of the left-hand pie consists of two groups: Other Religions (6% of Gen Y) and “Theists” (3%). The Other Religions group, discussed briefly in Chapter 5, are predominantly Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu – their spirituality type is Traditional, but naturally they are very different from Christianity. The ‘Theists’ are ‘solitary believers’: they affirm belief in God, but are otherwise religiously undefined: that is, they do not identify with any religion or denomination, whether Christian or non-Christian, they were not raised in any religion, they do not indicate belief in the resurrection or divinity
of Jesus; nor attend religious services; they are not seriously involved in alternative spiritualities; but because of their belief in a God, do not fit the Secular profile.

The New Age and Secular types are the subject of chapters 7 and 8; here we will explore the right-hand pie: the four components of the Christian version of the Traditional spirituality type.

Levels of commitment within the Traditional-Christian spirituality type

A large proportion of Generation Y (46%) base their spirituality on some version of Christian tradition, so more detailed analysis of this type was possible, and a number of sub-types emerged, classified in terms of the level of ethos in which the spirituality was expressed, as Committed, Regular, Marginal and Nominal Christians, as shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality Type</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed Christian</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Christian</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Christian</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The level of ethos refers to the degree of intensity or commitment with which the worldview is expressed in values and carried into practice. So, for Christians, the classification of levels used primarily the following criteria:

- Belief in God and in Jesus Christ.
- Identification with a Christian denomination (or at least with Christianity).
- Attendance at religious services.
- Private prayer.
- A low level of involvement in alternative spiritualities: people who identified as members of a Christian denomination but also endorsed a significant number of items from New Age belief systems or were seriously involved in associated activities were classed as belonging to the New Age spirituality type rather than the Christian traditional type.

The following table shows these spirituality types within each denomination. It also includes the New Age spirituality type, which might at first seem out of place. It is not uncommon for Gen Y Christians also to affirm various New Age beliefs, and those who do so are not automatically classified as New Age rather than Christian. However, there are some who, while still identifying with a Christian denomination, are involved in New Age beliefs and practices to such an extent that they were classified as belonging to the New Age, rather than the Traditional (Christian) spirituality type. We have tried to reflect both sides of their eclectic spirituality by continuing to list them with the denomination with which they still identify, while at the same time classifying them in the spirituality type which fits their actual beliefs and practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality Type</th>
<th>Denomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed Christian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Christian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>Christianity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2 Gen Y (aged 13-24) Christians & New Agers: Spirituality sub-type by denomination
(percent of denomination) 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Christian</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committed Christian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Christian</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(New Age)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not surprising to see that 29% of Other Christians were classified as Committed and 25% as Regular and that few of their members were classified as New Age. Although 20% were Marginal, the 18% who were merely Nominal members is much lower than the proportion of Nominals among Anglicans and Catholics. Higher percentages of Anglicans were in the Marginal (25%) and Nominal (42%) categories – almost half of Gen Y Anglicans were Nominal – and 13% were classified as New Age. At the top of the scale, a good proportion of Anglicans were Committed, but a notably small proportion were on the next rung down at Regular. It appears that young Anglicans are either fully involved or else hardly involved at all, with not many in between. Catholics were more likely than Anglicans or Other Christians to be New Age: 18% of Catholics were classified as New Age rather than Christian; a further 51% were Nominal or Marginal, 30% were Committed or Regular.

Here are the defining characteristics of the four levels within the Christian Traditional spirituality type: Committed, Regular, Marginal and Nominal Christians.

**Committed Christian (9% of Gen Y)**
- Identify with a Christian denomination.
- Believe definitely in God and Jesus (that Jesus was God and rose from the dead).
- Attend church weekly or more often.
- Pray weekly or more often.
- Have very little belief or involvement in alternative spiritualities.

The Committed are the ‘full-on Christians’. They are only a little flock. When we encountered them in interviews; they made an immediate impression. All were swimming against the tide, but confidently, not struggling. And using quite different strokes and styles; orthodoxy is by no means dull, conformist and clone-like in the young people who take this steep path. They came across as having made a distinct choice for themselves, and were more reflective and articulate than others on spiritual matters. Listen to Christine:

*What do you think God is like?*
I see him as my friend, a person I can depend on no matter what’s happening and I know that he loves me, no matter what, and if I totally screw up, then he’s still going to be there for me.

*And what about Jesus?*
I believe that he is my saviour and that he died to save me and everyone else.

*Has there ever been a time when you’ve doubted whether God exists or you’ve doubted the church?*
Um, I don’t think majorly. I don’t think I’ve ever really turned sort of my back on God. I mean, I think there’s definitely been times, little times, where, maybe it all doesn’t add up. I mean, really because I’m a very scientific type of person. There would be little times where it doesn’t add up or something, but I don’t think majorly.

*Would you hold a creationist view of the origin of the world?*
Yes. But my views are a little bit different. I do believe in the Big Bang, but I think that it was
God who created the Big Bang. So yeah, I don’t think so far - - I’ve found that what I think
conflicts with anything in the Bible. I mean, I still know that God created everything …
So was that something you came to yourself, or something you worked out at school?
I think - I wrestled with it for a long time, but that’s what I believed in the end.

And here is Amber, who had rediscovered her faith and sense of belonging to an evangelical
church:

Well, I guess looking at it now, it’s not bad but when I fell pregnant it was bad at the time, and I
guess getting me to be totally honest, what pulled me through was pretty much just having faith in
God and just turning back to him, and also I guess the support of my family and friends. I just had
so much support, and being alone I don’t think I would have survived. But, yeah, having the
support. Mostly probably of God, but my family and friends are so good and I’ve just never been
alone since then. You know, I’ve always had help and yeah, it’s been great after that.

The defining characteristics of the other types of traditional Christians are as follows, again
with some direct quotations from interviews with members of each type, to add a little flesh
to the definitional bones:

**Regular Christian (8%)**

- Identify with a Christian denomination.
- Believe definitely in God; do not reject the belief that Jesus was God and rose
  from the dead (but some are unsure about it, whereas the Committed group all
  believe definitely in the divinity and resurrection of Jesus).
- Attend church less than weekly, but at least once a month, and also pray once a
  month or more often (whereas all of the Committed group attended and prayed
  weekly or more often).
- Have very little belief or involvement in alternative spirituality.

‘Regular’ Christians share most of the characteristics of the Committed except their
dedication to very frequent (weekly) church attendance and prayer. Peter was 19 years old
when he was interviewed:

I definitely think that Catholicism has influenced me. I personally believe that Catholicism is the
right way, but I also think that my brand of Catholicism as a younger person is much more liberal.
I would like to see the Catholic Church become more progressive, rather than sticking to all old
values. Because that's the only way you can fire it in the future. … In my prayers I always say the
Our Father and the Hail Mary, and I pray I suppose, to God as the Trinity, God, Jesus, and the
Holy Spirit, and I am praying you know for my goals, like to help me, knowledge, wisdom,
understanding and that sort of thing, for exams, praying for my family like if anyone in the family
is like particularly sick or injured, that sort of thing; if they're going through a hard time I pray for
that. And like, well obviously I go to Mass on Sundays. Not every Sunday, Oh, well, a couple of
times a month.

**Marginal Christian (12%)**

- Identify with a Christian denomination, but lack one or more of the characteristics
  of the Regular type; some, although not identifying with a Christian
denomination, believe in Jesus’ divinity and resurrection, or attend a Christian
worship service once a month or more often.
- Belief in God is not excluded, but most are uncertain; many formerly believed in
God, but now prefer belief in ‘a spiritual power or life-force’.
- Continued acceptance of most (sometimes all) of the beliefs of the religion or
denomination; sometimes lack of acceptance of some core belief(s).
Belief in Jesus’ divinity and resurrection may be affirmed, uncertain, or (in a few cases) denied.

10 to 20% of them have some New Age beliefs, but few are seriously involved in New Age practices.

They attend religious services a few times a year.

Private prayer or other voluntary devotional practice is only occasional.

**Natasha** (age 16) is an example of this style:

I pray to God that I hope my aunt is safe with him. I pray that me and my mum and sister have a good, healthy life. Just stuff like that. Ah, yeah, once in a while I go [to church] sometimes, but mostly go on special occasions. Oh, it’s relaxing. Some things go on forever, like sermons. Ah I believe or what I believe, my religion believes, I believe that God is big and he’s the creator of this earth. I kind of believe what the Bible says but I believe my own stuff and like I don’t believe there’s a hell. I think God forgives us, every one of us. I just believe that God is with everyone, no matter if we do wrong, he’s there. He forgives everyone, no matter what you do. He’s there for us, supports us, but unlike us. When I’m really down, I start doubting that.

**Nominal Christian (17%)**

- Most of this large group have some traditional Christian beliefs, but little or no involvement with any denomination. They have had some experience of church-style religion and rejected it fairly completely.
- Most still identify with a Christian denomination, but not strongly; identification is acknowledged but not affirmed; those who do not identify were raised Christian or sometimes attend a Christian church.
- Most believe in God; a large minority believe also in Jesus; all remain clearly short of complete secular rejection of religion/spiritual reality.
- 10 to 20% of them have some New Age beliefs, but few are seriously involved in New Age practices.
- They do not attend church services, but many still pray.

**Andrew**, aged 13, has never been involved with a church:

*Do you ever pray?*

Oh, only once or twice, when I was really worried about stuff.

*And when you pray what were you praying to, or what were you praying?*

I was just praying to God, because some things had happened and I was worried about dying and stuff. I was really freaking about that. Kind of made me feel better, I suppose.

*But it’s also something you can do.*

Not that often. When I’m really in trouble.

*Okay. So, have you ever been involved in a church or a youth group?*

No, not at all.

*So what do you believe about God? Do you think there is a God, for starters?*

Yeah, I do. I suppose, yes.

So I used to like go to church with Grandma sometimes. I still do now and then but no, our friend took us to one of their churches once and where people were fainting to prove their, you know, their trust or—and I don’t feel I fit in with that kind of activity. I’m too solo—solitaire. I just do my own thing my own way.

**Miriam**, aged 24:

... we’ll go to a Polish church at, you know, Easter and Christmas, because it’s Polish.... So we do that twice a year I guess. The old Christmas and Easter thing but we will go sometimes just by ourselves ... I’d still be, yeah, Catholic, yeah .... Just a non-practising one. ... Oh, when I was
younger I wanted to be a witch, a good witch that saved the world. That was about it. That was as far as that went.

The following table compares each of these subtypes or levels of traditional spirituality on the measures of spirituality introduced in the previous chapter. The right hand column includes not only all of these Christian traditional types, but *Gen Y as a whole*; that is, Gen Y including the other two major spirituality types – New Age and Secular. Naturally, the score for the whole of Gen Y on these measures of traditional spirituality is influenced by the substantial numbers whose spirituality is non-traditional.

**Table 6.3 Gen Y (aged 13-24) Traditional Christian spirituality type:**
Selected measures of spirituality by sub-type
(percent of each spirituality sub-type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-types of Christian spirituality</th>
<th>Committed</th>
<th>Regular</th>
<th>Marginal</th>
<th>Nominal</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Believe in God: Yes</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe in God: Unsure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe that Jesus was God and rose: (Definite)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God relates in a personal way</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How close feel to God most of time: (V) close*</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one religion is true</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK to pick and choose beliefs: (Str) disagree</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of faith in shaping life</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals are relative (Str) disagree</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely believe in:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-life after death</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-angels</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-demons / evil spirits</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-miracles</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-astrology</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-communicating with the dead</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-reincarnation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-psychics and fortune-tellers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never got seriously into New Age spirituality</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend religious services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– weekly or more often</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– monthly or more often</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find religious services boring: rarely or never</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find local church community welcoming: usually</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Took part in a religious group in past year</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray when alone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-daily</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-weekly or more often</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read the Bible privately weekly or more often</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Have experienced
The table is read as follows: looking at the row ‘God relates in a personal way’, 97% of those belonging to the Committed Christian spirituality type agreed with the statement; as did 93% of the Regular Christian group, 74% of Marginal Christians, 25% of Nominal Christians, and 39% of Gen Y as a whole. So the table serves as a detailed profile of the beliefs and practices of these four sub-types or levels of the Traditional (Christian) type.

The ‘alternative practices’ mentioned about halfway down the table were yoga, Eastern forms of meditation, Tarot, tai-chi. Very few of those with any level of traditional spirituality had engaged seriously in any of these practices. Involvement in these activities on the part of those belonging to other spirituality types is discussed in Chapter 7.

Committed or Regular = ‘Active’. Up to this point, the Committed and Regular types have been treated separately, so as to bring out the distinctiveness of the Committed: they are the nucleus of any group of believers, the ‘full-on’ Christians. However, for the more detailed analysis to follow, analysing a larger group will provide more reliable statistics, so the Committed and Regular types will be grouped together. And to avoid tiresomely repeating ‘Committed or Regular’, the combined group will be referred to as ‘Active Christians’; our three Christian sub-types of Traditional spirituality will then be: Active Christian, Marginal Christian and Nominal Christian.

Influences on Traditional Christian spirituality
Do the survey data reveal the factors which appear to influence young people to become or remain Active Christians (Committed or Regular)? By sifting repeatedly through the data, several candidates for this role were identified: denomination the respondent belongs to, parents’ attendance and commitment, whether the family talks about spiritual matters, attendance of friends, family intactness (whether the child lives with one or both natural parents), type of school attended, and then a whole range of demographic variables such as: age, gender, birthplace, SEIFA Advantage-disadvantage, State of residence, residing in capital city or regional area, whether still living at home, education/work status (whether at school, in tertiary education, working or unemployed), etc.

It was clear from early interviews that sometimes ethnicity plays a major role in shaping and supporting young people’s spirituality. Although the survey collected data on people’s own birthplace and that of their parents, there was no simple pattern of influence on spirituality associated with having been born overseas or having parents who were born overseas. Length of residence in Australia of the overseas-born (or of overseas-born parents) is a relevant factor, also the dominant religion in the country of origin.

Factors associated with being an Active Christian
Which factors appear to have had the strongest association with whether the person was an Active Christian or not? (Often, we’ll just say ‘Active’ for short.)

The following factors had strong ‘bivariate’ relationships with being Active; judgment is reserved on whether they are effective influences until they are tested in multivariate analysis.

**Denomination**

We have already seen that the denomination a person belongs to has a strong relationship with the likelihood of their being Active, especially if they belong to one of the denominations in the Other Christian group.

**Mother’s attendance at Church services**

Next, we look at how often the person’s mother attends (or attended) church services. Since we know from previous research that the religious practice of a person’s mother has a powerful influence on their own, we would expect a strong relationship between mother’s attendance at services, and whether the child is an Active Christian or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance of mother</th>
<th>Commitment of Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 or several per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is not Active</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is Active</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a different type of table from what has been used so far; it is the first in a series of similar tables, so more detail is presented in this first example. The row labelled at left “Child is Active” is the one to focus on. In the column headed ‘1 or several per year’, the table shows that only 16% of those whose mother attended church services only once or a few times a year, were in the Active category. The column percentages add to 100; so it is automatically the case that 84% of those whose mothers attended only once or twice a year are not in the Active group, as shown in the top row. This upper row will be omitted in the tables that follow in this set. As frequency of mother’s attendance increases, so does the likelihood that the child will be Active: 41% of those whose mother attended 1 to 3 times a month were Active; and 71% of those whose mother attended religious services weekly or more often (abbreviated as ‘Weekly+’) were in the Active category.

The figures indicate a strong relationship between the two variables. A young person whose mother attends weekly or more often is 4 to 5 times more likely to be an Active Christian than someone whose mother attends only once or a few times per year.

**Father’s attendance**

Here is a parallel table for the effect of father’s attendance, without the redundant upper row.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attendance of mother</th>
<th>Commitment of Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 or several per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is not Active</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is Active</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The relationship between father’s attendance at religious services, and the likelihood of the child being Active in spirituality type, is very similar to that for mother’s attendance. 43% of those whose fathers attend 1-3 times per month are Active Christians. Does mother’s attendance have a greater effect on daughters, and father’s attendance on sons, we wondered? It turns out: No, nor in reverse neither!

Friends’ attendance
Respondents were asked: ‘Do your closest friends usually attend religious activities with you?’ 60% of those whose friends attended church with them are Active; only 33% of those whose friends did not attend were Active. Attendance of friends is clearly important, but less so than attendance of parents: someone is twice as likely to be Active if they have friends who attend with them.

Parents’ enthusiasm for their religion
Other aspects of parents’ attitudes to religion have been shown in previous research to make an impact on their children. There is convincing research indicating that parents’ religiosity influences children more if it is perceived as ‘joyous’. Seeking to translate ‘joyous’ for our young respondents, the survey asked: ‘On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is ‘not at all enthusiastic’ and 5 is ‘very enthusiastic’, how enthusiastic is your mother about her religion?’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment of Child</th>
<th>Attendance of father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 or several per year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is Active</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures speak for themselves; the difference from low to high enthusiasm is of the order of 2.5: Gen Y people who rated their mothers’ enthusiasm for their religion as 4 or 5 (the 1 to 5 scale has been partly collapsed) were two and a half times more likely to be Active.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment of Child</th>
<th>Level of mother’s enthusiasm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is Active</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Father’s enthusiasm for his religion is as strongly related to the likelihood of the child being in the Active category as was Mother’s enthusiasm. Neither of these is as strong as were the relationships with parents’ attendance.
**Family conversation about religion**

Staying with family influences, the next question was: ‘How often, if ever, does your family talk about religion?’ The responses ranged from ‘never’ to ‘every day’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often family talks about religion</th>
<th>Commitment of Child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is Active</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About one third of children from families which never or rarely talk about religion are Active; but three quarters of those from families which talk about it every day are in the Active category.

**Family intactness**

Last in this list of family influences was family intactness: young people aged 13-17 were asked who they lived with now; and if they did not live with both their natural/biological parents, they were asked what age they were when they last lived with both of them (if they had ever done so). 21% of those aged 13-17 and living with both natural parents were Active; only 11% of those living with only one of their natural parents were Active.

**Type of secondary school attended**

Last on this list of ‘biographical’ influences is the type of secondary school the youth is attending (or attended – the question was asked of all Gen Y respondents, but not of those in the control group). If the school attended was private, its denominational affiliation was asked. Because ten different denominations were mentioned in response to this question, some represented by only small numbers of students, it was necessary to collapse the religious affiliation of the school into the categories Catholic and Other Private (the latter containing schools affiliated with e.g. Anglican, Baptist, ‘Christian’, Lutheran, and Uniting churches, as well as private schools not affiliated with any denomination).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of school attending / attended</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person is Active</td>
<td>Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11% of those attending Government secondary schools were Active; as were 26% of those attending Catholic schools and 30% of those attending other private schools (the difference between the latter two is not significant). The impact of church schools on students’ spirituality will be treated in detail in the discussion at the end of this chapter.

The other sources of possible influences on the spirituality of young people are demographic: age, gender, birthplace and so on.

**Factors with little or no influence**

*Difference between men and women*
It is especially interesting to note factors which might well have been expected to make a difference to whether a person would be Active or not, but which turned out to have *little or no influence*. The first, and it is important, is gender. 16% of males and 18% of females were Active. Being male or female makes little difference, among Gen Ys, to the probability of being Active. Yet here, as on most of our measures, women have slightly higher scores than men; like a faint echo in today’s young women of what was once a major difference. If we look beyond the boundaries of Gen Y to the older generations, although there is no male-female difference in the proportion of Actives in Gen X, among the Baby Boomers, 19% of women are Active, vs. only 9% of men. They are the last generation to retain some clear signs of gender difference in religiosity.\(^7\)

*Age*

Age had no major influence within Gen Y: Actives were fairly evenly distributed across the age range of Gen Y.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Boom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person is Active</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a tendency for the youngest group to have a higher proportion who are Active, but the difference from those in their late teens is not significant. But Generation X were significantly lower in Actives than Gen Y as a whole; the Boomers tend in the same direction (the lower level among males of that generation masks a higher level among females).

*Other demographic factors*

Other variables lacking significant influence were: years of education completed, years of tertiary education, and residing in an urban or a rural area.

Demographic factors which initially appeared to have an association with being Active were: living at home or away, parents’ birthplace, socio-economic status, education/work status (whether at school, in tertiary education, working or unemployed), residing in a capital city or a non-metropolitan region, and State of residence. Tables are not shown for these relationships, since they were later found in multivariate analyses to be non-significant.

*Looking for causes: multivariate analyses*

How can we speak with any confidence about ‘influences’ on spirituality? How do we know that any of the factors listed actually influence spirituality? Could not their association be due to mere coincidence? The rules of sociological method for determining whether an *association* between two variables is really one of *cause and effect*, are quite demanding:\(^8\) one of the requirements is that the supposed cause must be prior in time, or logically prior, to the effect: if there is an association between a and b, we must be sure, before concluding that a *causes* b, that the influence is not the other way round – perhaps b is influencing a! Take the following example: attendance at a church youth group in the past year is observed to be associated with a high level of spirituality. Attendance at the youth group *may* have influenced someone’s spirituality towards a higher level, but it could just as well be the case that the person’s previously high level of spirituality was what led them to join the group. For a more decisive verdict on issues like this, a study that follows people over time is ideal: if
their level of spirituality was lower before they joined the youth group, and higher afterwards (for a significant number of people, so that other random influences are cancelled out), the analyst is better able to argue that the youth group was influential. But this is much more difficult—sometimes impossible—to establish from a survey such as the present one that presents a single snapshot at one point in time.

There are some possible influences listed earlier in which the assumed direction of influence could be the reverse: a person’s high level of spirituality might cause more family conversation about spirituality than the other way round. It is certainly true that parents’ spirituality in many cases strongly influences the choice of the type of school which a child attends. But in other cases, the direction of possible influence is unambiguous; it is clearest when the proposed cause is prior *in time* to the effect, excluding any possibility of causation in the opposite direction.

But direction of influence is only one of the possible sources of confusion: there may be no genuine relationship between a and b at all: a third factor may be influencing both of them. How do we take account of multiple interacting influences, which affect each other as well as the spirituality of the young person who is at the centre of interest?

So far, we have shown simple relationships between two or three variables. The questions now posed require ‘multivariate’ analysis, using different techniques to consider the whole set of relationships between ‘independent’ and ‘dependent’ variables, along with the effect of other variables which ‘mediate’ or ‘moderate’ the way in which independent and dependent variables are related. Using such techniques, it is possible to ask: How are these—possibly causal—influences related to each other? Which of them retain their influence when the others are taken into account, and age and gender and other ‘controls’ are also factored in? The objective is to account for, or ‘explain’ as much as possible of the variation in the spirituality of young people by revealing the factors which help to shape it.

The analytic technique called *binary logistic regression* was employed for this task because it is designed for dealing with this type of inquiry, and with the kind of data collected in this study. First to be tested was the influence of denomination, together with mother’s attendance at religious services, on the respondent’s likelihood of being an Active Christian. Both of these remained highly significant sources of influence, even when controlling for age, sex, birthplace, mother’s birthplace, metropolitan/regional, state, socio-economic advantage, occupational stage (school, university or work) – the demographic variables which had previously shown a significant association with a person’s being Active.

The next step was to enter the other ‘possible influences’ variables into the process: father’s attendance, attendance of close friends at religious services, each parent’s enthusiasm for their religion, family talk about religion and type of school attended. When all these were analysed together, the only variables which were found to be significant, distinct sources of influence were the following:

- mother’s attendance (only if monthly or weekly)
- denomination (only if Other Christian)
- family talk about religion (only if several times a week or daily)
- attendance of friends
- type of school attended (only if ‘Other Christian private’).
Father’s attendance and the enthusiasm of each parent dropped out; evidently they were different measures of essentially the same thing: parental support for the spirituality of the respondent. They ‘reduplicated’ each other; so once mother’s attendance (the strongest influence) was taken into account, the other parental-support variables were rendered redundant.

The final step was to again subject the influences listed just above to the same set of control variables: age, sex, socio-economic status, birthplace and parents’ birthplaces, State of residence in Australia, metropolitan/regional place of residence etc. The result was that the significance of each of the influences was not reduced, and none of the control variables added significantly to the explanatory power of the ‘influence variables’.

The prominence of family religiousness as an influence in the above analysis is supported by another recent major study which used a national sample: Evans and Kelley, reviewing recent surveys in the IsssA series (see Chapter 2, p. 00), state:

The main influence on people’s religious beliefs is the religious orientation of the family they grew up in. Research in other countries also suggests that parents’ church attendance is reliably reported and generally has strong effects on respondents’ religion. We find: people who grew up in families which attended church regularly are far more likely to be devout themselves than are people from secular families. … Social class and economic factors do not much matter.

Australia was considered one of the more secular countries in a cross-national comparison conducted by Evans and Kelley; it is in such countries that family influence on the devoutness of children is strongest. In more religious nations, family influence counts for less, and the influence of the national culture counts for more.

Up to this point, the analysis has shown the overwhelming power of family support in influencing the spirituality of religiously Active young people. However, one third of those in the Generation Y sample were currently attending (or had recently attended) private schools affiliated with a religious denomination, and nearly all such schools have, as a prominent part of their proclaimed function, support for the spiritual development of their students; usually with particular emphasis on the denomination’s form of Christian spirituality. Half of the students attending church schools were attending Catholic schools; the remainder, schools affiliated with nine other denominations, or with no religious affiliation.

So in the next section, we take up this more specialised topic: the influence of church schools on Christian spirituality.

*The effects of church schools on students’ spirituality*

Previous research on the impact of religiously-affiliated schools on religious / spiritual outcomes among students has been very varied in character. On the one hand, there have been innumerable qualitative studies, not only overseas but also in Australia, or surveys of individual schools or groups of schools affiliated with various Christian denominations, purporting to show effects of schools on the religious beliefs, attitudes and practices of students. All such studies suffer from the limitation that their findings cannot be generalised beyond the schools which were actually studied. They can only suggest what may be the case more generally. Many of them, but by no means all, also lack statistical and analytical rigour – assuming that schools cause certain student outcomes on the basis of bivariate associations between spiritual outcomes and school attendance not adequately tested in multivariate analysis.
On the other hand, although some major education studies based on national samples have compared the impact of Government and denominational schools only on academic outcomes,\textsuperscript{19} or their relative success with disadvantaged groups,\textsuperscript{20} there are also important studies of the impact of church schools on religious outcomes, which are based on national probability samples and employ multivariate analytic techniques, and so have been able to draw plausible general conclusions on the issue. Most studies in this category have taken place in the US, and most, but not all, have focussed particularly on Catholic schools. There have been few studies of this kind in Australia.

The earliest\textsuperscript{21} of the US studies, Greeley & Rossi’s \textit{The education of Catholic Americans},\textsuperscript{22} found significant positive effects of Catholic schools on a variety of student religious outcomes. In what the authors called the ‘multiplier effect’ of Catholic schools, impact was strongest on students who came from highly religious families, less evident in those who came from moderately religious or nonreligious families.\textsuperscript{23} The study was replicated in 1976 with better techniques.\textsuperscript{24} The second study found a marked decline since 1966 in the level of religious belief and practice, but an even stronger impact of schools on religious outcomes, rivalling the influence of families. These early studies were followed by numerous others.\textsuperscript{25}

Hans Mol’s pioneering \textit{Religion in Australia} (1971) was the first major sociological study of religion in this country, and included an analysis of the impact of both Catholic and Protestant schools on the religious beliefs and behaviour of their students.\textsuperscript{26} His analysis found no difference between the religious beliefs and behaviour of Protestants who had attended Protestant schools and those who attended Government schools, and concluded that in general, the religious teachings, worship services and school climate in these schools had no detectable impact on religious outcomes among students. In the case of the Catholic schools he found an interaction between parental religiosity and school type very similar to the ‘multiplier effect’ noted by Greeley and Rossi: Catholic schooling appeared to make a significant difference to the religious practice of students who came from strongly religious families; but in the case of those from non-religious families, attendance at a Catholic school made no significant difference to religious behaviour.

Like Greeley and Rossi, Mol was at that time unable to undertake a full multivariate analysis of his data, and came under the same critique: his argument for an independent effect of attendance at a Catholic school was attacked on the grounds that Catholic schooling made no difference to students whose parents were not regular attenders.\textsuperscript{27} Mol admitted the possibility that the effect of schools was not entirely independent of the religiosity of parents. When he published an update of his study of Australian religion in 1985, Mol could only repeat the findings and analysis from his 1966 survey on the topic of the impact of denominational schools on their students. He cited several surveys of selected groups of schools whose findings tended to confirm his earlier analysis, but no new data from a national survey were available, and the conclusions from the smaller surveys were impressionistic rather than rigorous.\textsuperscript{28}

These studies make clear how particularly difficult it is, in research on schools, to disentangle effects of the school on the individual from those which in fact derive either from the family, or from the individual’s prior level of commitment; obviously, families who are more religious are likely to send their children to schools affiliated with their denomination. So the apparent relationship between type of school and religiosity of the student may be ‘spurious’: i.e. the outcome of a higher level of religious belief or practice, compared with those who did
not attend a church school, may be due to family influences or the student’s prior level of religious involvement, not to attendance at the school.29

Looking more closely at the overall impact of church schools, we next present the responses of students in these schools to several school-related survey questions.

**Helpfulness of religious education**

Those aged 13-24 who definitely believed in God and were attending or had attended a private secondary school were asked how helpful or unhelpful religious education was in strengthening their faith. Obviously, these responses do not tell us anything about religious education at these two types of schools, which would vary widely from one school to another; rather they tell us what kinds of students find RE helpful.

Here are the responses classified by the two types of private school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpfulness of RE</th>
<th>Catholic school</th>
<th>Other Christian school</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very unhelpful</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unhelpful</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpful</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very helpful</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that these are not percentages of the whole of Generation Y, but of those who believed in God and were attending or had attended a private secondary school; in a few cases, no RE was offered at the school.

A majority of those who definitely believed in God at both types of school found religious education very helpful or helpful in strengthening their faith. There was no difference between students attending the two types of school. Active (61%) and Marginal (57%) Christians were equally likely to rate RE as helpful / very helpful; even one-third of Nominals did so. The more committed students (those who attended religious services more frequently, prayed more frequently, had committed their lives to God, read the Bible or other spiritual texts more often) appreciated RE most; but there was a puzzling 20% or more of the Active Christians across all denominations and types of schools who found RE unhelpful or very unhelpful. These students had no other characteristic in common; presumably RE is sometimes a disappointing experience for religiously committed students, either because of the program, the teaching, or perhaps because of the mode of participation of other students. We cannot shed any further light on this issue; our study was not designed to undertake in-depth exploration of religious education programs.

How old were the students at the time when they offered their assessments of the helpfulness of RE? It was necessary to collapse the ‘Very helpful’ and ‘Helpful’ response categories together to get a more reliable estimate.
Table 6.12 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Believers attending (or attended) private secondary schools: Helpfulness of RE by age group (percent of age group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group within Gen Y</th>
<th>Helpfulness of secondary RE</th>
<th>13-15</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V) unhelpful</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(V) helpful</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students still at school responded more positively; those looking back after leaving school took a less positive view.

There were others, also attending private schools, who had said they did not believe in God, or were uncertain. It would have seemed like presumption or pressure to ask them whether RE had been helpful in ‘strengthening their faith’, so a more diplomatic formulation was used: ‘Did religious education at secondary school incline them to take a more positive or a more negative view of religion, or not have much effect either way?’.

Table 6.13 Gen Y (aged 13-24) Unbelievers/uncertain attending (or attended) private secondary schools: View of religion deriving from RE by type of school (percent of school type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of private school</th>
<th>Religious education at secondary school - encouraged a more positive or a more negative view of religion</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other Private (Christian)</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative effect</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much effect either way</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive effect</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the responses were classified by type of school, there was no difference between types of school in terms of positive effect, but those who were unbelievers or uncertain about God, and who were attending or had attended Catholic schools were more likely to say that religious education inclined them to take a more negative view of religion. Those who considered RE to have a positive effect were more likely to be in the group aged 15-17 at the time of the survey.

Students at Government secondary schools: helpfulness of primary school RE

Those who had indicated belief in God, and were attending, or had attended, Government secondary schools, but had attended a primary school at which religious education was offered, were asked how helpful it had been in strengthening their faith.

Table 6.14 Gen Y (aged 13-24) Believers attending Government secondary schools who had RE at primary school: Helpfulness of primary school RE by denomination of respondent (percent of denomination)
A strong majority (70%) of Catholics who were attending or had attended Government secondary schools responded that they found the religious education received at primary school very helpful or helpful in strengthening their faith – presumably the high proportion responding positively is related to the likelihood of their having attended Catholic primary schools. A majority of Anglicans (59%) also recalled primary RE as helpful; but those of Other Christian denominations were much more divided in their assessment – 49% found their primary school religious education helpful or very helpful, and 34% unhelpful or very unhelpful. This uncharacteristically less positive response seems likely to be explained by the lesser availability of primary schools affiliated with these denominations. A higher proportion of Other Christian students probably attended Government primary schools.

**Impact on religion of other subjects studied**
Those who had been in Year 11 or 12 at school during the year prior to the survey were asked whether the other subjects they had studied (apart from RE) had inclined them to take a more positive or negative view of religion, or had not had much effect either way on their view. Overwhelmingly (79%), respondents said ‘not much effect’. A similar question to those who had been engaged in tertiary studies in the previous year elicited the same response from almost the same proportion of respondents.

**Peer pressure against religion at school**
Finally, in first-round personal interviews, some students had mentioned that they were subjected to some degree of teasing or pressure at school because of their religious beliefs or practices. So in the survey, all those who attended religious services at all (even if only once a year, were asked: ‘How much, if at all, were you pressured or made fun of at school because of your religious beliefs and practices? A lot, some, a little, or not at all?’ Most said they had experienced no pressure or teasing at all. So few replied ‘A lot’ or ‘Some’ that their answers were combined in the following table with those who said ‘A little’. The responses are classified by level of spirituality of the respondent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-type of Christian spirituality</th>
<th>Pressure at school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little/some/lot</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Naturally, the Committed and Regular most often attracted teasing or pressure. There would be little in the way of beliefs or practices among the Marginal adherents to provoke critical
comment. Nominal types do not appear in the table since they do not attend services and were not asked about pressure at school.

Since 40% of the Committed reported some pressure at school, we examine the type of school they were attending or had attended: Government, Catholic, Other Private.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pressure at school</th>
<th>Type of school attending / attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Govt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little/some/lot</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Committed youth were more often pressured or made fun of at school because of their religious beliefs or practices if they were attending or had attended a Government or Other Private school (the difference was not significant). A significantly smaller proportion of those at Catholic schools reported this experience.

We found this result puzzling. We had got the impression from the pre-survey face-to-face interviews that being teased at school for still going to church was fairly common. We knew the early interviews were not representative of the Generation Y population, but it still seemed odd that so few of the survey participants reported that it occurred frequently. So in a number of the post-survey face-to-face interviews, the question was pursued further in the hope of gaining some insight into the apparent inconsistency. An often-heard theme in response, both from secondary and university students, when the person being interviewed was a believer and attended religious services regularly, was that no criticism was received from others, since the topic was never discussed, and only close friends who shared the person’s faith were likely to know of their religious/spiritual beliefs or practices.

It became clearer why survey respondents so seldom reported that they were pressured or made fun of because of their religious beliefs or practices. Theorists have discussed for years the ‘privatisation’ of religion: here was a clear example. It might not be expected that, in schools with a religious affiliation, a culture of silence would develop surrounding one’s personal beliefs and practices. But in an environment where only a small minority of fellow-students share one’s religious commitment, it seems a natural defensive strategy, and also accords perfectly with the dominant, highly individualised view of religion: that it is not a public or even a communal affair, but a private matter, shaped according to the individual’s preferences, and no one else’s business. The consequences of individualisation for the likely future shape of traditional spirituality among Gen Y are discussed in chapter 12, and the influence of informal student cultures in chapter 13.

Testing the influence of church schools on students’ spirituality
The reader will recall that there was an initial positive bivariate relationship between the likelihood of being Active, and attending either a Catholic or Other Christian private school. But in the multivariate analyses described above, the school factor had an effect of its own, over and above the influence of the family, only in the case of Other Christian private schools.
To make sure that these findings were not in some way an artefact of the method of analysis or of the particular variables used, a separate series of analyses was conducted, using a different analytical technique — linear regression — and a different set of outcome variables: the scales of belief and practice described earlier in the chapter.\textsuperscript{31} The regression analysis tested whether people’s scores on these two measures were influenced by the family support factors, and by type of school. Under the same set of demographic controls as before, the results were very similar: parents’ and friends’ attendance, and this time also parents’ level of enthusiasm about their religion, were the only significant influences; type of school attended was not significant.

The conclusion from these analyses is as follows:

- although this study was not designed to evaluate the effectiveness of schools affiliated with religious denominations in influencing their students towards commitment to their religious traditions, it can make a contribution towards such an assessment.\textsuperscript{32} If church schools generally had a significant positive influence on students’ spirituality, this should be apparent in the data gathered in a national survey of this kind. The probability of not finding an influence of church schools generally, if it really exists, is relatively small. But what this study cannot do, is establish:
  - whether any particular school or regional group of schools has an independent, positive effect on students’ spirituality; no doubt there are some which have considerable impact, but would not come under notice in a national survey of this kind;
  - what factors contribute to the effect, whether religious education programs, chaplains, school religious services or retreats;
  - which schools achieve this effect more strongly, and which less so or not at all, and the reasons for the difference.

A study focussed primarily on the impact of schools on religious outcomes would be expected to address these questions, and pursuing this goal would require a much more intensive study of denominational schools.

\textit{Conclusion: Impact of Attending a Church School on Spirituality}

Despite the above limitations, the present study was suited to address the more general question of whether attendance at a church school affects students’ spirituality, and after reasonably rigorous testing, the only impact that could be detected was that of Other Christian schools, which appeared to make a small independent contribution, over and above the effect of family religiousness, to the likelihood of students being Active Christians.

\textit{The Spirit of Generation Y} project and many other studies have established beyond any doubt that family support for traditional spirituality is available to only a very small minority of young people. However, where that support exists, and where other necessary conditions are met (which lie beyond the scope of this study to explore), there is every reason to expect that religious schools can, even if on a much more modest scale than formerly, make a most valuable contribution to the enhancement of traditional spirituality among students. In chapter 13, we offer some tentative recommendations in support of this goal.

\textit{Movement away from traditional Christian spirituality}

We have considered at length in this chapter the ‘high’ end of the spectrum of commitment to Christian spirituality: the Committed and Regular (Active) levels; now attention turns to forms of spirituality in which the mainstream Christian tradition, while still present in some
way, plays a much smaller part. However, it would be tedious and unilluminating to profile at any further length the sub-types described as Marginal and Nominal. Their defining characteristics were given earlier, and comparisons were made with the Active types in beliefs, practices, life-goals and values.

In many cases, the survey respondents did not provide much information about their family’s religious characteristics; in an interview ‘sprung upon’ a teenager by a stranger phoning unexpectedly, it seemed discourteous, even a burdensome imposition on their goodwill, once they had made it plain that they had little or no interest in either religion or spirituality, to ply them with detailed questions about their own and their family’s beliefs and practices in religious or spiritual matters.

What influences lead to the outcome of Marginal or Nominal status? It was clear from the information that was provided that very often these respondents’ beliefs and practices also reflected those of their family. Given what was discovered from analysing the role of family support in the case of the Active types, it is also to be expected that family support for alternative beliefs, or for an altogether lower salience of religion and spirituality in life, would be equally effective. It is not a question of a mere deficit, a lack of belief (although the strong traditionalist may be tempted to see things in this perspective), but rather of a different view of life in which spirituality is much more muted.

As an alternative way of exploring forms of spirituality which stand in sharp contrast to the Active type, it will be more rewarding to consider those in whose lives traditional Christian spirituality not long ago held a more prominent place, but more recently, has significantly receded. Obviously, most of these will have been classified as Marginal or Nominal, but they are different from some others in these categories because they are more visibly in motion away from the traditional path. For example, those who have little or no sense of Christian identity, and few Christian beliefs, but who come from families where this is not the norm, and who have changed their beliefs and practices over the last few years.

The researchers became aware very early in the project that even within the Gen Y age group, there were significant numbers who:

- previously believed conventionally but now did not
- previously felt that they belonged to, or identified with a Christian denomination, but did so no longer, or only minimally
- previously attended religious services more regularly than when they were interviewed.

These are three broad paths along which significant numbers of young people are moving away from traditional Christian spirituality. All of these, at the time of the survey, retained some form of contact with Christianity; but they are ‘in-between’: e.g. they have stopped attending, but still believe or identify, or they have stopped identifying, but still believe and perhaps even attend; or no longer believe but still identify.

Given that over half of Gen Y do not consider themselves Christian, and that a large proportion of this majority did previously identify as Christian, it seemed of the greatest interest to this project to learn as much as possible about them. As explained earlier, a series of open-ended questions was used to shed light on three major issues – all to do with changes of outlook across time: why people who had previously thought of themselves as belonging
to a particular denomination now did not; why people who formerly believed in God no longer did so, and why people who had at some earlier stage attended religious services more than once or twice a year had abandoned the practice.\textsuperscript{33} The reasons people gave for no longer believing in God will be discussed in Chapter 8, \textit{The secular path}, since this issue lies at the core of the Secular orientation; reasons given by those who are on the other two paths: moving away from identification with a denomination and from attendance at religious services, were summarised and discussed in chapters 3 and 4 respectively.

\textbf{The teenage ‘Questioners’}

Among those moving away from the Christian traditional path, one group were particularly interesting: in face-to-face interviews prior to the survey, a striking number of teenagers mentioned that at the end of primary school or earlier in secondary school, they believed, identified, attended according to their family’s pattern; but now had changed significantly in one or all of these respects. We called them ‘teenage questioners’ and their defining characteristics are as follows.

‘Questioner’ is a transitional form of spirituality \textit{in adolescence} among those whose spirituality type \textit{in childhood} was traditional; it is characterised by \textit{questioning} their previous spirituality: significantly reducing or suspending former beliefs and practices, sometimes also abandoning their former identification with a denomination.

The typical Questioner:

- is aged 13-17 and is not Active, but was previously more committed to Christianity in terms of identification, beliefs and practices
- identifies with a Christian denomination, or now does not, but was raised Christian; previously identified as Christian and has changed since the age of 12
- believes in God, in the divinity and resurrection of Jesus; or does not believe in either
- may still attend often; but in most cases attends religious services seldom or not at all, but previously attended more than once or twice a year.

\textbf{Some typical Questioners}

\textit{Anthony} had gone to a Catholic primary school, and was previously more highly involved in religious practices; but now, aged 17, is no longer as active:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Would you say that you ever pray?}
I don't know. What's praying?
\textit{Do you have a feeling there is something beyond this, that there's God or something out there?}
Yeah, but I'm not sure I follow or conform to the idea of what he is or it is. I know it’s out there and I guess I'd choose to believe what suits me best; I suppose I would say that I believe it in a Christian context. I’m Catholic, so I went to a Catholic primary school. And that was pretty involved as far as twice a week we’d go to the church across the road and whatever else, but yeah, I got involved in it, I suppose you could say. But more recently, I’ve barely gone to a Sunday voluntary type thing.
\textit{So you're not involved in any youth group or anything?}
No, no, not really.
\end{quote}

\textit{Rohan}, aged 15, attends a Catholic school:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Have you been involved in the church at all?}
Well, I go to church at school, but I don’t really go to church on Sundays or anything like that.
\textit{What happens after death, do you think?}
I don’t know. There’s just too many possibilities. I just reckon you die and that’s about it.
\end{quote}
*Do any of your friends or family go to a church?
No. Oh, my friends, some of them. Like, my friend David, he’s not Catholic but he goes to the church anyway.

Would you say that what you believe has sort of changed over the last few years?
Yeah. Like, I used to like believe in God, like a lot or Jesus and all that. Now I’m starting to doubt that.

Yeah.

Starting to think oh yeah, he’s probably just - - as I grow older, like I learn more about science and evolution and all that so I’m starting to think that would probably be more accurate. … If there is a God, then how can bad things happen? That’s how I feel sometimes, you know.

We can probably infer from his initial ‘No’ in response to the asterisked question above that no-one in his family goes to church, so probably he has never attended apart from services at school. His former beliefs are weakening; he is sceptical about life after death, and finds it harder to reconcile belief in God and Jesus with the existence of evil and with what he is learning in science about evolution.

Jasmine, aged 15, is a student at a Protestant church school, and used to attend the local Church of Christ ‘all the time’; but now goes only occasionally; her mother still goes regularly.

Do you read the Bible?
At school in Christian living. That’s about it, really.

And how do you find that? Is it interesting, relevant?
It’s hard to understand. Just don’t really know what to think about it really, not yet, anyway.

Okay. What about in the church services that you go to?
Kind of thrown out kind of thing because the pastor is so boring. He just talks. I just don’t really listen. I just sit there and feel hungry.

Okay, so you don’t have trouble with taking the Bible literally?
Sometimes I do because I’m just like what about the dinosaurs and all the other things. I just don’t see sometimes how it all fits in and how people can just pass a book down through all these years and stuff.

So have there been times when maybe you’ve sort of doubted God or the church?
Yes, I have, you know. It’s still not really clear. I guess one day I will say to myself yes, I do, or no, I don’t; but at the moment I do.

So those doubts that you’ve had have related to sort of science and religion and how the two fit together?
Yes.

Okay. Now do you have friends who attend church?
Some, but most of them don’t. It’s not that they don’t believe, it’s just that their parents don’t go so they don’t, and they probably just find it boring anyway.

It is not clear whether Jasmine gets ‘thrown out’ of church, or scripture is ‘thrown out’ at the congregation by the pastor. Once again, the dinosaurs are a problem. The service holds little interest for her. However, in another part of her interview, she mentions that the leader of the Sunday school session explains the Bible in ways that apply to young people’s lives, and she does find that interesting.

In our first analysis of the pre-survey interviews, the Questioning pattern was considered a possible spirituality type in its own right. But it became clearer from the survey data that even those who share that teenage pattern are still very diverse, and fitted into the main spirituality types as shown in the following table.

Table 6.17 Gen Y (aged 13-24) Teenage Questioners: Spirituality types (percent of Questioners)
A special characteristic of the Questioning teens was that often, the status turned out to be temporary – transitional, like so many things that are part of teenage life. Several, interviewed when in their twenties, recalled that their former faith ‘fell apart’ in their teens. Afterwards, a few had picked up the threads of their former faith, and had become Active (perhaps as a result of a life-changing experience such as becoming a mother). None who had taken this direction were encountered in the survey, but then the survey did not afford nearly so much opportunity for eliciting an individual’s history – their spiritual story. Others resumed their identification with a denomination at a medium or low level; for those who had, earlier in life, been at least Regular, the commonest outcomes of the Questioning phase were either moving to Nominal status, or taking the broad and crowded highway to the secular way of life we have called Secular, or, less often, the winding scenic path of New Age spirituality.

### Australian and US teenagers compared

As mentioned in chapter 2, the most significant overseas study of teenage religion in recent years is the US National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR). Although the study was confined to those aged 13-17, many of the same questions were used in this US study and our own. Confining our attention to just this age group, how do Australian and US teenagers compare? We expected that Australian teenagers would be less religious than Americans. In chapter 12, we will compare the two groups in some other ways.

To make the comparisons more pointed and accurate, respondents in both countries have been gathered into four groups, according to the NSYR’s classification of the type of denomination to which they belonged, with the fourth group containing those who did not identify with any denomination.

#### Table 6.18 US and Australian Teens (13-17): Traditional religious beliefs and practices by denomination by country (percent of denominational group within country)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief / Practice</th>
<th>Conservative Prot</th>
<th>Mainline Prot</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>No Religious ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belief in God:</strong></td>
<td><strong>AUS</strong></td>
<td><strong>USA</strong></td>
<td><strong>AUS</strong></td>
<td><strong>USA</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How close to God: Close</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith V important /important in shaping life</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only one religion is true</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK to pick and choose rel beliefs (Disagree)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginal</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With almost monotonous regularity, Table 6.18 shows, across comparable denominational groups, that American teenagers are ‘more religious’ than Australians of the same age, yet not so markedly as media commentary might lead one to expect.

Some of the exceptions to the general rule of higher US teenage religiosity are due to differences in the questions asked – these are explained in the endnotes to the table; two others which at first appear more surprising are asterisked in the table:

- The levels of belief in life after death among Australian Catholics and those of No Religious Identification, higher than in the US, are inflated by the very high level of belief in reincarnation in these two groups in Australia.
- The apparently odd result, that a higher proportion of Australian than of US attenders in several denominational groups find their local churches ‘warm and welcoming’, may be explained as follows: compulsion to attend religious services is now quite low in Australian families, and expectations from peers and the general community would favour non-attendance rather than attendance; a much smaller proportion of Australians are attenders, so they are a more ‘elite’ group – fewer of them would be attending under sufferance. In the US, where pressure to attend comes from both parents and community expectations, there is likely to be a higher proportion of teenagers whose attendance is less than fully voluntary, so their experience of the church community and of the worship services is more negative.

Clearly, our expectation is met in this comparison of findings; however, this is only part of the picture of the relationship between the traditional spirituality of teenagers in Australia and the US. We further expected that US and American teens would be more closely similar in levels of individualism; this is a topic that can better be pursued in our concluding chapter; as we will see, it sets even the findings portrayed above in a somewhat different light.
It is time to summarise our findings from this extended treatment of traditional spirituality in Generation Y. It would be premature to draw conclusions at this point; there are still two major strands in the spirituality of Generation Y which we have not yet explored. Fuller discussion and interpretation of these and other findings in relation to each other, leading to our conclusions, is the task of chapter 12.

**Conclusion**

Spirituality stemming from the Christian tradition, which has been the focus of this and the previous three chapters, is at the centre of a complex and turbulent process of change among Generation Y in Australia.

Despite the similarity between the traditional Christians within Generation Y and their parents of the post-World War II generation, there are also some major differences: a much smaller proportion of Generation Y are Christian, and a significant proportion of those who were Christian and practising in childhood have already moved in other directions before turning thirty – about the same as the proportion of their parents’ generation who have moved away from Christianity, but over almost a lifetime.

So, as previously noted, Gen Y are beginning at a lower starting point than their parents did. On the basis of what is known about their spirituality now, what are the prospects for traditional spirituality among this generation as they age? We will be in a better position to take up this question in chapter 12, where it can be set in the larger context which it requires.

There are signs of strength and continued growth in conservative Protestant denominations, and each tradition within Christianity has its nucleus of Committed and Regular members.

Youthful spirituality, in its traditional forms, derives its support principally from families who share it, and it seems rarely to thrive without support from this source, despite the best nurturing efforts of church schools.

At the other end of the spectrum, there are also many within the generation – most likely more than ever before, who have little or no interest in either religion or other spiritual matters.

In between are a large proportion of young people moving between alternatives, especially during their teenage years. Most of this movement appears to be away from traditional spirituality, either towards eclectic blends of mainstream and New Age spiritualities, or more frequently in the direction of secular indifference. These two options are the subject of the following two chapters.
Chapter 7
Gen Y in search of new and old alternatives
New Age Believers and Participants

Signs of spiritual life outside the bounds of traditional, organised religion often attract media attention. The emphasis in this coverage is usually the same, highlighting Australians’ ‘growing fascination’ with this or that spiritual alternative. For example, a recent newspaper article headlined ‘God takes an almighty battering’ brazenly declared that increasing numbers of young people ‘are turning towards tarot readers and psychics for answers’. Readers were told that ‘tarot readers and psychics are riding the wave of youth demand’ and that parents are hiring card readers to appear at coming-of-age parties.

Paganism (which includes witchcraft) was accorded similarly enthusiastic treatment after the 2001 Australian Census. Many newspaper articles on Paganism appeared, featuring lines such as: ‘Nature religions, including witches, druids, are Australia’s fastest growing religious group’, ‘According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Tim (a witch) and his friends are one of many’, ‘The Neo-pagans move from strength to strength’, ‘It’s the fastest-growing religion in Australia’. It is true that the number of Australians reporting that they are Pagans has increased markedly in the past few years but the actual numbers of adherents is very small (23,000 people, just 0.12% of the population, identified themselves as Pagans in the 2001 Census).

Beyond the hyperbole, there is little doubt that Australia experienced an ‘alternative spiritual awakening’ in the late 1960s and 1970s, in which new and unprecedented alternatives to Christianity emerged. Alternative spiritual groups, like the Krishna Consciousness Society (the Hare Krishnas), the Unification Church (Moonies) and the Sri Chinmoy movement all founded communities or centres at this time. Other, newer religions, like Neo-Paganism and Scientology also appeared. The New Age movement, encompassing practices as diverse as reiki healing, past-life therapy and yoga, began to flourish. Other changes also took place; new patterns of migration resulted in an increase in the numbers of adherents to Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, causing these religions to become more prominent.

As we noted in chapter 2, some sociologists describe the contemporary context, full of choices, as the ‘spiritual marketplace’ or ‘spiritual supermarket’. Others simply declare that this eclectic spiritual landscape is the ‘New Age’ of spirituality. Similar expansion and diversification has also taken place in the United States and the United Kingdom. The spiritually inclined now have, easily accessible alternatives to Christianity available to them. At the same time as the ‘spiritual marketplace’ began to expand, Australian census data reveal that the number of people identifying themselves as Christians has fallen steadily. This is particularly true of young people.

Despite all of these changes, social scientists in other Western nations are doubtful that the ‘growing fascination’ with the spiritual is a replacement for the decline in established religion. Writing about the UK, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead argue that ‘the holistic milieu (the spiritual alternatives, like yoga, belief in reincarnation) has not become large enough to compensate for the decline of the considerably larger congregational domain’. Reporting on a national study of youth spirituality in the US, Christian Smith found that very few youth there were ‘spiritual seekers’. Far less is known about Australia.
This chapter considers the extent to which young Australians are engaged in spiritual seeking, experimentation and exploration, beyond the boundaries of traditional religion. We begin by examining whether young people are exploring the other religious traditions now available to them. From there, we present a detailed consideration of the uptake of various ‘New Age’ beliefs and practices in Australia. Finally, we look at the spiritual type most associated with spiritual mixing and matching – the New Age spirituality type. These young people report far higher levels of New Age beliefs and practices compared to the other major spirituality types.

Exploring other religious traditions

St Michael’s Grammar School in Melbourne was founded by Church of England nuns in the late 1890s. Still an Anglican school today, it offers a daily Eucharist for interested staff and students. Promotional literature for the school notes that while the ‘Christian faith is integral to all we do’ it is ‘also multi-faith’, teaching the basics of many religions and insisting ‘on respect for the beliefs of all our members’. Such statements are a testament to post-war changes in Australia’s religious and cultural mosaic. Those raised in the age of the spiritual marketplace are less constrained by traditional religious ties and obligations. Young people who wish to explore other religions are afforded opportunities previously unavailable to them.

This possibility of religious exploration was readily apparent when we interviewed a young woman called Tina. Tina was raised Catholic, became a Pentecostal in her mid-teens and then joined the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) when she was 19. During her interview she told us about her religious journey:

I’ve always had like a basic Christian belief; we went to the Catholic Church and so I knew about Jesus Christ and what He did and I knew there was a God I could never question that. But it wasn’t really in our home, like I never really read the Bible, I think I read the Bible twice when I was a little girl just ‘cos I wanted to know when I was 10. But other than that I didn’t really get into it until I was in Year 9 and then that’s when we first joined the Pentecostal church and then I had disagreements so I left.

We asked her to tell us more about these ‘disagreements’ with the Pentecostal Church. She said:

Oh just ‘cos I’m a really a deep person, a really deep thinker and I just couldn’t get my questions answered and I found contradictions and I didn’t understand some of the things that the pastor taught. I didn’t think that they were right and feel they were right and I’m not one to just say, ‘Oh I believe you because you tell me its true,’ like I need to know – it needs to make sense to my heart and to my head.

Some time after Tina left the Pentecostal church a Mormon friend of her mother’s visited and explained to them the tenets of that faith. Her mother was persuaded by what she heard, became a Mormon, and after a number of visits, Tina followed suit: ‘I listened and they helped me to pray, to pray if it was true and I did and I feel like I got the answer.’ How common is this type of pattern? Do many young people visit the ‘world religions’ section of the ‘spiritual marketplace’ and join a religion different from the one in which they were raised, or even join a religion for the first time? In this section we explore the extent to which young people experiment with, or explore, the non-Christian religious traditions.

Exploring non-Christian religious traditions

As part of The Spirit of Generation Y survey, we asked participants whether they had explored world faith traditions apart from their own. The following table, Table 7.1, shows Gen Y’s exploration of religions apart from Christianity, including religions studied at
school. For reasons that become obvious, we examine the exploration of other religions according to spirituality types.

### Table 7.1 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Exploration of other religions by spirituality type (percent of type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion explored</th>
<th>Active Christian</th>
<th>Marginal Christian</th>
<th>Nominal Christian</th>
<th>New Age</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paganism or Wicca</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religions explored</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey participants who explored other religions may have explored more than one, so the columns in this table add to more than 100 percent.

Reading down the ‘Gen Y’ column on the right of this table we see the percentage who have explored other religions. These data suggest that about half of Generation Y Australians have not explored other world religions or Wicca. Buddhism is the religion that attracts most interest (27% among Gen Y), from both Christian and non-Christians alike. The two least explored religions are Judaism (explored by 16% of Gen Y) and Wicca (10%). The interest in Buddhism is no surprise; this religion has become very popular in the west, with interest being fuelled by the Dalai Lama’s regular tours, and endorsements from actors like Richard Gere and musicians such as the Beastie Boys and the Red Hot Chilli Peppers.

This table also shows another very interesting pattern when we compare the percentage in each spirituality type who have explored other religions; in the case of all the major world religions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism), it is those who are most religious – the Active Christian group – who are most likely to explore other major world religions. For example, 33% of the Active Christian spirituality type have explored Judaism compared to 17 of the Nominal Christians. Thus, it is the most religious who are doing the most ‘exploring’ of other faith traditions.

Females are slightly more likely to have explored all the religions listed in the table above, although with the exception of Buddhism, these differences are not significant. Among the age groups, those aged 16-18 are the ones most likely to have explored Judaism, Hinduism and Islam. The age group most likely to have explored Wicca are older, 19-24 year-olds.

Can we conclude from these data that committed young Christians are readily incorporating, for example, Hindu practices and teachings into their own religious journeys? Such a conclusion is implausible given the data we have collected. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Active Christian group are the least likely of all spirituality types to believe in reincarnation and yet table 7.1 shows they are the most likely to have explored Hinduism (of which reincarnation is a central tenet). Why then are the Active Christian group the biggest explorers of other faith traditions? Possible explanations include the fact that more of the Active Christian group attend or have attended a private school compared to the other spirituality types, and many private schools include some comparative religion studies in
their curriculum. It might also be the case that religious people are more interested in religion generally and have thus looked into other world religions, simply out of curiosity.

All of this suggests that most members of Gen Y who explore other religions are simply ‘information’ gatherers rather than people looking seriously for other religious alternatives. Tina, who was discussed in the introduction to this section, seems more the exception than the rule (in any case, Tina moved between Christian denominations before settling on Mormonism, which is derived from Christianity). This impression that most exploring of other traditions is simply information gathering is confirmed when we consider the ‘depth’ of exploration of other religions. In addition to asking survey participants whether they had explored various religious traditions, we also enquired about the depth of this exploration. Respondents were asked if their overall exploration of other religions involved just finding out general information or whether they had gone a bit further – for example, reading scripture, going to a worship service, or taking part in a ritual. Table 7.2 shows the depth of exploration among those who have explored one or more religions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Active Christian</th>
<th>Marginal Christian</th>
<th>Nominal Christian</th>
<th>New Age</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just finding out general information</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going a bit further - for example by reading their scripture</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that most of those who explore other religions content themselves with low level exploration, simply finding out general information, rather than participating in a service of worship, or reading the scriptures of that religion.

So what is to be concluded from these data on exploration of religions apart from Christianity? Simply put, just because young people can explore, it doesn’t mean they are doing so. If young people are creating mix-and-match spiritualities it seems unlikely that these are centred around the beliefs and practices of the traditional world religions.

There are some, however, who are exploring other religions with a view to converting, and if not actually taking up this faith, then perhaps incorporating some beliefs and practices into their own lives. One group that stands out from the others when it comes to religious exploration is the New Age spirituality type. Table 7.2 shows more than a third of the New Age spirituality type have undertaken serious religious exploration, far more than the other spirituality types (19% of the Active Christian, 24% of Marginal Christians). It is reasonable to conclude that among this group, and perhaps some of the Nominal Christians, we see some people – no more than 4% of Gen Y – who are looking at genuine religious alternatives beyond what they might encounter in a comparative religion class at school. The two main religions of choice for these explorers appear to be Buddhism and Wicca. As shown in table 7.1, Nominals and New Agers were almost as likely to have explored Buddhism as the Active Christian, while New Agers were those most likely to have explored Wicca. Earlier, we discussed some of the reasons why Buddhism is popular. How are we to understand the rising interest in Wicca?
Wicca – a modern version of witchcraft – was first popularised by Britain’s Gerald Gardner in the late 1950s. Drawing allegedly on ancient Pagan rituals, Wiccans celebrate significant seasonal and solar changes, while also practising ‘magic’; casting spells and preparing potions. Wicca is different from the other religions, having only been established in the 20th century, notwithstanding its ancient antecedents. It is popular with females, with many practitioners seeing it as a religion free from patriarchal authority. According to Australian witchcraft scholar Douglas Ezzy, the popularity of witchcraft has increased markedly in the past decade, facilitated by the availability of information on the internet, popular books, notable witches (singer and minor celebrity white witch Fiona Horne, for example) and television shows with witch characters, such as *Charmed* and *Sabrina: The teenage witch*.

Clearly, Wicca and Buddhism hold some interest for the most religiously searching members of Gen Y. Of these 4% of Gen Y who are perhaps seeking meaning from religions apart from Christianity, most do not identify with a religion now, but many had some religious involvement in the past; they are more likely to be women and at the older end of the Gen Y age scale.

Of course, ‘spiritual seeking’ need not involve exploration of other world religions. Gen Y commentators such as Rebecca Huntley suggest that most members of Generation Y have a ‘broad-based rejection and disinterest (sic) in religion’, themes explored elsewhere in our book. Does this mean, then, that young people are exploring spirituality in different ways, and perhaps creating spiritualities that select from a range of popular alternatives to the established faith traditions?

**Alternative spiritual seekers: The uptake of New Age beliefs and practices in Australia**

At the outset of this chapter, we noted that young Australians have many spiritual alternatives from which to choose, if they wanted. Some are complete ‘packages’, such as Wicca, the Hare Krishna movement, Church of Scientology or Buddhism. Other spiritual alternatives are diffuse: the psychic readings advertised on late night television, the Feng Shui, palmistry, and numerology discussed each week in popular women’s magazines or the local yoga class. These diffuse elements can be classified under the rubric of the ‘New Age’. According to American sociologist William Bainbridge, the New Age movement is:

> A strange potpourri of myths and rituals drawn from Asian religion, European legends, and the imaginations of its practitioners. Much of it claims to be science, history, or the arts, rather than religion, but at every turn an explorer of the New Age will confront supernatural forces.

The appropriation and repackaging of various traditional religious, spiritual and paranormal beliefs and practices is a hallmark of the New Age movement. ‘New Age’ is the term we adopt here to describe various alternative spiritual beliefs and practices, given that it has passed into public consciousness.

As noted in chapter 2, in a society like Australia, with its diverse spiritual alternatives, the spiritually inclined can select ‘unbundled’ components of spirituality from a wide range of sources, rather than having to ‘buy’ one complete ‘package’. These New Age ‘spiritual components’ a person might bring together include the belief that she or he had once lived a past life, the regular practice of an Eastern form of meditation and the occasional reading of their horoscope.
In the remainder of this chapter, we examine the extent to which Gen Y dabble in New Age alternatives, both practices and beliefs, and how many are mixing disparate elements in order to fashion their own distinctive spiritualities.

**New Age Practices**

In recent times, various religious practices originating from Asian religions and traditions have become popular in the west, notably: yoga (originally a Hindu practice); Eastern meditation (Hindu and Buddhist); and tai-chi (Chinese martial art). Like much of the New Age, when one encounters such practices, they are usually disconnected from their original religious context.

Our research into New Age practices considered Tarot cards, Eastern mediation, tai-chi and yoga. We chose to ask survey participants about these activities, rather than other well-known New Age practices, like reiki, channelling or the use of crystals because of the findings from our initial interviews. These interviews provided almost no evidence of the latter kinds of New Age practices among young people, whereas a few reported having done yoga, practised meditation or read Tarot cards.

The next table, Table 7.3, shows the extent of New Age practices among the Australian population, by age groups. In *The Spirit of Generation Y* survey, participants were asked ‘Have you ever got seriously into any of the following activities?’, which required a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. We explained to survey participants that ‘seriously’ meant ‘regular practice of the activity over an extended period of time, study of the activity, meeting with others who practice the activity or the purchasing of equipment associated with the activity’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Age groups within Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen Y 13-24</th>
<th>Gen X 25-39</th>
<th>Boom 40-59</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into yoga</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into Eastern meditation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into tai-chi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into Tarot cards</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never got into any of these activities</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey participants may have done more than one of these activities so the columns in this table add to more than 100 percent.

This table compares the percentage of people in each age group who have ever ‘got seriously into’ yoga, Eastern meditation, tai-chi or Tarot. We are comparing age groups because age is an important differentiating factor when it comes to these practices. Looking at this table, in particular, the ‘Gen Y’ column, we see that the uptake of any of these practices among Generation Y is low; 82% have never got into any of these activities, meaning only one in five have ever done yoga, Eastern meditation, tai-chi or Tarot. The columns further to the right show that 73% of 25-39 year-olds have never got into these activities, while 67% of 40-59 year-olds have never done so.
Compared to Generation Y, the Baby Boomers are more likely to have done yoga (17% compared to 8%), Eastern meditation (12% compared to 6%), tai-chi (9% compared to 4%) and Tarot (8% compared to 7%). Those aged 25-39 are closer to the figures of the older age group rather than Gen Y.

These age differences are partially explained by the fact that these practices are what William Sims Bainbridge describes as New Age ‘client services’ – serious participation typically requires disposable income, especially those practices typically done in classes, namely tai-chi and yoga. Those who are older might also have a greater interest in the health and wellbeing components of these practices.

**Tai-chi and yoga**

Table 7.3 also shows that among Australians the two most popular activities are yoga and Eastern meditation. That said, regular yoga practice may not be construed by most practitioners as being primarily a spiritual practice, or even about spirituality at all, mostly because the spiritual status of yoga is unclear. Kimberley Lau argues that ‘As first commodified and subsequently practiced in the United States and many other countries in the world, yoga and tai-chi are removed from their philosophical contexts and largely undertaken as physical exercise regimens, though still presented within the context of body-mind integration and spirituality’. Yoga is routinely offered at gyms, alongside aerobics classes, while many schools offer yoga as an alternative to other after-school sports. As such, it is often presented as part of a broader Western trend towards holistic health and wellbeing, rather than a spiritual activity *per se.*

Almost all of the people we have interviewed across the course of our research declared that improved health and wellbeing were the primary goals of their yoga activity. The following comments were made by Olivia, aged 18, during our face-to-face interviews:

I did yoga a lot last year and that was brilliant, I still try and do as many of my stretches and other stuff as much as possible. It’s excellent, you can see yourself and feel yourself achieving just a tiny bit more every time you do it.

*Was it only a form of exercise for you or was there something more to it than that?*

Definitely a form of exercise but stress relief as well, something to take the mind off things. You just feel a bit better in yourself afterwards. I also used to do a lot of meditation and tai-chi, reading up on that and certain breathing and how it incorporates and comes together.

In like manner, Stephanie, aged 24, said:

I’ve got a DVD at home that I just do it myself and again it’s just to help me relax and, you know, stretch my muscles out. I’m working a pretty physical job so sometimes I get back pain and stuff like that so, yeah, I just love it, to help relax and ... I mean, it helps to tone your body up and stuff like that too, and helps you feel healthy and well.

These comments suggest the main reason most people take up yoga is for overall wellbeing, first of the body, then the mind. This is not to say that participants do not draw some spiritual meaning from doing yoga or meditation, or even have feelings and sensations they may describe as spiritual, but if this happens, it is almost certainly a secondary outcome.

**Tarot**

In contrast, Tarot, which involves reading into the future so that the participant can have a better understanding of her or his fate, has a more explicit spiritual focus. Arguably, this type
of practice requires greater acceptance of the accompanying cosmology than is required by the average yoga participant who is practising to stay fit and healthy, calm and relaxed.

Are Gen Y women more likely to undertake New Age practices? Table 7.4 shows the percent of Gen Y males and females who have seriously practised yoga, Eastern Meditation, tai-chi or Tarot.

Table 7.4 Gen Y (aged 13-24): New Age practices by gender (percent of gender)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into yoga</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into Eastern meditation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into tai-chi</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ever got seriously into Tarot cards</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey participants may have done more than one of these activities so the columns in this table add to more than 100 percent.

This table shows that among Gen Y, two New Age practices are clearly favoured more by females than males; yoga and Tarot cards (13% of females compared to 3% of males have seriously practised yoga; 11% of females compared to 3% of males have seriously practised Tarot). Later in this chapter, in the section on New Age Participants, we examine the reasons why this might be the case.

Multiple New Age practices
It is also interesting to consider whether those doing the various New Age practices are participating in more than one activity. Additional analysis of our data show that across all the age groups, those engaging in such practices are most likely to do just one activity, and the most popular activity was yoga. Only 10% of the population aged 13-59 has undertaken three of these activities seriously and less than 2% have done all four. The most common combination of activities is yoga and Eastern meditation, both of which are primarily about health, wellbeing and relaxation. 38% of those who have seriously done yoga have also seriously practised Eastern meditation.

Gen Y: New Age practices – Conclusion
We have shown that for the overwhelming majority of Generation Y, New Age practices are simply not important. The same cannot be said, however, of New Age beliefs, which have greater acceptance among this age cohort.

New Age beliefs
In our survey, we asked young people about the following New Age beliefs: astrology – that stars and planets affect people’s fates; the possibility of communicating with the dead directly or in a séance; reincarnation – that people have lived previous lives; and the power of psychics or fortune-tellers. Table 7.5 shows how widespread New Age beliefs are among those aged 13-59. In the survey, participants had a choice of answering, ‘yes, definitely’,
‘maybe’ and ‘no, definitely not’. The table shows the percentage of each age group (e.g. 13-15, 22-24) who definitely believe in astrology, séances, reincarnation and psychics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitely believe in</th>
<th>Age groups within Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Boom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrology, that stars and planets affect people’s fates</td>
<td>25 22 26</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of communicating with the dead directly or in a séance</td>
<td>23 25 28</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnation, that people have lived previous lives</td>
<td>31 30 32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of psychics and fortune-tellers</td>
<td>19 21 22</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Survey participants may hold more than one of these beliefs so the columns in this table add to more than 100 percent.

Table 7.5 shows a substantial level of definite belief among Generation Y in reincarnation (31% of 13-24-year-olds), the possibility of communicating with the dead (25%), and in astrology (24%). Slightly lower is the belief in fortune-tellers, at 21%. Among the Gen Y age groups, there are no significant differences with respect to belief in astrology, communicating with the dead, reincarnation or the power of psychics and fortune-tellers.

Those aged 25-39 (Gen X) and 40-59 (Baby Boomers) hold New Age beliefs in slightly lower proportions than Gen Y (apart from belief in psychics and fortune-tellers); the main difference between the two generations is the belief in reincarnation; 21% of 25-39 year-olds definitely believe and 25% of 40-59 definitely believe compared to 31% of Gen Y. Overall, our research shows that there are not particularly significant differences between Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y when it comes to New Age beliefs, except the belief in reincarnation.

**Gender**

It is also useful to consider gender differences when it comes to holding New Age beliefs. Table 7.6 shows the percentage of Gen Y males and females who definitely believe in astrology, séances, reincarnation and psychics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitely believe in</th>
<th>male</th>
<th>female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrology, that stars and planets affect people’s fates</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of communicating with the dead directly or in a séance</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnation, that people</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This table shows that females aged 13-24 are much more likely than males to believe in astrology (30% of females compared to 19% of males), communicating with the dead (30% compared to 20%) and the power of psychics and fortune-tellers (27% compared to 15%). Females are somewhat more likely than males to believe in reincarnation, but this difference is not significant. Earlier in this book we noted that Gen Y women are not more traditionally religious than Gen Y males, however, we see that Gen Y women are much more open to the New Age beliefs.

**Multiple New Age beliefs**

It is also interesting to consider whether those who hold these various New Age beliefs also believe in more than one, as this would provide evidence of eclectic spiritualities in which quite disparate beliefs are held together. Our analysis – not shown in this table – indicates that half of Generation Y do not hold any New Age beliefs, while 22% hold just one, 16% hold two and just 14% of the population hold three or four beliefs. A high level of spiritual eclecticism – holding more than three New Age beliefs – is the exception among Gen Y. For those who hold two or more New Age beliefs, no particular combination of beliefs stands out more than any other.

**An interesting comparison with the US**

In our survey we used the same questions about New Age beliefs as the US National Study of Youth Religion (NSYR), and thus are able to compare the responses of US teens with Australian teens (the NSYR covered the ages of 13-17). Given the different place of organised religion in both societies and the major differences in the proportion who do not identify with a religion, it is worthwhile comparing the popularity of various New Age beliefs among US and Australian teens. (In the US, 16% of those aged 13-17 do not identify with a religion, compared with 47% of Australians aged 13-17.) Table 7.7 shows the percentage of US and Australian teens aged 13-17 who definitely believe in astrology, séances, reincarnation and psychics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Age belief</th>
<th>US</th>
<th>Australia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Astrology, that stars and planets affect people’s fates</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The possibility of communicating with the dead directly or in a séance</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reincarnation, that people have lived previous lives</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The power of psychics and fortune-tellers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note: Survey participants may hold more than one of these beliefs so the columns in this table add to more than 100 percent.

This table usefully highlights key differences between US and Australian teens. It shows that Australian teens are much more likely than their US counterparts to accept various New Age beliefs. Like Australians, US teens are most open to reincarnation, but even then, Australian teens are more than twice as likely to definitely hold this belief. The more religious orientation of the US appears to make a significant difference when it comes to the acceptance of New Age beliefs. Religious organizations in Australia are weaker compared to the US, thus opening the way for those who are spiritually interested to search elsewhere.

One particular New Age belief: Reincarnation

The most widely held alternative belief, among Gen Y (and Generation X and the Boomers), is reincarnation – the idea that people have lived previous lives, or that some aspect of a person, such as their spirit or soul, survives death and is ‘reborn’ in another human, or in some cases, another living creature. The idea of reincarnation is central to Hinduism, which teaches that a person’s actions in one life influence what happens upon rebirth. Buddhism also teaches that people are trapped on a constant wheel of death and rebirth. Neither Judaism, Christianity or Islam subscribe to the doctrine of reincarnation. And yet, we see that 31% of Gen Y definitely believe in reincarnation. Where is belief in reincarnation coming from, and how salient is this belief for those who hold it?

As noted in a previous section, 27% of Generation Y have explored Buddhism, and 17% Hinduism, the two world religions which feature reincarnation. There is no clear relationship, however, between belief in reincarnation and knowledge of these two religions. Almost 70% of those who believe in reincarnation have never explored Buddhism, while 81% of those who believe in reincarnation have never explored Hinduism. This strongly suggests that belief in reincarnation is more like a folk belief that circulates widely in the culture, an unsophisticated idea that we have had past lives, or that our soul is embodied in some new earthly form after we die, rather than a seriously understood article of faith connected to its original Eastern religious heritage.

One wonders then how salient this belief in reincarnation actually is for those who hold it. Information drawn from the face-to-face interviews suggests that young people have quite varied understandings of what reincarnation means. Some whom we have interviewed take the belief in past lives seriously.

One of these people is Janet, a retail worker who has a New Age spirituality and whom we introduced in chapter 1, having done a course in Tarot card reading, visited psychics and practised numerology. When asked her thoughts on reincarnation, she said:

There’s lots and lots of different ideas out there on reincarnation and past lives and things like that. I’ve read a few different books on it. I guess what I’ve come up with is that we are all souls, and that you have the opportunity to come back to either be a guide or a spiritual guide. So I guess you choose what you want, but I guess we have the opportunity to come back and … our souls are the same, but we may have different lifetimes and be different people and different journeys. Have you gone and sort of tried to find out about that sort of thing?
I have, actually. I did go and see a lady who specialised in past life therapy. We didn’t really do much about past life stuff. We ended up doing a lot in this lifetime, and she did say a couple of things that made me think, well, that’s really interesting because she said I’d been forced into nunneries a few times in my past lives and I thought well that’s really interesting because I have these sort of negative feelings about religion in this lifetime and about being forced to, you know, conform to a religion, so I thought well that’s really interesting. But really I don’t know.
Faith is a twenty-three year-old student and, like Janet, and was classified as having a New Age spirituality. During her interview she was asked about her belief in reincarnation:

*Can you tell me more about your belief in that, how you came to hold that belief?*

Well I actually believe it for myself. When I was very small Mum tells me that I used to tell her things about when I was a mum and how I used to do them. And I still remember that I had two children and I lived on a hill and we all had blonde hair. And like Mum says I’d come out with things when I would have been about two or three, things that she knew that I’d never experienced with anybody that I’d been around. I’d just come out and go well when I was a mum I’d do things this way.

*So you just had this kind of innate sense about your past?*

Yeah, I don’t know when it was or anything but I still remember. It’s kind of like remembering a dream and that’s all I can remember now at 23. But yeah I sort of remembered it for myself.

15-year-old Annika, a Nominal Christian, was asked about her belief in reincarnation:

*You believe in reincarnation then?*

Yes. I don’t see someone who has had a really bad life, I know someone who was raped and then got run over and died, like how they could have such a short life and like a baby that is stillborn, how that could be their life over, that there must be something else. And then the people who commit heaps of bad crimes and get away with it, like they should have another life that should be bad so that they get what they deserve.

While the belief in reincarnation is genuine for these three women, they are affirming a Westernised, New Age-like understanding of reincarnation, or have formulated their own understanding of what it means or how it works.

Others – and this is probably true for most of those who believe in reincarnation – are less certain what it means and the implications of this belief for the way they live their lives. For example, Katie, fourteen, was asked about life after death and to describe her ideas and beliefs about reincarnation:

*And what do you think happens after death?*

Um, I don’t really know because I’ve never had anyone close to me die. So I haven’t had a lot of experience of death, but I guess our soul gets used for other people.

*Oh, okay, so like reincarnation?*

Yeah, similar, but not our body. Our body goes somewhere and our spirit lives on.

*Oh OK. So where do you think it lives on?*

In other people, in our family.

Katie’s belief in reincarnation appears to be little more than an idea to help her make sense of what happens after death in the absence of any other understanding. Katie’s answer also offers a clue as to why reincarnation is the most popular New Age belief among Gen Ys. Only 17% of Generation Y seriously follow a religious tradition, and only half definitely believe in life after death. Thus, a belief in reincarnation, no matter how inchoate, offers those who have no other meaningful answer a way of addressing the difficult question of what happens after death, assuring them of some form of confirmed existence rather than extinction.

*Gen Y: Religious and New Age practices and beliefs: Conclusion*

Most members of Generation Y are not looking for meaning among the world’s religions, nor are they particularly involved in New Age practices, and only a reasonable number of young people definitely believe in reincarnation or astrology. None of this is suggestive of a
generations creating customised spiritualities by mixing from a range of disparate sources. However, 17% of young people, whom we describe as the New Age spirituality type, do create their own blended spirituality, drawing on a variety of New Age resources. These people are the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

**Gen Y’s alternative spiritual eclectics: A profile of the New Age spirituality type**

Following on from considering New Age beliefs and practices we can now consider a profile of the New Age spirituality type. For the purposes of analysis and discussion, the New Age spirituality type is divided into two sub-types: *New Age Believers* and *New Age Participants*, titles which refer to the type of engagement they have with the New Age ‘spiritual marketplace’. Below is a description of each sub-type:

- **New Age Believers.** 8% of Generation Y. People who hold a number of New Age beliefs (3-4 beliefs) but are not involved seriously in any New Age practices.
- **New Age Participants.** 9% of Generation Y. People who hold a number of New Age beliefs (2 or more beliefs) and have participated in one or more New Age practices.

Why do we refer to this mix-and-match spirituality type as ‘New Age’? As noted above, one of the key features of the New Age is the wide range of beliefs, practices and rituals which the movement encompasses. Most scholars of the New Age agree that participants in this milieu typically ‘draw on multiple traditions, styles, and ideas simultaneously, combining them into idiosyncratic packages’. While many of our New Age Believers or Participants may not see themselves as ‘New Agers’ – or even know what the term means – their mix-and-match approach to the spiritual marketplace is certainly very New Age in character (if this involves combining and selecting from different traditions), hence our adoption of the term. Our designation of people as New Agers is not an indication of how enthusiastic they are about one particular activity, such as Tarot reading, but that said, we do know that all of the Participants have seriously undertaken at least one practice. In the following, we profile the New Age Believers and New Age Participants.

**A Profile of New Age Believers**

As noted above, 8% of Generation Y are New Age Believers; those who hold 3 or 4 New Age beliefs but do not engage seriously in any New Age practices. Who are these young people?

**Gender**

Table 7.8 shows the percentage of Gen Y New Age Believers who are male or female:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Age Believer</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although females are more likely than males to be New Age Believers this difference is not significant. This is interesting, given that females are more likely to hold a single New Age belief. Being a New Age Believer, however, is about holding a mix of beliefs, and it appears that females are no more disposed than males to having a mix-and-match set of beliefs.
Age
Table 7.9 shows age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>New Age Believer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen Y</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Age also has no major influence: being at the older end of the Gen Y spectrum does not increase the probability of being a New Age Believer. (8% of Gen X and 8% of the Baby Boomers are New Age Believers.)

Religion
Do New Age Believers also identify with a religion? Table 7.10 shows their religious identification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion/Denomination</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relig ID</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60% of New Age Believers do not identify with any religion, 40% do; 23% are Catholics and 8% are Anglicans. However, these religious New Age Believers are not particularly active in their denomination. They are closest to Marginal Christians when it comes to religious belief and practice. Only a very few New Age Believers then are sitting in a religious service each week. The majority – 60% – are not seriously involved with a traditional religion.

Social factors
Are other social factors associated with being a New Age Believer? An English study conducted by Leslie Francis found that teens (ages 13-15) he describes as TV addicts (those watching more than four hours of TV per school day) are more likely than non-addicts to believe in their horoscopes, to believe in ghosts, to believe that it is possible to contact spirits of the dead and to believe in black magic. Perhaps exposure to the many TV shows that contain supernatural elements means a person is more open holding a diverse mix of spiritual beliefs? There is certainly a popular appetite for TV shows, both real and fictional, which feature the paranormal and the occult (Medium, Buffy: the vampire slayer, Charmed, Ghost Whisperer, Sabrina: the teenage witch, Supernatural, Crossing over and Xena, warrior princess) to name some recent examples. Elsewhere in this chapter we noted the recent interest in witchcraft and again, the media have played an important part in this popularisation.
We collected data on the amount of TV that a person watches per week. Those who definitely believe in reincarnation and astrology watch two hours more TV per week than those who definitely do not hold either of these beliefs. Interestingly, New Age Believers (that is, those holding a mix of alternative beliefs) watch substantially more TV per week than any of the other major spirituality types. We also collected data on the number of hours spent each week on the internet, playing video games and the number of movies seen each month. These data reveal that New Age Believers are not more frequent users of video games or movie watchers.

**Multivariate analysis**
Given these findings, it is worthwhile investigating further which factors – TV watching, socio-economic status, or perhaps something else – are most strongly associated with holding a mix of New Age beliefs. It is possible that TV hours watched is not significantly associated with being a New Age Believer, if one takes into account other factors, such as a person’s level of education, or age. Perhaps the main reason New Age Believers watch a lot of TV is because they are younger and have more time, or because they have less formal education and choose not to read books in their spare time.

A logistic regression analysis, controlling for the effects of a person’s age, sex, school type, level of education, social advantage, place of birth, parents’ place of birth and where and with whom a person lives, along with TV hours watched per week, reveals the following factors to be significantly associated with being a New Age Believer:

- *Living away from home.*
- *Watching more TV.*
- *Living in an area of economic disadvantage.*

How might these findings be explained? The particular mix of New Age beliefs held by New Age Believers is not grounded in any particular authority, community, worldview, or religious tradition. Instead, New Age Believers hold a disparate ‘grab-bag’ of beliefs that may not have much salience in daily life. All of the variables associated with this type suggest, in some way, that perhaps many of these young people are more on the margins; living away from the family home at a younger age or living in a less well-resourced community.

The finding about TV watching is interesting. Perhaps the reason New Age Believers watch more TV is because they live in poorer areas and might have less opportunity to pursue other activities? However, further statistical analysis reveals that living in an area of disadvantage does not correlate strongly with heavier TV consumption. We do not know what New Age Believers are watching on TV, whether they are more interested than other spirituality types in the many shows with supernatural content, and if they were, whether this influences their beliefs. In any case, as will be explored in detail in chapter 9, it is unclear how, if at all, the media influences ideas about the supernatural. It may well be that those who hold this unfocussed, eclectic mix of New Age beliefs are simply more into watching TV, the content of which, particularly on the youth-oriented commercial networks, is more often than not shallow, contradictory and undemanding.
New Age Participants
Like New Age believers, New Age Participants hold a number of New Age beliefs. Unlike New Age Believers, New Age Participants have engaged in at least one New Age practice. The abiding characteristic of this group then is the mixing of a range of alternative beliefs and practices. Slightly less than half of these New Age Participants – 4% of Gen Y – have undertaken two practices or more. These are the people we described in the introduction to this book as those who are seriously committed to the New Age, analogous to the Active Christians.) Among New Age Participants, the most popular activity is reading Tarot cards, then somewhat further behind are Yoga, Eastern meditation and Tai-chi.

Religion
As was the case with the New Age Believers, some New Age Participants are involved in organised religion. Table 7.11 shows the religious identification of New Age Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion/Denomination</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Christian</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Religion</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No relig ID</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A large minority of New Age Participants (39%) identify with a religion. 34% of these are Christians (mainly identifying as Catholics). These Christian New Age Participants are somewhat religious; in terms of their Christian beliefs, they are similar to the Marginal Christians, and in terms of practice, quite similar to the Regular Christians. It appears that Christian New Age Participants are interested in both religious and New Age practices. In chapter 12, we will see that whether a New Age Participant was raised religious or not makes a significant difference to the extent to which they are engaged in their communities and the compassion they have for others.

Gender
What social factors are associated with being a New Age Participant? Firstly, gender is associated with this sub-type:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Age Participant</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.12 shows that females are twice as likely as males to be New Age Participants (12% of Gen Y females compared to 6% of Gen Y males). Although not shown in the table above, it is worth noting that females are more likely than males to be Christian New Age Participants.
Age
Age is also associated with this sub-type:

Table 7.13 Gen Y (aged 13-24): New Age Participants by age group within Gen Y (percent of age group)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>13-15</th>
<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>All</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Age Participant</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.13 shows that those aged 19-24 are significantly more likely than those aged 15-15 to be New Age Participants (11% of Gen Y 19-24 year-olds compared to just 6% of Gen Y 13-15 year-olds). This relationship between increasing age and being a New Age Participant is reflected in the fact that 12% of Gen X and 14% of the Baby Boomers are classified this way.

Multivariate analysis
In the previous section, it was noted that New Age Believers were frequent TV watchers, however, New Age Participants are not. What other factors are associated with being a New Age Participant, and are age and gender still significant when one controls for the effect of a range of other demographic and social variables?

A logistic regression analysis controlling for the effects of a person’s age, sex, school type, level of education, social advantage, place of birth, parents’ place of birth and where and with whom a person lives shows the following factors to be associated with being a New Age Participant:

- Being female.
- Being older.

We would expect New Age Participants to be older because, as noted above, participation in New Age activities typically requires disposable income, and it is likely that those who are older have the jobs to pay for such activities, or are at least interested in spending their money on activities that are about ‘wellbeing’, rather than on other items of interest to teens. What about the association between being female and New Age participation? New Age practices tend, in Western culture, to be more closely aligned with the feminine than the masculine. For example, Heelas and Woodhead, in their study of the ‘holistic milieu’ in the UK town of Kendal found that 80% of those participating in various New Age activities were women. Other research has found the same thing. Why is there a relationship between New Age spirituality and the feminine? Arguably, the primary objective of reading one’s horoscope, communicating with the dead, visiting a psychic or any other New Age practice, is to discover more about oneself or one’s life journey or to seek assistance with intimate, personal matters. Self-care, emotional awareness and introspection are associated in Western culture more with the ‘feminine’ than the ‘masculine’.

This association between the feminine, the New Age practices and self-care is reflected in and actively promoted by female-oriented media, particularly the popular women’s magazines, including *Cosmopolitan*, *Cleo*, *New Idea*, *New Weekly* and *Women’s Day*, all of which purport to be about the everyday concerns of women. These magazines encourage the idea that one can turn to New Age practices for help or ‘spiritual guidance’ in intimate matters. In their pages, one can usually find sections on things such as astrology, numerology,
dream analysis, palmistry and psychic readings as well as advertisements for the same. No doubt, these magazines have these ‘spiritual’ sections because this is what appeals to their target audience, but the media are also influential and can serve as a source of ideas, legitimating, among women at least, the validity of New Age practices.

**Two New Age Participants: Stephanie and Faith**

Tables and percentages do not always provide us with the full picture. Our conversations with two women, Stephanie and Faith, who fit the ‘typical’ New Age Participant profile, assist in providing a better understanding of this spirituality type, particularly with respect to the salience and meaning of certain activities and beliefs, and how these are ‘held together’.

**Stephanie**

Aged twenty-four, Stephanie lives in a capital city on the Eastern seaboard. She works full-time, has moved out of her family home and has done some post-school study. She is a keeper at a wildlife sanctuary, caring for sick and injured animals. This is something about which she is passionate, but work is not as important as extracurricular activities – spending time with her partner, friends and family, and caring for her own pets. Stephanie thought of herself as an introvert, ‘definitely introvert’.

Stephanie certainly liked getting out of the city and down the coast as often as she could, but did not recall any specific ‘nature-based’ spiritual experience, or speak of a deep affinity with the earth, of the kind we might associate with Neo-Pagans or New Agers.

New Age Participants are significantly more likely than other spirituality types to have read a self-help book in the two years prior to our survey. Stephanie was particularly interested in a holistic healing book. She said:

> It talks about the behaviours that we do in our lives to bring in that negative energy that creates illness and disease in our body, so I suppose that’s a book I always turn to, it’s always sitting on my bedside table and whenever I have a pain in my back or my wrist’s hurting.

Our research also suggests that creativity, closeness to nature and self-fulfilment in work are important elements in the lives of some of those who seriously engage in New Age practices compared to those who do not.

One of the reasons we chose to interview Stephanie was because she scored high on scales for both New Age practices and beliefs. She had seriously undertaken yoga, Tarot and Eastern meditation. For her, yoga is primarily an extension of her holistic approach to life and wellbeing and was something she first encountered in high school as an alternative to after-school sport.

Stephanie first became interested in Tarot cards at about the age of sixteen, mostly due to the influence of her mother. At this time, her divorced mother was getting involved in a range of ‘spiritual’ activities, including Tarot. Stephanie now has her own deck of cards and does readings, ‘Mainly for myself, I mean it’s not something I feel comfortable enough to show off to other people and stuff like that. I’ve done them for my boyfriend and for my mum and stuff like that, but mainly just self-help sort of stuff’. It is not something her friends have taken up.

Stephanie definitely believed in séances, horoscopes, reincarnation and psychics. While she believed in horoscopes and her star sign, she did not really trust the stars printed in the mass media. She had sought out and paid for professional Tarot readings.
Perhaps the most dramatic part of Stephanie’s interview was when she was asked about her belief in communicating with the dead. This was something about which she was really sure. She told us:

When I was sixteen and my mum started getting into all this stuff and we actually went to a course for a seminar on channelling spirits … it wasn’t anything really in-depth or anything. It was only I think two nights a week for three weeks or something, but we got to see the teacher do it properly and we wanted to try, and she taught you exactly.

Some time after completing this course, Stephanie came upon her mother, who, while meditating, had inadvertently channelled a spirit, which contorted her face and caused her to speak in another voice.

Her mother had also done some past life therapy, and while Stephanie believed in reincarnation, she has not done anything specific in relation to this, such as having a past life reading. She declared:

It is definitely something that I firmly believe in and it’s something that plays a part in, I suppose, how I see other people as well, where they’re at on their soul journey and all that sort of stuff. And I just think it’s something that’s definitely very strong with me, yeah.

Stephanie clearly holds a wide range of spiritual beliefs, many of which seem to be typical of a ‘New Ager’. How are all of these beliefs and practices held together? Stephanie did not articulate a coherent ‘New Age’ worldview during her interview, but in talking to her it was possible to see that she felt all of her spiritually-based activities and beliefs did add up to something and have a logic about them. We also asked Stephanie about being called a New Ager:

Someone of your kind of more spiritual interests might be described as New Age. Is that a term you would apply to yourself?
Not really.
No?
I think once upon a time it was an acceptable word to use but once again it’s something that the media and every other person that thinks they can make money out of these sort of things has grabbed a hold of and … it’s definitely been watered down to an extent where to me it means nothing at all, really, New Age like for me yeah, means nothing, really. No, I wouldn’t use that to describe myself.

Her rejection of the term New Age label appears to mostly be the result of what she sees as the negative, perhaps inauthentic connotations that are, in her opinion, associated with the term New Age. Nonetheless, she happily declared that she was a spiritual person.

In the previous chapter we noted that a person’s spirituality is usually consistent with the way she or he was raised. Stephanie attributed her own interest in spirituality to the influence of her mother:

Now that I think of it, it’s all kind based around that last year that I lived at home with my mum and my stepdad. And since then anything that I become interested in it, I do research into it and it has become a big part of my life, it’s not just something that I sort of sit on the sidelines. It is pretty much incorporated into my everyday life, the way I think, the way I see other people and all that sort of stuff. It came about probably first
again from my mum and her interest in it and it grew from there, just through the experiences that I was having and just through how much sense it made to me.

Organised religion did not play a part in her upbringing. She told us:

We never were religious as children, I was never baptised or Christened or anything like that. We never went to church, we never said grace before dinner. I’m just trying to think if there was anyone in my family, like no-one in my immediate family has ever gone to church. I suppose my introduction to it was probably at school. I can remember in Grade 4 when they used to come in and do Bible studies or whatever, it was so ... but I suppose I used to just sort of sit there and let it all fly over my head a little bit because I didn’t know about it.

Later, in her teenage years, Stephanie moved out of home and to the city. It was there, while boarding with a distant family member who was a born-again Christian, that Stephanie first went to church. Over the next eight months she attended regularly and even got baptised. However, she never connected with the ‘church experience’ and left. Now she describes this time as an ‘encounter’.

Faith is a twenty-three year-old living in a medium-sized town about 200 kilometres from the nearest capital city. She is a student, studying medicine at a rural university and currently lives with her partner on a property just out of town. She commenced tertiary later than most other Gen Y. The country life was important to her and she enjoyed being close to nature, as well as planting her own crops. Her parents had divorced when she was much younger.

Like Stephanie, Faith is a regular yoga practitioner and reader of Tarot cards. She did not see her yoga practice as spiritual, rather it was about recharging, stretching and suppleness. Tarot is important to her, something she uses in order to have a sense of what is going on in her life:

I was just always interested in it. Down on the coast a friend of mine used to take me to a palm-reader and she used to do Tarot cards. A lot of things sometimes rang true and they pretty much have. Like, he told me I’d go through some hard relationships, as you do, and find someone who accepted me for who I am and everything and that’s happened, and some little things.

Both her mother and her aunt also read their Tarot regularly. Faith is also a strong believer in past lives – some of what she said is included in the section above in reincarnation. Her own sense of having lived past lives is strong and something she feels she has always known. Her mother is supportive of this belief.

While Faith definitely believed in reincarnation and fortune-tellers, she indicated that she only ‘maybe’ believed in astrology and communicating with the dead. When asked about this in the interview, she told us:

Well, astrology ... I mean nothing can be a hundred percent accurate but I’ll go and I’ll read my stars every now and then but it’s like ‘Oh yeah that’s not going to happen’ … Communicating with the dead, I’ve actually ... one of my friends, she’s quite like open to ghosts and things, she believes she’s had several encounters, both negative and positive. But my sister has just moved into a house in Perth behind a cemetery and the house has this very welcoming feeling to it. Like you’d think living behind a cemetery you’d sort of
think people would get really uncomfortable but people go there and we were just there on the weekend for the first time and you feel very comfortable just from the word go. And I mean like you can just take that as a sign of the people buried there or maybe there’s like calming spirits or something there, just from the sheer viewpoint that over the back fence is a grave.

Comments such as these indicate that Faith has an overall openness to spiritual beliefs and practices we might associate with the ‘New Age’ or typical New Age practitioners. Unlike Stephanie, Faith was comfortable in describing herself in this way:

I mean there’s so many labels you can give people. Like people label me nerdy and the like. I’d be New Age because I’m like creative and I’m into Tarot and things like that. But yeah, I’d be comfortable with that.

Faith had no religious upbringing. She had a view of religion that she felt was bigger than labels:

Because I figure the belief is you can speak to God wherever you are. He doesn’t just dwell in particular houses, he is everywhere around, and if you want to talk to him you can talk to him wherever you are.

For both Faith and Stephanie, their spiritual orientation is entirely consistent with the way they were raised and the beliefs their mothers hold. In their households, church was unusual, while Tarot reading, past lives, spiritual channelling and the like were normal, accepted practices. One suspects that for many of the other respondents in the New Age Participants group, their mixed palette of beliefs reflect their own eclectic upbringing in religiously non-traditional homes and families.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has explored Generation Y’s engagement with the New Age. We found that for the overwhelming majority of Generation Y, New Age practices are simply not important, but a greater number hold New Age beliefs. Overall, slightly less than 1 in 5 members of Generation Y have an eclectic, New Age-like approach to spirituality. So, while Generation Y are not a generation of seekers, some are interested in the alternatives to mainstream religion. The next chapter looks at those members of Gen Y who are neither religious or spiritual – the Seculars.
The Australian federal government announced in late 2006 a scheme to place school chaplains in all Australian schools, total cost $90 million. Perhaps predictably, the plan was greeted with much criticism in the mainstream press. For example, a columnist in one major metropolitan daily noted that the plan potentially contravened the Australian constitution, which ‘limits the ability of the Commonwealth to play a role in religious affairs’. The presidents of various rationalist and Secular societies wrote a joint letter warning that the plan favoured ‘zealous evangelical/ fundamentalist/ Pentecostal groups’. Another, perhaps more unexpected, opponent was an 18-year-old male from suburban Melbourne, who wrote a letter to the Melbourne Age. He declared that ‘No public school student should be subject to political or religious influence. These are choices that need to be made outside school’.

It is hard to imagine that this young letter writer, publicly vociferous in his opposition to the school chaplain plan, is a religious young man. Much more likely is that he is nonreligious, perhaps identifying himself as an atheist or agnostic. He may never have had anything to do with organised religion, or perhaps is a former practitioner. Whatever his background, this young man felt compelled to write a letter expressing his displeasure at the prospect of religious influence in a government school.

How many nonreligious young people will the newly installed school chaplains encounter, readily able to express their displeasure at the presence of a religious figure in the classroom? Or will the majority be open to their presence? The research discussed already in this book indicates that many of the young people in the classroom will be either nominally religious, or not religious at all. What will be the typical attitude of the nonreligious and non-spiritual youth to organised religion? Doubtlessly, the chaplains will need to quickly establish what the nonreligious believe and value, and how they make sense of their lives and world around them.

This chapter deals with those young people who follow a secular path in their lives, the spirituality type we have called ‘Secular’. Most of this group do not believe in God now (many never have), and do not hold the eclectic mix of religious or New Age beliefs that is reasonably common among Gen Y. Most of these Secular Gen Ys have an ambivalent attitude towards religion and spirituality; it simply does not have any importance in their daily lives.

The chapter begins with a consideration of the extent of secularity among members of Generation Y, examining national patterns of non-belief in God, life after death, angels, demons and the various New Age beliefs discussed in the previous chapter. From there, attention turns to the Secular spirituality type, which we have divided into the three main subtypes: those who have never believed in God (who we call the Nonreligious), those who once believed in God (the Ex-religious) and those who are uncertain (Undecided). Using case studies, we describe each of these Secular subtypes, look at their characteristics and consider the factors that shape their worldviews.

The extent of secularity among Australian Generation Y
This chapter is about those whose life orientation and worldview is primarily ‘this-worldly’ or ‘secular’, if this is understood to entail the rejection of religious and spiritual beliefs, practice
and affiliation. Any discussion of secularity in Australia must necessarily be framed in reference to the broader issue of secularisation. These issues were described at some length in Chapter 2, but are worth reprising here. The term secularisation has several different applications, but at its core refers to a decline in the salience and significance of religion culturally, politically, institutionally and within individual consciousness. As rationality, empiricism, science, individualism and humanist philosophy increasingly dominate society, religion concomitantly declines in importance, for individuals and in public life.

Certainly there has been a substantial decline in levels of religious affiliation since the end of the Second World War. Data from Australian population censuses reveal that in the fifty-nine year period following World War II the number of people identifying themselves as having ‘no religion’ grew from 0.3% of the population to around 19%, while across the same period of time the percentage of the population identifying with the largest Protestant denomination, the Anglican Church declined from 39% to 19%. Overall, the percentage of the population describing themselves as Christian has fallen by 24% between 1947 and 2006.

Social researchers Evans and Kelley have conducted extensive research on patterns of religious attendance and belief in Australia. They have found that ‘levels of belief have not changed greatly in the last 20 years [up to 2004], although there is probably a decline in the last decade’. The picture is less positive in terms of church attendance. 24% of the population attended church weekly in 1967, down to about 18% at present. Evans and Kelley suggest because levels of belief have remained fairly constant, the decline in attendance is perhaps a result of other factors. One of these is society-wide trend in which people are less involved with large-scale community organisations and community life, compared to the 1950s and 1960s. It is an indisputable fact that in the post-war years churches, with their associated tennis, cricket and football clubs and regular dances, played a role in the community that went beyond simply meeting people’s religious needs. The churches are not alone: membership in the Freemasons, scouts, Lions, Rotary and Apex have all dwindled in recent years.

While church attendance and religious affiliation are declining, it is important to note that Australia has always been a secular nation: the separation of church and state is enshrined in the constitution, and no one religious group or ideology has been institutionally privileged over another. When the education act was first proclaimed in Victoria, religion was thought to be ‘a source of conflict to be avoided … so government schools were to be secular with no teaching of religion’.

Scholars of religion, particularly in the US, have in recent years questioned the magnitude, scope and inevitability of secularisation, pointing, for example, to the vitality and growth of evangelical and Pentecostal churches and the capacity of the religious right to influence political decision making. In Australia, sociologist of religion, Gary Bouma, makes a similar case, arguing that ‘religion and spirituality seem to be undergoing change rather than simple decline’. To be sure, Australia’s religious demography has changed somewhat over the past fifty years. In addition to the ‘decline in the hegemony of the English Protestant establishment’ noted above, Australian Census data reveal that the percentage of the population identifying with religions other than Christianity (particularly Islam and Buddhism), alternative religions (including witchcraft) and neo-Pentecostal Christian groups has grown. To be sure, these other religions still represented less than 6% of the population in the 2006 census – hardly revolutionary, especially when one considers that the majority of the population still identifies with a Christian denomination.
Nonetheless, the religious profile of Australia is now more segmented and less centralised
than at any previous time. The spiritually interested have more choices open to them, both
from world religions and newer alternatives. Significantly, amidst these patterns of religious
growth and differentiation, an increasing proportion of the Australian population is
comfortable in declaring they have no religious affiliation and church attendance is in decline.
No matter what one’s perspective is on the matter of secularisation, it is an indisputable fact
that what it means to be either religious or secular is different in a society that is now post-
industrial, multicultural and religiously diverse and in which one’s religious identification is
increasingly a matter of personal choice rather than social obligation.

Against this backdrop of religious decline and differentiation, we can consider the question:
how widespread is non-belief among Gen Y? Most of the changes described above impact far
more directly on those born well before 1980. Generation Ys have never known the time of
Protestant hegemony, or regular Christenings. Are they then less likely to believe than those
who are older?

Thus far, analysis in this book has considered who believes what. We also collected data on
the extent of non-acceptance of religious and spiritual beliefs. Table 8.1 shows the extent of
non-acceptance of religious and spiritual beliefs in Australia for those aged 13-59.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unbelief: Religious or Spiritual</th>
<th>Age groups within Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
<th>Gen X</th>
<th>Boom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>16  18  17</td>
<td>17  25  18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>34  34  29</td>
<td>32  28  26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>16  23  18</td>
<td>19  25  18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is very little truth in any religion</td>
<td>22  23  24</td>
<td>23  26  29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in life after death</td>
<td>36  37  36</td>
<td>36  36  40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in the existence of angels</td>
<td>48  51  42</td>
<td>46  49  51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in the existence of demons</td>
<td>55  60  56</td>
<td>57  57  56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible to communicate with the dead</td>
<td>57  55  52</td>
<td>54  51  64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in reincarnation</td>
<td>47  48  45</td>
<td>46  48  52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in psychics or fortune-tellers</td>
<td>62  59  53</td>
<td>57  52  58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that slightly less than one fifth of the population aged 13-59 reject a belief in
God, while similar numbers hold that there is very little truth in any religion; a quarter of
those aged 13-59 do not believe in life after death. Levels of unbelief in angels and demons is even higher, with almost 50% of those aged 13-59 not believing in the existence of demons.

When it comes to not believing in God the most sceptical are those aged 25-39, the Generation Xers, commonly described as the most cynical of the three generations, X, Y and Baby Boomers. 25% of Generation X do not believe in God, compared to 17% of Gen Y and 18% of Baby Boomers. Among the Gen Ys, levels of non-belief in the traditional religious beliefs are fairly similar across all three Gen Y age groups. For example, 16% of 13-15 year-olds do not believe in God compared to 18% of 16-18 year-olds and 17% of 19-24 year olds; 36% of 13-15 year-olds do not believe in the existence of angels compared to 37% of 16-18 year-olds and 36% of 19-24 year olds. Overall, these data show that a reasonable percentage of Generation Y reject traditional religious beliefs.

Looking next at New Age beliefs, we see the number who reject these outright is considerable, with more than half of Gen Ys rejecting belief in astrology, the possibility of communicating with the dead, or the power of psychics and fortune-tellers. The only New Age belief not rejected by more than half this generation is reincarnation, which, as we saw in the previous chapter, is the most popular of the New Age beliefs. The oldest members of Gen Y (19-24) are a little less likely to reject New Age beliefs than any of the three young age groups. This makes sense: those most open to the each of the New Age beliefs are aged 19-24.

The table above shows levels of non-acceptance of specific religious or New Age beliefs. Who among these could be described as following an essentially secular path in life, eschewing most religious and spiritual beliefs, practice and affiliation? 28% of Gen Ys – about a quarter of youth and young adults aged 13-24 – either do not believe in God at all or are unsure, do not affiliate with a religion, and largely reject New Age beliefs. These are people for whom religion and spirituality has little meaning in their daily lives. We refer to them as the Secular spirituality type.

**The Secular Spirituality Type**

For the purposes of analysis and discussion, the Secular spirituality type is divided into three discrete sub-types: The Nonreligious, the Ex-religious and the Undecided. Below is a description of each sub-type:

- **Nonreligious.** 10% of Generation Y. People who have *never* believed in God, do not engage in religious practices, do not hold an eclectic mix of spiritual beliefs and do not affiliate with a religion.

- **Ex-religious.** 4% of Generation Y. People who *used* to believe in God but definitely do not believe now, do not identify with a religion now and do not hold an eclectic mix of New Age beliefs.

- **Undecided.** 14% of Generation Y. Those who are unsure if they believe in God, do not now identify with a religious tradition, nor hold an eclectic mix of New Age beliefs. People in this group have always been equivocal about whether God exists or not, with the majority having *never* had a definite belief in God at any point in their lives, while some once believed and are now unsure rather than confidently negative, as is the case with the Ex-religious.

Table 8.2 presents an overview of the beliefs that these Secular sub-types reject.
Table 8.2 Gen Y Seculars (13-24): Non-acceptance of selected religious and spiritual beliefs by Secular sub-type (percent of sub-type)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Secular sub-type</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in God – no</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- unsure</td>
<td>Ex-religious</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is very little truth in any religion</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believe in a higher being</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in life after death</td>
<td>Ex-religious</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in the existence of angels</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in the existence of demons</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in astrology</td>
<td>Ex-religious</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impossible to communicate with the dead</td>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in reincarnation</td>
<td>Nonreligious</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not believe in psychics or fortune-tellers</td>
<td>Ex-religious</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the column on the left we see that unlike the New Agers of the previous chapter – some of whom did not believe in God and never have – the Nonreligious are not open to New Age beliefs, with 78% or more not believing in astrology, the possibility of communicating with the dead, or in the power of psychics (reincarnation is slightly more popular). Affirming their ‘this-worldly’ orientation, only a third (36%) of the Nonreligious believe that there is ‘a higher being or life force out there’, and of those who have this belief, 70% believe this being does not care about them. The Nonreligious also largely reject the possibility of other forms of transcendence or otherworldliness: 63% do not believe in life after death, 86% do not believe in the existence of angels and 85% do not believe in demons.

Like the Nonreligious, the Ex-religious have a strong this-worldly orientation that goes further than simply rejecting God. Looking down their column, we see that slightly more than a quarter (28%) believe that there is a higher being or life force out there, and of the few who do, the absolute majority believes that this force does ‘not care about us’. Notwithstanding the fact they once believed in the possibility of something ‘out there’, the Ex-religious also largely reject the possibility of other forms of transcendence or otherworldliness: 62% do not believe in life after death, 79% do not believe in the existence of angels and 75% do not believe in demons. Like the Nonreligious, the Ex-religious do not embrace the spiritual alternatives. Overall, these two groups are very similar, and represent the hardcore of secularity among Gen Y – 14% of that generation.

The Undecided group are not as decisively ‘this-worldly’ as the other two Secular subcategories. Slightly more than half of the Undecided (58%) believe that ‘there is a higher-being or life force out there’ and most of these life-force believers think that this force ‘cares about them’. A smaller proportion of the Undecided group do not hold religious-derived beliefs (angels, demons, life after death) compared to the Nonreligious and Ex-religious, but as table 8.2 shows, their orientation is still more towards the secular than religious. Not reported in this table are the percentages of the Undecided who answered ‘maybe’ to these questions. Compared to the Nonreligious and Ex-religious, a significantly higher proportion of the Undecided group said ‘maybe’ to all the beliefs listed in table 8.2 (apart from the belief in the higher being, which was yes/no). But these were still the minority of believers.
**Gen Y: Secular: Conclusion**
The data in this table suggest that religion or spirituality has little meaning in the life of Seculars. Either they do not believe at all in the possibility of transcendence, or they simply do not care. Our face-to-face interviews certainly support this being the case.

**Three typical Seculars: Case studies**
In the following sections, we present case studies of three ‘typical’ Seculars: Olivia, who is classified as Nonreligious, Justin, who is Ex-religious, and Clarissa, who is Undecided. Through their interviews, we can arrive at a better understanding of their values, worldview and ethos.

**Olivia: Never Believed in God**
10% of Gen Y are Nonreligious, having never believed in God and largely rejecting spiritual alternatives. One such person is Olivia, an 18-year-old woman who grew up in a small country town, but who now lives in a smaller Australian capital city because of her work. She went to a government school. Her mother is a homemaker and her father a tradesman who also has a tertiary qualification. Olivia has three siblings, although her parents are now divorced. When she was interviewed, Olivia was completing a business internship, hoping to secure permanent employment when finished. In her spare time, she likes gardening, reading and going out to nightclubs.

Olivia came across as a happy and self-assured person. She is passionate about challenging racism, caring for the environment and ‘female rights’, and her goals for the future were simple:

I just want to be able to be happy, happy with myself as a person, my growth and the way my life is going. I just don’t want to waste my life, I want to contribute something, feel like my life has made some impact on society, or even one person, if I can help one person and make their life better then my life hasn’t been a total waste.

That said, life has not always been easy for her, particularly in her later teens. Year 12 was especially difficult. A bright but less-than-committed student, Olivia struggled with the study requirements and could not get herself properly motivated. Her problems were compounded by her classroom behaviour: ‘I used to rock up stoned to classes a lot and fall asleep in half their lessons, and they would say to me that I was the brightest student they had ever taught.’

Olivia could not explain why her final year of school was so difficult, whether problems at home, just being a teenager or the challenge of study meant she did not do so well. She is not alone among her peers, however, as many young people in her remote country town also struggled with ‘drug and alcohol abuse, crime, unemployment and dropping out of school and things like that’. Olivia has put the setback of a poor final year of school behind her, has a job and is full of hope about her future. Overall, she seemed to be a resilient and thoughtful young woman.

The face-to-face interviews we conducted did not start immediately with questions about religious or spiritual beliefs. Seeking to build rapport with the interviewee, we began by asking about how they spent their time, activities they enjoy and the movies and TV they watched. Next, we talked to them about exciting or meaningful experiences, values and important people in their lives. After this, the interview turned to questions about religion and spirituality. At this point in her interview, Olivia was remarkably candid: ‘Personally I don’t
believe in God, no.’ She has never believed in God and has never been involved in a church or participated in organised religion, except when she had no choice (school religious education, infant baptism). Religion or spirituality has little to no part in her life and her worldview is this-worldly. Her here-and-now orientation was apparent in answers to a whole range of spiritual and religious questions. For example, when asked ‘Do you have an idea of what might happen after death’ she told us:

I’d really like for there to be something but I don’t know, I can’t see more than it just being lights out. I am very interested in science and the whole workings of the universe and space and the way things are, how life is structured, I find it unbelievable. I like to be able to see some logic in things and evidence mainly. Life after death is a lovely idea and I think it would be great because we have got so little time here as it is. I see it as a way people, especially in the Dark Ages when there was so little to look forward to in life and there were so many people living on that lower standard of living, it was just another comfort to have that even if life is all that bad we have got something to look forward to in the end. I don’t think it is a good outlook to have on life, to be awaiting this final thing, because you take too much for granted what happens now.

Although never religious herself, Olivia was not hostile toward religion, and even thought there is some value in religious teachings and morals.

When asked about psychic experiences, tarot and eerie coincidences, she said:

I haven’t seen enough to believe totally in psychic abilities or anything like that although I do think that the mind is such a massive organ and is so confusing as it is, like we know so little about it and what we do know is like nothing solid. I’ve also read a lot about mind tricks and stuff like that too.

This is typical: her answers to existential questions, or explanations about the mysterious or the supernatural invariably rejected the possibility that there is more to life than that which can be seen, tested or verified.

Elsewhere in this book, we have discussed the importance of parents in the transmission of religious faith. Olivia’s non-belief reflects the way she was raised:

My parents had us all Christened or whatever it was, I’m not even sure if it was Catholic or Christian, but they said it was mainly just for the rest of their family because it looked better for them. They always told us from a very young age that we had a Bible in our house and to take it with a grain of salt and if you believe in it and want to do it by all means, but we are not going to tell you what to believe in.

At least when she was very young, her parents identified with a Christian denomination – Olivia is not sure which – but this was simply a nominal identification and her parents never attended church. Olivia has always been a religious sceptic, albeit an open-minded one:

I had read the Bible just because it was there, I think I was bored one afternoon at home, and I started getting into a few stories and some of them were pretty seedy too. It really interested me. By and large it [religion] has got a lot of good things that come out of it like messages, a lot of contradictory and irrelevant ones too.

Religious education was compulsory at her primary school, but here her anti-authoritarian streak and questioning nature came to the fore:

I used to question and push the Father or Priest and bring up all these contradictions, he would say that all living souls would go to heaven, and I’d say something stupid like, ‘why aren’t dogs in heaven?’ and really debate about it … I just found it all idiotic a lot of the time … he also told me after one class that I was going to end up in a mental institution by the time I was eighteen because
I didn’t believe in God. I was in Year 5 so I would have been about ten years old at the time and that sort of put a bit of a downer on the situation for me. After that I was adamant that I was never going to conform to a religious point of view.

If religion or alternative spirituality were not factors shaping her life, what did she identify as some of the things that influence her the most? Like many other Generation Ys, Olivia nominated family and friends as her biggest influence:

My friends to me are very important and I have had a lot of arguments with my family for that very reason. I’ve had a very up and down relationship, very love-hate with all members of my family and my friends have been there for me more than I could ever ask of them or expect them in very hard times. If anything in life I think your interactions with people are the most important.

As will be discussed at length in chapter 10, for young people friends are increasingly important to their identity, hardly surprising given the significant shifts that have taken place in family living arrangements in the past 30 years.

**Justin: Used to Believe in God**

The next major grouping of Seculars are the Ex-religious, just 4% of Gen Y: the majority of them were raised in a religious tradition but have since repudiated it; the others were simply believers in God at some previous stage in their lives but have never identified with a religion. Most of the former believers who were raised in a religious tradition identified with the two largest Australian denominations, the Catholics and the Anglicans.

Justin is typical of the Ex-religious. Raised as a Catholic, he is now, in his words ‘agnostic or atheist’. Justin was interviewed on two occasions, two and a half years apart. At the time of his first interview, Justin was 17 and in year 12 at school. At that stage, he was living with his parents in northern Australia. We interviewed him at the national convention of Youth Voice, an international organisation of young people committed to serving others. He hoped to get adequate marks to study medicine at university. He was articulate, politically aware, affable – a bit of a larrikin – and very socially engaged. Justin was close to his parents, even though his father is of a different political persuasion. He said: ‘I’ve got a happy family, two cool brothers and I understand that there are a lot of people that didn’t get those chances.’

When we caught up with Justin the second time he was about to embark on a trip to South America, where he was to manage a travelling puppet show. The puppet show visits orphanages and schools. Justin was very excited about this prospect. His involvement in the puppet show came about through his volunteer work with Youth Voice. Now nearing 20, Justin was studying medicine at university after obtaining excellent marks in Year 12. His university was in another city far from where his parents live; he resides in a university residential college during the semester. Justin was still an easygoing fellow.

In his first interview, we asked him whether he believed in God. His answer was, no, but he had a tentative belief that something else might be ‘out there’: ‘I suppose in a way I sort of believe in a force, when I really think about it I really believe in a force.’ This tentative belief in a higher being makes no difference to the way he lived his life. His worldview was very much grounded in the here-and-now: ‘I think about the present and I go out and do it.’ Two and a half years later, nothing much had changed, telling us about his view of what is ‘out there’: ‘Once you die, you die, so you’d better get on with it.’ He was also still equivocal on the matter of a higher being: ‘I suppose I believe in, like, a higher being.’
Justin did not believe in God, nor did he believe in religion:

For a fair while I’ve had absolutely no belief in organised religion … it’s crazy … I really get really upset with people who base their actions on their interpretation of what God said. For example, their attitude is ‘Gays, gays are horrible people’. Someone in the Bible … the Old Testament, there’s this paragraph about gays and I mean it pisses me off a lot … I get upset about organised religion, I think it gets us nowhere.

During his first interview, Justin told us he had been raised as a Catholic, and attended mass. This was something we particularly wanted to delve into with the second interview – what he believed as a child, what his parents said to him about religion, what his peers and siblings thought. This might provide a clearer picture of why he doesn’t believe now.

As a boy, Justin went to Mass ‘fairly regularly at one stage’ but this ceased by the time he turned about twelve: ‘Yeah, Mum and Dad like tried to raise us as Catholic for a while but they soon gave up, like they had no real religious beliefs themselves, I don’t think and yeah we went to church until I was in about Grade 7.’ Church was not something that Justin ever really connected with:

Oh like I never really wanted to go. I mean even when I was little I didn’t really enjoy it. My parents stopped going and I was quite happy not to attend also. And I think they stopped going because of the kids, we didn’t show any sort of belief in this. I never liked the Catholic dogma that they feed into you at church.

When his parents were taking him to Mass as a child, the teachings were not reinforced at home:

They [his parents] never read us Bible stories. At one stage we were going to church weekly. It would be a surprise if we didn’t go to church but … I asked mum about this the other day, actually she’s like … they only started going again like as the kids were born sort of thing, just to give us some sort of appreciation … they were going to get us baptised, we were going to church sort of thing but the whole thing in the end was a dismal failure.

For Justin, there was no key moment of turning away from God or abandoning the church, rather, his belief and identification simply faded as he got older, a consequence of his parents’ own lack of interest. As he developed his own independent view about life, he did not feel any reason to go on his own terms. Growing up, and later, in his teens, Justin had few religious peers:

Ah I mean they just didn’t drink beer or have a good time, the religious kids. Unless they were quite hypocritical. There were a couple of kids in my class that were good kids and quite religious but you couldn’t really hang out with them especially when we got to the age when we got cars and we were quite silly on the weekend.

Three of his grandparents were still practising Catholics. Justin also thought his little brother was becoming more religious ‘which worries me’. These days, religion was not a dinner table conversation topic, except Justin and his middle brother ‘occasionally hang shit on religion around the dinner table’. That Justin no longer believes in God is related to the fact that he no longer attends or identifies. As participation ceased in his pre-teen years, so his belief in God has not been sustained.

*Clarissa: Unsure about God*
The final grouping of Seculars are the Undecided, 14% of Gen Y. Being either male or female does not increase the probability that a person is Undecided, and age has no influence. These youth and young adults are not as secular as the Nonreligious and the Ex-religious, but their life orientation is very much in the ‘here-and-now’. These are people with little ‘feel for’ or experience of religion.

One such person is Clarissa, a 16-year-old who attends a private school and was about to start year 12 when we interviewed her. She lived in a middle-class suburb of a major city. School was a bit of a struggle; Clarissa had thought about not attempting year 12 and going to a TAFE instead. Her interests were typical of a teen: dancing, friends, socialising, following her football team. Like so many teens we interviewed, her life ambitions were modest – being happy, being loved – and centred around personal fulfilment, such as finding a satisfying job. She didn’t have strong opinions about the world around her, nor was she socially engaged or community-minded. Overall, she came across as someone with an as yet unformed worldview.

When asked about her religious and spiritual beliefs, she was equivocal:

So what do you believe in?
I know there is something there but I don’t know what it is, there’s something but I’m not quite sure what to believe in yet, I’m still finding my way.

Do you believe in God for instance?
Right now probably not, I’m at that stage, because I went to a religious primary school and that was sort of ‘God this and God that’. And now that I’m getting sort different ideas from everyone, having everyone’s life experiences and things, what they believe in thrown at me, so now I’m finding out what I sort of believe in too.

Like the majority of the undecided, Clarissa believed in the existence of a higher power. For her, this belief emerged during a dark period in her life. We asked here whether she had ever been aware of a ‘presence of something more powerful, or a force’ she told us:

I actually wanted to take my life a few years ago when I felt, I didn’t obviously now, but I actually felt that there was something there that sort of stopped me. I don’t know what it was but it stopped me, it came from inside my head, it stopped me.

Would you put a name to that, say it was God, or just a force?
To me it was just a force, a spirit thing.

So you believe in spirits?
Yes. There is something there, something is always there with you. I don’t know if you call it an angel or something, some people call it a guardian angel, I don’t know, but always with you.

So what do you think that that thing tells you or how does it influence you?
It’s sort of like, it influences you sort of or it doesn’t influence you about anything. Like I don’t know how to explain it, it’s like it’s there, and you know it is there so you sort of, to me I think I’m conscious of it sometimes with decisions I make, I sort of know it is there.

So how would it impact the decisions you are making?
I don’t know.

Many of the teens with whom we spoke across the course of this research had unformed ideas about what they believed. This was true for both those with some religious enculturation and those who have none. Clarissa was raised religious and is now ‘uncertain’ rather than confidently negative.

I am actually baptised Lutheran, because I’ve been baptised and been confirmed and done all the steps at church. But that’s in my family, religion, like you are born into that, my parents were sort
of born into that religion ... when you are sort of old enough to start actually saying, ‘hang on, what about this, what about that, I don’t believe this and that’. So right now I’m sort of finding my way. So I’ve sort of gone off Lutherans ... I was born into it, like when I was little we went to church every Sunday but for the past three years I have stopped going, I go every now and then, it depends on what I’ve got on. So right now I wouldn’t call myself a Lutheran.

Like Justin above, for Clarissa, no longer having belief is associated with no longer being involved in a religious community and having nonreligious parents. In her case, not participating is her choice and came about because of her questioning of certain beliefs. For the most part, however, spirituality is simply not a major factor in her life. When asked about the religiosity and spirituality of her friends she said:

I don’t really know because we don’t really talk about what we believe in.

What do you talk about?
The weekend, how life is going, what we are doing, family and things.

If religion or alternative spirituality were not factors shaping her life, how did she deal with existential questions? This what Clarissa said about life after death:

I think that we all go to a place that we want to go to. Like you go to a place that you dreamed of that you had in your life, you can go to a perfect place like when you have your own little world, nothing is wrong, everything you want is there, it happens.

And what about how life turns out? Can this be controlled by humans? Clarissa’s answer was interesting:

Each part of your life, the events, paths of your life, it’s in sections, the future is handed out according to the influences.

What’s been an influence that’s made you take a particular path?
I had a friend who got hit by a car and died when I was in primary school. To me influence, like cherish your life, take each day a you’ve got it and make the most of it, don’t worry about the bad stuff, not block it out, but get on with your life, enjoy what you have got, be grateful for what you have got, been given.

For the most part, Clarissa is typical of the Secular informants with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews: largely tolerant of religion, but putting their faith in science and humanity and not looking towards a religious tradition for meaning, purpose, values or guidance. Most of the Gen Y Seculars live lives effectively untouched by religion and pay it very little regard.

Social factors associated with being Nonreligious or Ex-religious
Having explored the three case studies, it is appropriate to consider more broadly the factors associated with being either Nonreligious or Ex-religious. Up to this point, the Nonreligious and Ex-religious types have been treated separately. As we can see in Table 8.2 above, these two groups are very similar in their levels of non-belief. For the analysis that follows they will be treated as one group. This larger grouping will provide more reliable statistics.

Parental influence
Previous research demonstrates that the strength, or even presence, of teenage and young adult religious commitment (and by way of extension, belief in God) is mainly contingent on parental influence.\textsuperscript{13} For example, research by American sociologist Dean Hoge and colleagues found that the religious beliefs of the adolescent are strongest when parents are committed, when these values are transmitted to the children, and when the parent-child relationship is healthy.\textsuperscript{14} We might reasonably expect a similar pattern would be seen for those who are secular in orientation, and that their parents will typically be nonreligious as well. In
other words, when parents are non-believers, this is most effectively transmitted to children under the same conditions as for the transmission of belief. The qualitative data we collected confirms this distinct pattern: like Olivia’s parents, the parents of the Nonreligious were either not religious or nominally religious when the children were young, while the parents of the ex-religious, like Justin’s, were nominally religious at best. None had rebelled against a strict religious upbringing, although this is of course a reason why some might choose to follow a secular path in life (although we did not come across any in the face-to-face interviews).

What about other factors, particularly social and demographic factors? Are these associated with being Nonreligious/Ex-religious?

**Gender and age**

Table 8.3 shows that gender is associated with being Nonreligious/Ex-religious.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person is Nonreligious/Ex-religious</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Males are almost twice as likely as females to be Nonreligious/Ex-religious. We will not show a table for age, as it has no major influence: being older does not significantly increase the probability of being this type. Being male increases the probability that a person will be Nonreligious/Ex-religious, but does gender still impact on the likelihood of being Nonreligious/Ex-religious if we take into account the effect of other social and demographic factors?

**Multivariate Analysis**

A logistic regression analysis (see p 00) controlling for the effects of a person’s age, sex, school type, level of education, social advantage, place of birth, parents’ place of birth and where and with whom a person lives reveals the following factors to be significantly associated with being Nonreligious/Ex-religious:

- *Being male.*
- *Living away from the family home.*
- *Having an Australian born father.*

Those who attend or have attended government schools are somewhat more likely than those who attend Catholic schools to be Nonreligious/Ex-religious, but this association is not statistically significant when all the other factors are controlled for in the analysis.

How might these findings be explained?

**Gender**

We noted in chapter 6 that being either male or female makes no difference to the probability of being an Active Christian. Among the other spirituality types, however, gender is still influential, but in different ways: women are more attracted to the New Age and men are more attracted to the secular path. We explained in chapter 7, the association between the New Age and the feminine. In contrast, the secular path has long been associated with
traditional ‘masculine’ values and norms, such as reason and rationality. This association between the secular and the masculine is reflected in and reproduced through the mass-media. Unlike female-oriented media, male-oriented media do not have anything like the same New Age content (Ralph and FHM magazines have no palm reading or horoscope columns). Only one of the supernatural-themed TV shows has a lead character who is male (Angel, a spin-off from Buffy). The recent popularity of Harry Potter books and movies might open more boys’ minds to the otherworldly possibilities, but Harry is hardly ‘cool’ compared to witches like Buffy, and he is not cut from the classic masculine hero mould.

**Living away from home**

What about those who live away from home? Why are they more likely than those who still live at home to be Nonreligious/Ex-religious? Our data tell us that the majority of the Nonreligious/Ex-religious who now live away from home did not move out until their early adult years, when they had finished their schooling. Maybe the independence afforded by living away from the family home results in a person developing a stronger sense of what they believe in – or not. While this might be the case with some of the Ex-religious, the Nonreligious who live away from home have not lost faith since leaving – they have never believed in God at any stage in their lives. What appears to be happening then, is that the Nonreligious/Ex-religious are not as inclined as the other spirituality types to remain living in the family home once they reach adulthood. Perhaps the ties that bind are not as strong for many of them as it might be for those who are religious. The family unit is very important in all the major religious traditions and it might be that religious children want to keep living at home because the home environment is happier and more family-oriented or the family as a whole is more committed to togetherness.

**Why people no longer believe in God**

Having examined three case studies and considered the factors associated with being either Nonreligious or Ex-religious, attention now turns to the reasons why people no longer believe in God. In the *Spirit of Generation Y* survey, former believers were asked to provide reasons why they no longer believed. Like the questions about no longer attending and no longer identifying, survey participants were invited to provided open-ended reasons about why they no longer believed in God. This was the question we used:

We’re interested in the reasons why people who used to believe in God (or a higher being or life force that cares about us) change their views ...You’d have your own reasons for the change in your view – would you mind telling us about that...
- What other reasons do you have (for no longer believing as you previously did )?
- If this question was answered, it was repeated for a third time.

- Then the interviewee was asked: (Apart from the things you’ve just told me about)... are any of the following (also) reasons why you no longer believe as you did previously?
  - Doing further study or scientific or other subjects
  - Finding that religion or religious beliefs hold me back
  - Couldn’t accept that there is a God with so much suffering in the world
  - No convincing evidence or proof for God
  - So many religions, with contradictory teachings
  - Disillusionment with churches or religious organisations

In total, there were three open-ended queries and a set question with six responses, all of which could be chosen. Of the 102 people who fitted the criterion for once having believed in God, 74 provided answers. We noted more than 250 comments on why people no longer
believe. The four most common reasons for no longer believing, are: ‘doing further study, especially science’ (16% of verbatim responses); ‘no convincing evidence or proof’ (13% of verbatim responses); ‘disillusionment with the churches’ (11% of verbatim responses); and a category we called ‘couldn’t accept that God allows suffering’ (9% of verbatim responses). These were the main reasons offered by both the Gen Ys and the older groups. Below are some examples of what members of Gen Y said about these four main reasons.

**Doing further study, especially science**
Many former believers felt that the explanations about life provided by science made a belief in God impossible:

- Having learned some things about science and evolution I can see that people were not made to be in God’s image and that lead me to realise that I don’t believe. (18-year-old male)
- Just studying about it … the study of evolution helped make me change my mind. (14-year-old male)
- Biology, astronomy, these thing conflict with religious beliefs. (15-year-old male)

**No convincing evidence or proof**
For others, more proof of God’s existence was required:

- There’s all these images of what God might be like, but there are no photographs. And how did Mary ever get with God, and how did God’s son come to Earth? (14-year-old female)
- There is no evidence to back up what they are saying. (17-year-old female)
- I’m one of those people that seeing is believing. (16-year-old female)

**Disillusionment with the churches**
As was the case with those who no longer attend and those who no longer identify, anger or dissatisfaction with religious organisations was a catalyst for non-belief:

- The church is into making a lot of money, one of the biggest businesses in the world. (22-year-old male)
- How they refuse to let people to go and see and do things because of the boundaries of the beliefs. Like banning kids from seeing Harry Potter. (16-year-old male)

**Couldn’t accept that God allows suffering**
This last category is a common reason put forward for not believing in God. If God were real, how could suffering, especially the suffering of innocents, be allowed?

- If God cared then he wouldn’t let the people suffer. (16-year-old male)
- Well everyone says God does all this good stuff. In church they’re all talking about how good God is, but then what about wars and stuff? (14-year-old female)
- Poverty, people dying everyday for no reason (babies etc). (16-year-old female)

Another set of responses reflect changes that took place as a person got older. For these people, belief in God was just a childhood superstition that passed, or church participation was something in their childhood and circumstances changed, so that belief in God was not reinforced:
When I was little I went to religion classes and was young so I just absorbed it. (16-year-old female)

I was raised Catholic and as I grew up I realised there is no God or higher being. (24-year-old male)

I believed in God when I was little and went to a Catholic school and didn’t know any better. And then I moved to a public school and saw the difference, as it wasn’t forced down my throat. (15-year-old female)

In my primary school they had weekly prayers. When we moved and came up here the praying also stopped; after this my beliefs changed. (15-year-old male)

In chapter 4 we discussed at some length that the reasons people gave for no longer attending church may or may not be the actual causes of such change. The considerations offered there also apply to the reasons offered as to why people have ceased to believe in God. The explanation for why a person no longer believes may be more complicated than simply what the survey participants declared to us; a short answer to an open-ended question does not reveal how different factors, such as parental beliefs or peer influence, impact on what a person believes or does not believe. Nor does it tell us how strong the belief in God actually was, whether this was a notional belief or something held very strongly. That said, there was very little surprise in the answers we collected.

Gen Y’s Secular Humanists
Having explored who among Gen Y is secular in orientation and why this might be the case, it is worth discussing briefly whether following this path makes a difference to the type of life a person leads. For example, does being either Nonreligious, Ex-religious, or Undecided make a difference to a person’s community participation? Are Seculars more self-oriented, less socially engaged and have different values compared to those we classified as having a Traditional or New Age spirituality? Do the Seculars care less about the world around them?

Almost all the Secular informants from our face-to-face interviews displayed a really striking ethical drive: a strong social conscience and extensive, generous involvement in individual and group activities for the benefit of others. For the most part, these particular young people were participants in the ‘Youth Voice’ program (see page 00), which drew people with this outlook from all over the country, irrespective of their religious orientation. Most participants in that program displayed these admirable characteristics. However, as we will suggest in chapters 10 and 11, this association between those Gen Y with a Secular worldview and the altruistic ethic is far from the norm. Seculars, particularly the Nonreligious and Ex-religious, typically score lower than Active Christians and New Age Participants on measures of social concern, altruism, positive human values and compassion. We explain in these chapters why this might be the case. Although the majority of Seculars are less engaged than other spirituality types, it is interesting to conclude this chapter with a look into the values, worldview and ethos of the altruistically minded Seculars from the Youth Voice program with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews. In earlier reports about our research, we referred to this group as Humanists.

Many readers will be familiar with the intellectual and philosophical tradition of humanism. Humanism has antecedents going back to ancient Greece, and it has become a key component of the Western worldview. Humanism exists in both secular and religious forms – our interest in this section is with those who can be described as both secular and humanist. At its core,
humanism affirms the primacy of human beings; we are not equivalent to other living creatures.\textsuperscript{15} Humanism views humans as having ‘unique capacities and abilities, to be cultivated and celebrated for their own sake’.\textsuperscript{16} Humanism is abidingly optimistic, and places great faith in values such as ‘endurance, nobility, intelligence, moderation, flexibility, sympathy and love’.\textsuperscript{17} These types of sentiments were expressed in the face-to-face interviews with the non-religious Youth Voice participants.

For example, \textit{Olivia} told us:

\begin{quote}
Just treating people with a basic equality and the whole positive outlook on life and no matter how bad things are or how bad people are that we have all got good in us.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{So humanity isn’t all evil?}
Yeah, no matter how bad it looks, even the worst people, mass murderers, can be the best family people. We are basically good creatures it is just what influences us, our experiences and so many other different variables can make us what we are.
\end{quote}

The secular humanist emphasis on humanity’s various capacities leads to the assumption that life can and ought to be lived confidently in the here-and-now, ‘without metaphysical or religious certainty’.\textsuperscript{18} 18-year-old \textit{Steven} said:

\begin{quote}
And just as I said before, I … go by the doctrine of the whole period of life means nothing. You die in the end. So enjoy the time you’ve got and don’t be afraid of all the petty crap. Just enjoy yourself. I have found so much joy out of helping other people so that’s more my philosophy. And I just feel if everyone gave, if everyone who had what we have got gave twenty minutes of their life, in helping someone who needed it, there would be no poverty, there would be no famine, and whatever, well I guess. And you get so much joy out of doing that stuff. Just I don’t know, I just recommend that to anyone you know. I think that’s how the world should work. People worry so much about themselves and petty stuff and when it really doesn’t mean anything, and all superficial stuff and that kind of thing.
\end{quote}

Arguably, the fundamental value exalted by humanism is the infinite worth of the human individual, and the inviolability of personal freedom and autonomy: freedom in cultural, artistic, sexual, political and economic terms; freedom from every kind of restriction, censorship, oppression or discrimination – whether based on race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, sexual preference or age. Does this commitment to personal freedom impact on their attitude to religion? Unlike many secular humanists, the Youth Voice participants tended to be quite tolerant of religion and appreciative of its values. 22-year-old \textit{Brett} is not only ‘cool with’ friends who believe, but has a positive appreciation of the ‘good human values’ contained in traditional religions and carried by religious organisations:

\begin{quote}
A lot of my friends come from a wide variety of religions and I find it interesting to talk to them about how they feel.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textit{When you talk about your values, would you say you have been influenced by a particular religion or philosophy when you decide those sorts of things?}
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Not a particular religion no. Next year I’m working in a Catholic boys’ school which is so foreign to me it’s not funny, and I have serious ethical and moral worries about going and teaching in a place like that. And the flip side of that is that there could be a kid there just like me who has been sent there because his parents think it’s really good there. I think me being there for that kid would be really important. There is no religious backing to the way I think or the way I do things. . . . At this stage I don’t believe in a higher force or anything like that but I am totally cool with anyone who does, but I can’t convince myself that it is real for me. Unfortunately the more study I do the less I tend to believe that it’s legitimate, but that’s me . . . I think there is something in Jung and Freud but I don’t think any of them got it right. Catholicism, Muslim religions, Buddhism, I think there is something in all of it. But I think those sorts of things are the sort of values we try and push through whatever it is we are doing.
Humanism has tended to be allied with an optimistic view of human progress, derived from the rise of science and the series of scientific and technological revolutions. As we might expect, the non-religious Youth Voice participants looked to science to provide an alternative to religious explanations. 18-year-old Fiona is one such example:

I do believe that there are things that aren’t explained at the moment by science but I believe that doesn’t mean there isn’t a scientific explanation – the idea that it’s just genes or chemical reactions that make us who we are. I don’t really think like there is this other thing like a soul in me, like I’m pretty sure it is all coming from me and how I’ve been brought up and just that’s who I am and that it is all physical and explained by science. But I don’t think that means that you can really define it by science; science created it but you still act, like emotions and human thinking and stuff, you can’t really explain how people will act. So no, I don’t think I really do believe in something else directing me. I think a lot of it is all internal. I believe in having your own faith and what you think and that’s fine and I respect my friends so much who believe in a power; but I actually can’t comprehend how they would think that it is true. I just don’t think organised religion is really beneficial and don’t really believe anything but science.

Such is the worldview expressed by the non-religious Youth Voice informants who we interviewed in our study: largely tolerant of religion, putting their faith in science and humanity and not looking towards a transcendent reality for meaning, purpose, values or guidance. Many of the socially engaged Active Christians with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews also expressed strong humanist, albeit religious humanist, sentiments.

As will be shown in chapters 10 and 11, the social awareness and community engagement demonstrated by these Youth Voice participants is not typical of Seculars generally; nor is their life orientation so obviously positive and affirming. For this reason, we elected not to use the term humanist to describe those members of Gen Y who follow a secular path.

Conclusion

Many young people in Australia are following an avowedly secular path in life – rejecting a belief in God and declaring that there is little truth in any religion, while at the same time affirming human experience, human reason and scientific explanations. While some Gen Ys might be angry or disenchanted with organised religion, many simply do not care or are not interested – it has never been on their ‘radar’. This is not unique to Generation Y – many Boomers and Xers are also Seculars, according to our definition, pointing to the broader trend away from religion which took root in the 1960s and 1970s. Gen Y Seculars simply reflect the broader secular context and the spirituality of their own parents. For all of the religious revival seen in many parts of the world, the vitality and growth of some Australian churches and the numbers who affirm a belief in non-traditional spiritual paths, the secular strand in Australian society is flourishing.
Chapter 9
‘From obligation to consumption’
Spirituality, Culture and Society

In the previous chapters we have examined spirituality types among Australian youth and young adults and described some of the personal and demographic factors which appear to influence these spiritualities. What about other influences on spirituality? Does the fact that we live in a society with rampant consumerism make a difference to young people’s spirituality? What about all the TV shows with supernatural content? Does that influence young people’s beliefs? And what about music? Does listening to too much Marilyn Mason or Metallica dispose someone to question traditional religion?

This chapter places our findings about spirituality in the broader socio-cultural context in which Generation Y has come of age and considers how this context might impact on the spirituality of young people. We begin with a discussion of various generalisations of Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y, then present an overall summary of the social context of Generation Y, focusing in particular on the rise of consumerism, changing patterns of work, increased instability in family arrangements and the prevalence of individualism. This is followed by an examination of the ways in which young people engage with technology and the impact that popular culture has on spirituality. We then conclude with a review of some of the major demographic and other social influences on Gen Y spirituality.

‘Talking about my generation’: The social context of Generation Y and their spirituality
Throughout this research we have been using the term ‘Generation Y’ to refer to the cohort born between 1981 and 1995. Before Generation Y came ‘Generation X’ (1966-1980) and the ‘Baby Boomers’ (1946-1965). The idea that each of these Generations has its own quirks and traits has considerable currency in the mass media, among marketing gurus, and increasingly, in academic work. In this section we explore the supposed ‘characteristics’ of each generation before considering the notable aspects of the social context of Generation Y.

Popular generalisations of Boomers, Xers and Gen Y abound. Below are lists outlining the alleged defining characteristics of each generation. These characteristics are drawn from more than a dozen books, newspaper articles and journal articles that deal with Boomers and Generations X and Y.²

**Baby Boomers**
When they were teens and young adults Boomers were typically thought of as:

- Counter-cultural, peace-loving
- Optimistic
- Sexually liberated
- Experimenters
- Driven to succeed
- Politically engaged.

*Key events* for Boomers included the invention of the contraceptive pill, Vatican II, the Vietnam War, abolition of conscription, the ‘Summer of Love’ (1967–68) in Haight Ashbury, Moon Landing 1969, the Paris student riots 1968, election of the Whitlam Labor Government
in 1972, publication of the Female Eunuch 1970, no-fault divorce laws in 1975. In the 1970s, those in the Boomer cohort were often referred to as the ‘me generation’.

**Generation X**
When they were teens and young adults Generation X were typically thought of as:

- Free and independent
- Sceptical and laid back
- Prolonging their adolescence
- Suspicious of major institutions
- Politically disengaged
- Afraid of marriage
- Pessimistic about their future.

*Key events* for Gen X included the election of Bob Hawke and the Australian Labor Party in 1983, the stock market crash of 1987, the Ethiopian famine, Live Aid 1985, America’s Cup 1983, the fall of the Berlin Wall 1989, Halley’s Comet 1986.

**Generation Y**
Generation Y are typically thought of as:

- Wanting instant gratification
- Technologically savvy
- Value family and friends
- Community-minded
- Fun-loving
- Morally relativistic
- Optimistic about their future.


Often the claims made in the popular press about the ‘characteristics’ of each generation are speculative rather than based on solid evidence, or derived from data which focus solely on one generation. Nor do people necessarily retain the same values they might have held in their youth. Recent attention has been paid to the fact that many Boomers have ‘sold out’ on the values they held dear in the 1960s and are now cashing in on the material benefits of the stock market and property booms. 3

It is also worthwhile remembering that many of Gen Y’s so-called ‘unique’ characteristics and quirks are probably typical of youth, no matter what their generation. In 1964, Britons Charles Hamblett and Jane Deverson published a book, *Generation X*, about youth growing up in the early 1960s. 4 Hamblett and Deverson’s Generation X were, for the most part, those whom we now describe as Baby Boomers. In the introduction to their book, the authors draw attention to the context in which these young Boomers were growing up, a world experiencing rapid ‘developments in mass communication’ and ‘social and scientific acceleration’.
Reading through the first-person accounts around which Hamblett and Deverson’s book is based, one is struck by how the sentiments, hopes and aspirations expressed by teens of the 1960s bear strong resemblances to what our own interview subjects told us. For example, Hamblett and Deverson’s informants told them things like: ‘I would like to be a lawyer, it’s an interesting job and you can help people, too’; ‘[Christianity] made me happier, knowing that someone cares for me. I feel as though there’s someone looking over me, leading me, and it’s very comforting’; ‘I’m a dreamer – I’m always dreaming about things’; ‘I’ll probably take a two-year post-graduate apprenticeship and then qualify. I’d like to travel’; ‘I talk about things in the news with my friends, we argue about things, but none of us are religious’.

Clearly, these young people are talking about issues which transcend the era into which they were born; emerging into the adult world, negotiating love, work, study, independence and friendships are universal experiences for those moving from their teenage years to adulthood. (As one of Hamblett and Deverson’s informants tells them, echoing the thoughts of youth across the generations: ‘I have left behind the complications of being fifteen and sixteen.’)

And yet, many of the problems and issues with which Hamblett and Deverson’s Boomers were dealing are far removed from the world of our Gen Ys. Talk in Deverson and Hamblett’s book about meeting a ‘girl’ and ‘getting married’, sexual liberation, battles between ‘Mods’ and ‘Rockers’, or what it is like to be 17 and a sailor in the merchant navy remind us that while everyone must grow up, the social conditions in which a person comes of age do make a difference to how life is lived, and on one’s aspirations and experiences. Gen Y are not saying things like ‘I would rather be dead than be a burden on my children’, ‘the Beatles are too smart’, or ‘I suppose I’d marry if I got a girl in trouble’.

Thus, beyond the generalisations, it is possible to identify differences in the social and cultural conditions in which Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y were raised. Notable aspects of the social context in which Generation Y are coming of age include: changing labour markets; increased instability in family arrangements; rampant consumerism; and individualisation. In order to properly understand the society and culture in which Gen Y are being raised and how this might impact on their spirituality, we will discuss each of these aspects in some detail below.

**Changing labour markets**
The idea of a ‘job for life’ is a concept that has little meaning for most of today’s young people, who, as inheritors of the expanding global market, have been sold the ‘message of self-invention, choice and flexibility’. As one journalist in the *Bulletin* recently observed, Gen Y are ‘flitting from job to job, rejecting … steady jobs … and quitting jobs if they’re bored or hate the boss’. Beyond this giddy rhetoric, however, young people are entering a job market characterised by a significant trend towards casualisation, contract-based work and low paying service industry jobs. Choice and flexibility for some may be accompanied by insecurity and uncertainty for many others.

Work has changed in other ways that has significance for members of Gen Y. Australians are working longer hours than previously. Researchers Charles Birch and David Paul note that:

> With less than two workers in five now working an eight-hour day, and workers nationally working an average of 43 hours per week, Australians have earned the dubious reputation of being one of the hardest-working peoples in the developed world.

Obviously, if more time is devoted to work, then less time can be directed towards other commitments and activities, such as spending time with the family (or even having a family),
community service or even self-care. Gen Y are entering a workforce in which they are expected to give long hours and rate other commitments as less important.

For many in the paid labour market work is also understood to be more than a way to put food on the table and pay the bills – ‘a means to an end’. It now serves as a way of finding connectedness, community and meaning. Work’s status has been so elevated and its meaning so inflated that it stands available as a ‘spiritual’ alternative to other forms of meaning-making, or perhaps work has become more important as fewer people are connected to religious traditions and connect with their local communities. It is questionable, however, how effective this emphasis on work can be in promoting ethical values or fostering resilience.

**Changing family arrangements**

Family living arrangements have altered dramatically in the past thirty years, with several key changes directly impacting on Generation Y. One point often overlooked in discussions about changing families is that families themselves are getting smaller; in Australia, the fertility rate has dropped from 3.48 children per woman in 1960 to 1.76 children per woman in 1998, to 1.75 in 2002. According to demographer Bernard Salt, ‘relationships are now formed with peers, not relatives’.

Not only are families smaller, but couples are having their first child at an older age; the Australian Bureau of Statistics, comparing census data from 2001 and 1976, found that in 2001, 16% of people in their twenties were partnered with children, compared to at least 40% of people in their twenties in 1976; a smaller proportion in their twenties in 2001 were getting married compared to those in their twenties in 1976.

Arguably the most significant factor determining the character of Australian family life in late modernity has been the major increase in divorce since the mid-1970s (following the introduction of no-fault divorce laws). Commentator Rebecca Huntley observes that Generation Y ‘were raised in families touched by divorce or had close friends whose parents had split up. In the years between 1986 and 2001 the number of divorces in Australia doubled from 0.6 million to 1.1 million’. According to sociologist David de Vaus, in 2001, 51% of divorces involved children under the age of 18.

As we have noted in earlier chapters, the family is the most important agent in a young person’s socialisation and now, more than any other time in recent history, family arrangements are liable to change. Parents have a higher chance of divorcing and remarrying, or finding themselves parenting alone. This has the capacity to disrupt or alter the socialisation a person might experience.

**Triumph of consumerism**

Most contemporary social theorists agree that contemporary society is characterised by rampant consumerism, what might be termed hyper-consumerism. For example, people’s leisure time is now predominantly spent on consumption activities – shopping, eating out, watching TV, going to the movies, renovating a house – rather than traditional leisure activities, such as picnicking with the family. Even traditional relaxation activities – be it exercising or spending time with friends – are subject to consumerist tendencies (e.g. eating out at restaurants for Mother’s Day and Christmas day, or purchasing a $3000 bike for competing in triathlons).
More than ever before, manufactured goods play a key role in keeping us entertained, informed, happy and fulfilled. Personal habits are changing as a consequence: in order to fund this appetite for consumption, people spend more time at work and have far higher levels of personal debt. This emphasis on consumption also encourages a certain type of behaviours and values. These include the premium on ‘individual’ choice, the right to determine what is best for oneself, the importance of self-expression, greed, acquisitiveness and envy.

As part of the drive to uncover new markets, young people are increasingly targeted as consumers and encouraged to define themselves by what they consume: the clothing they wear, the drinks they prefer, the type of phone they use, the colour of their iPod, or the places they shop are all used by young people to make statements about themselves, who their friends are and what they value. Market research firms offer their services to corporations in order to help them ‘better understand’ (and market to) Generation Y. One recent report makes the observation about Generation Y:

Generation Y are hard to engage. They have heard all the spiel. They know all the marketing messages and to a large degree they see through them. They may not have the wisdom of hindsight, but they are circumspect and suspect [sic]. They are aware and suspicious. This is why marketing strategists must not only ‘keep it real’ but they must keep it fun.16

The aim of this strategy of ‘keeping it real’ is simply to encourage greater levels of consumption among youth, but offers little in the way of meaningful values.

A notable feature of this rampant consumerism is the commodification of aspects of social life that were perhaps thought to be impervious to capitalist interests. This is particularly the case with spirituality. Sociologists Jeremy Carrette and Richard King recently published the book Selling spirituality: The silent takeover of religion. They argue that:

From feng shui to holistic medicine, from aromatherapy candles to yoga weekends, from Christian mystics to New Age gurus, spirituality is big business.17

Many of the New Age practices discussed elsewhere in this book have been undertaken as a paid exercise in the quest for self-improvement or self-knowledge rather than an activity done as a form of religious expression.

The logic of consumerism – the right to choose ‘whatever works’ for me – certainly appears to be exerting some influence on spirituality. This was evident in the high percentage of believers who felt it was ‘OK to pick and choosing religious beliefs’ and the reasonable percentage who create their own blended spirituality, mixing several New Age beliefs and practices together from the choices available in the ‘spiritual marketplace’.

**Individualisation**

We discussed individualisation at length in Chapter 2. Such is the importance of individualism in late modern societies, it is worth summarising these arguments and examining what qualitative evidence we can see of this trend towards individualisation among members of Gen Y with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews.

In traditional, pre-modern societies individual choices were largely prescribed by existing traditions and customs.18 These societies had an established, traditional social order that had been in place for centuries. This provided individuals with clearly defined roles and
expectations about how to behave and who they ought to be. One such example is the traditional Medieval English village. In such a community, a person was expected to marry at a certain age, marry someone from a similar social class and to pursue a traditional occupation, one which had been done for generations by other members of the family. In this kind of traditional, hierarchical and ordered society, each individual knew who they were and what their position was. For the most part, life was carefully mapped out for the individual. In the late modern era, however, social traditions, traditional ways of living and traditional institutions have been disrupted. According to English sociologist Anthony Giddens, a ‘post-traditional’ social order has emerged instead. The modern individual is less constrained by social class or traditional gender patterns, has greater freedom of choice with regard to employment, and a greater capacity to travel outside the area in which they were born. In sum, the individual has greater control over who they are, what they do and indeed, what they want to be. Youth studies scholar Anita Harris observes that:

[Individuals] … are required to make choices and create life trajectories for themselves without traditional patterns or support structures to guide them. They must develop individual strategies and take personal responsibility for their success, happiness, and livelihood.20

Young people are particularly implicated in this process of individualisation. Christian Smith argues ‘American youth . . . are nearly without exception profoundly individualistic, instinctively presuming autonomous, individual self-direction to be a universal human norm and life goal’.21 We suspect the same is true of Australian youth and young adults.

Evidence of individualism – as an approach and orientation to life – was strikingly apparent among the people with whom we conducted face-to-face interviews. By way of illustration, 21-year-old Lisa was asked:

Do you think in terms of your goals that your achievement depends on chance or forces beyond your control or more on your own effort?
I think it is your own effort. You are not going to be handed a job, it’s not luck of the draw, like they are not going to pick a name out of a hat, it will be that you go through an interview process. They will either pick the person who is best qualified or it will be a connection, you know, you have been recommended to the job by someone else in the same area. I think it is your own effort, whether you get to know people or you have got great credentials.

18-years-old Steven said the following in response to one of the evocative pictures he was shown:

The tracks that show possibilities [chose picture of railway tracks]. I’d just think so endless possibilities you know, I guess that’s my life, I plan on doing 1000 things. And so there is all these tracks going off everywhere you know all these great possibilities. Just because it looks like a real adventure and sometimes I guess I get a bit bogged down, but most of the time my life is an adventure because that is what I want it to be and it’s exciting, going back on this all the possibilities just so exciting and I guess I am working towards this adventure, ‘cause I am living it.

15-year-old Adam, when asked why he chose to play the trombone said:

Because not many people play it and I want to be an individual.

One might expect to hear such sentiments from middle-class young people, those who can more readily make their own way in the world. But this idea that the individual can direct their life outcome was mentioned by those not socially advantaged. Zoe was a 19-year-
old kindergarten assistant who had no tertiary qualifications. This is her response on being shown the evocative photo of a girl on a cliff:

OK, I picked this one because this reminded me of when I went to Central Australia, a year 11 camp and it reminded me when I was there all the open spaces and how sort of free it felt, to be able to climb all those rocky hills and also I picked this because that looks like that girl is going for an adventure and I feel that my life is one big adventure, like a roller coaster and I’m along for the ride and take things as they come. Yeah, I just picked it because it looks like something I would probably do because you really don’t know what’s out there. You really have to take one thing at a time, take it as it comes and that’s why I picked that one, because it’s most about me, because that’s the sort of person I am. I’ll take things as they come and life’s one big adventure.

Obviously, the idea that life is an ‘adventure’ and holds infinite possibilities is a sentiment commonly expressed by teens and young adults, moving away from the constraints of school and dependency on their parents. What is important here, however, is the belief that it is the individual who must take responsibility for, and has ownership of, the way his or her life turns out. This was true for even the most marginalised young people with whom we spoke. Nathan was a 17-year-old involved in Spin Cycle, a juvenile justice diversionary program. His answers tended to be brief, but we gained the impression from his interview that it was up to him to make progress in his life:

Do you have goals? In five years time where do you see yourself or what would you like to do?
Finish my apprenticeship, be a fully qualified spray painter and panel beater with enough money to open my own body shop.
Yeah, OK and is that something that you can work towards?
I reckon I could.

On the basis of our face-to-face interviews, we found that the societal emphasis on the individual is crucially influencing the worldviews of young people. Most young people, but notably the Nominal Christians and Seculars, believed that it is up to them to forge their own path in life. Evidence of individualism was also apparent among those we classified as Active Christians, but not to the same extent; for many of these young people, their will is consciously subsumed to that of a transcendent other. Those who are not influenced by a tradition seem more liable to become the centre of their own world. We return to this theme in chapter 12.

The impact on spirituality
These are some of the notable features of the world which young people are required to negotiate in their daily lives. While this social milieu may not directly influence whether a person will be a New Ager or Active Christian (as we have argued in earlier chapters, factors such as parental religiosity or gender exert the greatest influence on a person’s spirituality), this broader cultural context no doubt influences the ways in which people express and approach their spirituality, and what they see as important or valuable in life. For example, members of Generation Y may not be as comfortable listening to a forty-five minute sermon as the Boomers; Gen Ys will probably better relate to the message of a church service if it is an interactive multi-media event; Gen Ys are probably more likely to declare that values are relative, or are wary of getting married, or think that working long hours or having a large salary will give them ultimate meaning and purpose.

Much of what we have described in this section highlights the rise in uncertainty that has come to characterise life in late modernity, especially around family, work and identity. Individuals must increasingly make their own way in the world, without traditional networks, ties and affiliations. Youth scholar Anita Harris puts it this way: ‘Young people are newly
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obliged to make good choices for themselves and set themselves on a path toward success with little support or security outside the private sphere.’ As noted elsewhere in this book, over the past 50 years, religious organisations become less important and influential, meaning that in these uncertain times, young people are turning elsewhere for meaning, connection, guidance and community. That said, for all of the posited ‘distinctiveness’ of Generation Y, we ought to be cautious when making generationally specific claims. The significant social forces described above influence more than Generation Y alone, although young people, by virtue of their age and relative life stage, may be more prone to their effects.

Having discussed the social context in which Gen Y is coming of age, attention now turns one of the most distinctive aspects of the late modern era: the development of new communication, entertainment and information technologies. Does this make a difference to young people’s spirituality?

**God so luvd da world tht He gv his only Son: Technology, popular culture and spirituality**

The title of this section is from the New Testament book of John verse 3:16, written using SMS text. The Bible Society has just released an SMS version of the New Testament. The late modern era is sometimes referred to as the ‘information age’, a time in which rapid technological developments have altered the ways in which people are entertained and communicate. The key technologies in young people’s lives are mobile phones, TVs, MP3 players (for example, iPods), computer games and gaming machines (for example, Xbox, Playstation) and the internet. These technologies either disseminate or host the popular cultural forms popular with young people: digital music, the alternative worlds of computer games, blogs, Podcasts, ‘Youtube’ and ‘MySpace’. In this section we explore the relationship between technology, popular culture and spirituality, and in particular, the extent to which popular culture influences spirituality. We start by considering Gen Y’s use of various forms of information and entertainment technology.

**Technology usage**

In the estimation of many commentators, the two most important technological developments impacting on the lives of Generation Y are mobile phones and the internet. Rebecca Huntley describes the mobile phone as ‘an icon for this generation … for [Gen Y] their phones symbolise freedom and flexibility’. According to Aapola and colleagues, young people are using their mobile phones to ‘facilitate new forms of sociality’. This involves new ways of communicating, alternative ways of managing relationships and new spaces in which friendships are conducted. (In an earlier age, the motor vehicle was accorded the same transformative powers and was viewed as a radical new means for teens and young adults to enjoy freedom, flexibility and new social spaces.)

Like the mobile phone, the internet has also altered the ways in which people access information, organise relationships, find entertainment and educate themselves. With this technology in particular, the dissemination of information can proceed unchecked and unregulated in ways hitherto impossible. American sociologist Christian Smith notes that ‘Authority over standards of knowledge thus becomes radically democratised and decentralised, filling the open market with a congestion of ideas and information that have not been reviewed, judged, and sorted by evaluating authorities’.

While access to technology is not necessarily the preserve of young people, in the public mind they are seen to be the ones most adept at using it. According to Facer and Furlong, ‘Young
people, like technologies, are constructed within popular discourse as the natural inheritors of future societies, and young people’s mastery of technologies is read as inevitable’. A Sydney-based educator remarked recently that ‘Thousands of hours watching TV, playing video games, or using integrated technologies have morphed their brains into digital data processors’. Irrespective of how competent young people are in using technology, comments like these demonstrate that the normative standard placed on members of Generation Y is that they will be both technologically savvy and immersed in popular culture.

**Number of screen hours**

In our own *Spirit of Generation Y* survey we asked participants aged 13-24 the number of hours in a typical week they would spend using the internet, playing video games (including Xbox, Game Boy, computer games) and watching television (TV is an ‘older’ form of technology but is still perhaps the most used and influential). The following two tables consider media usage by age group and gender. These tables show the total number of hours spent per week using the internet, playing video games and watching TV, what might be termed, following Tim Olds and colleagues, as ‘screen time’. Given the development in the past two decades of other passive screen-based pastimes in addition to TV – the internet and video games – and young people’s uptake of these, it is appropriate to consider all of these together.

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<th>Screen time per week</th>
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<th>16-18</th>
<th>19-24</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 hours or less</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10-20 hours</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20-50 hours</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50 plus hours</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that more than a third of Generation Y spends between twenty and fifty hours in front of a screen each week, while a further third spend between ten and twenty hours per week in front of a screen. 7% spend more than 50 hours per week in screen time. Slightly less than a quarter – 24% – spend less than 10 hours a week in front of a screen. Most of the screen time is spent in front of the TV, followed by the internet and then video games.

It is interesting to note that those aged 19-24 are significantly more likely than the other age groups to spend more than 20 hours per week in front of the screen. (Adding together the two bottom categories in the table, we find that 34% of 13-15 year-olds, 41% of 16-18 year-olds and 46% of 19-24 year-olds have 20 plus hours of screen time per week.) All three age groups watch on average about the same amount of TV and play about the same amount of video games each week, however, those aged 19-24 average more time on the internet each week, hence the higher overall total.

**Screen time by gender**

Recent research conducted among South Australian children aged 10-13 found that males spent more time than females in front of the screen each week. Table 9.2 shows screen time by gender.
Table 9.2 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Number of hours spent on the internet, watching TV and playing video games per week by gender (percent of gender)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Screen time per week</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 hours or less</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;10-20 hours</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;20-50 hours</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;50 plus hours</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows that males are more likely than females to spend longer in front of a screen each week – watching TV, playing video games or on-line. Almost a half of males spend 30 plus hours a week in front of a screen, compared to slightly more than a third of females. This difference is mainly the result of males’ greater use of video games; males and females average almost the same amount of TV time per week, and males will spend slightly more time using the internet, but Gen Y males average 5 hours per week using video games, while females average only 1.

**Spirituality and Popular Culture**

A question of interest is the relationship between popular culture and spirituality, and the extent to which the former influences the latter. In the earlier chapter on New Age spiritualities, we noted that heavier TV watching is associated with the New Age Believer type, but resisted making the conclusion that watching a lot of TV causes these young people to hold several New Age beliefs. We do not know what these young New Age Believers were watching, and even if this included supernatural or New Age-like content, we have no evidence to determine whether or not a person is persuaded to believe, for example, in the power of psychics and fortune-tellers simply by watching a TV show like *Medium*. However, we do have very good reason to suggest that heavier TV watching is not the primary influence on young people’s beliefs in the supernatural or the New Age.

To be sure, the producers of mass media have in the past decades produced many shows and movies with spiritual content: in addition to the TV shows mentioned in the earlier chapter on the New Age, notable spiritual or supernatural movies include the *Harry Potter* series, the *Star Wars* series, horror films such as *Friday the 13th*, and *Nightmare on Elm Street*. Savage and colleagues, in their qualitative study of British Gen Y note that ‘young people’s greatest access to ideas about magic and other supernatural ideas outside of institutional religion is through television programmes, film, magazines, books and tabloid newspapers’. While the media do serve as a key way in which supernatural and spiritual ideas are disseminated, its influence, if this is understood as the media’s capacity to persuade people to believe, is probably not as significant as might be expected.

The most comprehensive study of popular culture, youth religion and spirituality has been undertaken by US sociologists Lynn Schofield Clark, in her book *From Angels to aliens: Teenagers, the media and the supernatural*. Clark conducted more than 100 face-to-face interviews with a range of US teens and found that:
such things should not be taken seriously at all. This theme … emerged among the teens I talked with. 32

We explored similar questions in the face-to-face interviews in our study. All the members of Gen Y with whom we spoke expressed similar sentiments: these ‘supernatural’ shows are about entertainment and are not taken seriously. 21-year-old, Tony was a fan of the TV show Buffy. This is what he said about it in his interview:

It’s meaningless and it’s just a little blond girl, you know, killing imaginary demons, but then again it does do some really good social commentary and especially the earlier seasons did a lot of stuff about dealing with pressure throughout high school and stuff like that so it is, it’s like that, double meaning thing. It’s nice and meaningless on one side, but then it’s not if you pay attention.

**OK and so how is it sort of relevant to you?**
When I first watched Buffy it was kind of like I was sixteen and she was sixteen and all her friends were sixteen and I could see bits of my friends in her friends and it was that sort of thing and it’s like oh, her first year of university was my first year of university and I had friends doing the same thing as her friends, and it was that sort of thing.

**So what is it you think makes those shows so popular?**
I think on one side it’s probably the cute, sassy girls and the big hunky guys, but it’s also it’s a really good story line if you kind of suspend disbelief for long enough, it’s actually pretty intelligent and it’s quite funny as well.

14-year-old Ricky was also asked about these shows:

*One thing that does seem to be in TV and film a lot these days is shows about vampires, demons and witchcraft and that sort of thing. What do you think about that?*
I’m always laughing at all that sort of stuff. It is just like another killing movie to me, like it is nothing serious or anything like that.

**A killing movie?**
Demons and stuff like that. I have never thought of it as something bad, like it is not like a serious cult or anything like that. It has never bothered me.

17-year-old Hayley told us:

I like Buffy … Buffy was my favourite show.

Yeah? I mean, Buffy wasn’t sort of like straight horror. It was a bit funny too.
Oh, it had funny lines.

And 15-year-old Thomas:

*And, what about films? Do you have a favourite film?*
Yes, Underworld.

**Right. What did you like about that?**
I liked maybe the plot. You know, sort of supernatural. I like that sort of stuff.

*Do you have a favourite TV show?*
Yes, Charmed.

**Again, a supernatural thing.**
Yeah.

*What is it about the supernatural that sort of gets you?*
That’s really interesting, because there’s lots of different concepts.

*Do you think there might be something in it, in some of those different concepts?*
I don’t know, it’s different to normal life sort of thing.

Yeah?
So, it’s sort of escaping.

Erica, 14, was the same as the others:
So what about magic, witchcraft, wizardry and that sort of thing?
I like to read it and watch films on it because it is interesting but I am not sure if I really believe in witches or wizards or anything like that.
So it is more of a fantasy thing?
Yeah.

While there is a popular appetite for TV shows and movies which feature the paranormal and the occult, arguably, these shows reflect the interests, tastes and beliefs of many of those who watch, rather than being the major factor persuading audience members to believe in ghosts, psychics or vampire-slayers.

What role, then, does popular culture – music, TV, film – play in the spiritual lives of Gen Y? We found in the interviews that many Gen Y simply take these things at face value, or engage with them for entertainment and enjoyment.

Music
Music is a case in point. For example, 16-year-old Lee told us:

Do you find that music helps you to make sense of life?
Oh it certainly helps my study. I’m not sure if it helps me make sense of life. I probably think better when it’s not totally silent. I can dwell on my own thoughts a bit more if there’s, say, some other noise, but I find it a lot easier to concentrate and study like when I’ve got soft music in the background or something.

17-year-old Daniel responded in like manner:

Do you enjoy music? Do you find that music helps you make sense of life?
I kind of … music for me is probably more just recreational. Either just to go dance or whatever in a club, or just listen while playing games or while I’m doing some homework or whatever, but I don’t really turn to music as such to answer some deep question kind of thing. It’s …
Has there been anything other than music that might have done that for you?
I enjoy music, more often the ones that actually have some sort of a message or actually say something logical and meaningful rather than just some senseless pop on the radio or something. But I don’t really take anything away from it as such. Has there been anything else? No, not really. Maybe other peoples’ experiences, learning from other people, I suppose. My own experiences, learning from my own mistakes or what I’ve been through, and things like that.

We spoke with 17-year-old Jasmine:

Do you find that music helps make sense of life?
Yes I listen to music, but I don’t think it helps me make sense of life. I just listen to it, because it’s … I don’t know, it’s cool.
Just like it?
I don’t look too deeply into that sort of stuff.
OK. Are there other things like films, books that might help you to understand about life, or give you some sense of what it is about?
Not films, I just like them because they are fun to watch as well. But maybe books and stuff sometimes. Like, I think I am kind of at a stage where I don’t really know where I am kind of thing. So I want to be familiar with all different types of things. So I am not just narrow-minded in a situation, maybe. So I have read … I was interested in reading like the Girlosophy book, so I bought one of those. Some of it’s just like, yeah, whatever.
But some of its just like – that kind of makes sense, that is cool and quirky, look at life in that sort of perspective, kind of thing … if that makes sense.

For some others, music was more important, because it offers a point of connection for life’s issues or was used to make statements about one’s identity. For example, 15-year-old Alison, a participant in Spin Cycle, a juvenile justice diversion programme, was asked to nominate her favourite kind of music. She said:

Mm, hip-hop …
Why?
Because they speak the truth about what the world’s really like and yeah, I don’t know, they just say the truth whereas everyone else is singing about love and everything.

16-year-old Jai, also a Spin Cycle participant, identified hip-hop, or rap (African-American street music) as speaking the ‘truth’:

I’m more into the rap, hip-hop sort of stuff. I listen to a bit of NWA [Niggers with Attitude], which is an old school hip-hop group that have broken up. A lot of Doctor Dre and shit like that mainly. A lot of rap.
OK, and what is it you like about rap?
Mainly the lyrics, what they have to say, especially Tupac he had a lot to say that actually did relate to this world. Like, it wasn’t just you know, ‘Kill the niggers,’ and all this sort of shit. It was actually real shit to listen to.

TV and movies
It is a similar story with TV and movies. Here are some typical comments, starting with 13-year-old Kristy:

What about TV. Do you have a favourite show?
Not really. I don’t really watch too much TV. Only on the weekends, because I’ve got heaps of work.
What’s your favourite film of all time?
I don’t know.
Nothing really stands out?
No, not really.

13-year-old Ashleigh:

And what’s your favourite movie of all time?
Umm, probably The Sound of Music.
Why that one?
Well, I love singing and I love musicals and I saw it when I was little and I’ve loved it ever since, and I saw it when I was on the stage years ago.
OK, so do you sing in a choir, anything like that?
I sing in the choir here and I do solos.
Oh, OK, and so how do you feel when you’re singing?
I really enjoy it because it’s something I like to do and something that makes me happy.

16-year-old Connor:

What about TV? Do you watch TV?
Ah, not a big fan of TV. We live on the land. We don’t own a farm, but we’ve got twelve acres, and sort of have been growing up in cars and motor bikes and sport. No, not a big fan of TV.
Or do you watch films at all, videos?
Oh, I watch movies. We never hire any videos. I’ll go to the cinema with friends.
OK. What would be your favourite film do you reckon?
Oh, I don’t really have a favourite. I like a comedy. I like comedies and action movies. I love the Bond movies. They’re just so stupid, like, some of the stuff that happens, but I still laugh.

**Gen Y: Popular culture and spirituality – Conclusion**

As these quotes illustrate, popular culture is more about entertainment first, then perhaps is used to assist in personal expression. It does not constitute a major influence on spirituality, values, or worldviews. That said, although it may not be directly influencing spirituality, elements of popular culture can play a role in a person’s religious or spiritual life. Many religious practitioners, be they Wiccans or Catholics, find and commune with like-minded individuals through the internet. The spiritually curious can readily access information about other religious and spiritual traditions. Music plays an important part in connecting with transcendent, assisting in worship, meditation or inspiration.

**Spirituality types and popular culture**

While the mass media is not the major influence on Gen Y’s spirituality, it is worthwhile examining the extent to which the different spirituality types are consumers of popular culture, particularly TV and internet. Table 9.3 shows TV hours watched by spirituality type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Active Christian</th>
<th>Marginal Christian</th>
<th>Nominal Christian</th>
<th>New Age</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average TV hours per week</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average internet hours per week TV hours per week</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average video game hours per week</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Agers watch the most TV per week on average, significantly more than the Active Christian type, but not significantly more TV than the other spirituality types. Within the New Age type, it is the New Age Believers who watch the most TV rather than the New Age Participants (averaging 14.5 hours per week compared to 11.1). We explained in chapter 7 that this does not necessarily mean that watching more TV influences the beliefs of these young people, rather, having an unfocussed and eclectic mix of beliefs simply goes hand in hand with excessive TV watching.

When it comes to internet hours per week, no spirituality type uses the internet significantly more than the other. Video games are listed last in the table. Gen Y average far less time playing video games compared to TV watching or using the internet. Seculars average significantly more video game time per week than the Active Christian type.

**Spirituality types and social and demographic factors: a summary**

Having described broader cultural and social factors and how this might influence spirituality, it is appropriate to conclude this chapter with an examination of the associations between our major spirituality types and social and demographic variables. Although in previous chapters we have discussed some of the notable associations, for example, between gender and the
New Age spirituality type, in this section we compare all the spirituality types at once to provide an overall demographic picture. We focus in particular on differences associated with demographic characteristics such as age, gender, country of birth, father’s country of birth, mother’s country of birth, school type and social class.

**Age**
We have not included a table for age in this section because age does not exert any significant influence on the major spirituality types. In chapter 6 we noted that that age does not have a major influence on the Traditional spirituality types. Those who are older are not significantly more likely than those who are younger to be Active, Marginal or Nominal Christians. The same is true of New Agers as a whole category, however, we did note in chapter 7 that those aged 19-24 are significantly more likely than those aged 13-15 to be New Age Participants, one of the two New Age sub-types. This is not true of New Age Believers. We noted in the chapter on Seculars, chapter 8, that age makes no significant difference on the probability of a person being either Nonreligious, Ex-Religious or Undecided.

**Gender**
Next, we consider gender and how this might influence spirituality. We have already seen in the two previous chapters the strong association between gender and the Secular and New Age spirituality types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among the Traditional spirituality types, gender has no significant influence, however, we see that New Agers are significantly more likely to be female than male and inversely, Seculars are significantly more likely to be male than female. For reasons explained in the previous chapters, it is clear that among Australian Gen Y, the secular path appeals strongly to males and the New Age path to females.

**Country of birth**
In the next three tables, we consider the survey participants’ country of birth, and the country of birth of their father and mother.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>All other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Three associations are significant: those born in Australia are more likely than those born overseas to be Nominal Christians (19% of those born in Australia are Nominals whereas just 8% of those born overseas are Nominals); those born in Australia are more likely than those born overseas to be Secular (29% of those born in Australia are Seculars compared to 21% of those born overseas); and those born overseas are much more likely than those born in Australia to be classified as Other (26% compared to just 5%). The last association is to be expected; the Other category includes those who affiliation with a major world religion, such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Across the past few decades, the percentage of the Australian population identifying with these traditional world religions has increased markedly. Sociologist Gary Bouma observes that ‘there are now more Buddhists than Baptists, more Muslims than Lutherans and more Hindus than Jews’. The major cause of this increase is migration. Half the Buddhists in our sample were born overseas, the majority in Asian countries. Almost two-thirds of the Muslims in our sample were born overseas, as were slightly more than half the Hindus.

Why are those born in Australia more likely than those born overseas to be Seculars and Nominals? As noted elsewhere in this book, Australia is a largely secular nation, having what Bouma describes as a ‘serious shyness of “high temperature” and “high demand” religion’, and featuring low to moderate ‘levels of participation in organised forms of religion and spirituality’. This has been the case since white settlement, so it is to be expected that those born in Australia are much more likely than those born overseas to be influenced by this prevailing cultural norm.

**Father’s country of birth**

The significant associations between country of birth and the Secular, Nominal or Other spirituality types are also found when we look at father’s country of birth (Table 9.6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father’s country of birth</th>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>All other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We see that those with overseas-born fathers are more likely than those with an Australian-born father to be classified as Other, whereas those with Australian-born fathers are more
likely than those with an overseas-born father to be Secular or Nominal. One other association is of interest in this table. Those whose father was born overseas are significantly more likely than those with Australian-born father to be Active Christians. Overwhelmingly, the fathers of these Active Christians were born in non-English speaking countries. As noted in chapter 6, however, this association is not significant when other demographic and social variables are taken into consideration when analysing the results of the survey.

**Mother’s country of birth.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother’s country of birth</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>All other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the two previous tables, there is a significant relationship between having an Australian-born mother and being a Nominal Christian. None of the other relationships in this table are significant.

**School-type**

Next we turn to school type. We discussed the relationship between the influence of schools and spirituality elsewhere in chapter 6, but it is worthwhile reviewing how school type and the spirituality types are associated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary school type</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Other private</th>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are some notable differences in this table. We see that those who are attending or attended a government school are significantly more likely than those in the Catholic system to be Secular (as are those attending a independent private school). In contrast, those
attending Catholic or other private schools are much more likely than those attending/attended a government school to be an Active Christian.

**Family intactness**
Another relationship of interest is between family intactness and spirituality type. Survey participants aged 13-17 were asked who they lived with now and if they did not live with both their natural/biological parents. These results are in table 10. Like in chapter 6, we present it here in a simplified form with two alternatives: living with both natural parents now or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family intactness</th>
<th>Living with both biological parents</th>
<th>Not living with both biological parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two relationships are significant. Those aged 13-17 who are living with both their natural parents are about twice as likely to be Active Christians as those living with one natural parent. Those aged 13-17 who are living with one natural parent are significantly more likely than those living with both parents to be New Age. None of the other relationships are significant.

**Socio-economic status**
Finally, we consider socio-economic status, using the Australian Bureau of Statistics SEIFA (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas) index of advantage-disadvantage. This variable takes into account factors such as income, occupation and level of education. Each postcode is given a score – higher scores indicate areas of advantage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>SEIFA value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active Christian</td>
<td>1020.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Christian</td>
<td>1003.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nominal Christian</td>
<td>1014.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age</td>
<td>990.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>1010.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1016.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active Christians live, on average, in the most socially advantaged areas in Australia, and New Agers in the least advantaged areas. Further statistical analysis suggests that this is the only significant difference between the different spirituality types. Within the New Age type,
it is the New Age Believers and not New Age Participants who contribute in particular to the much lower score for this type. This finding confirms the impression suggested in chapter 7: those young people who hold an unfocussed mix of New Age beliefs are those most likely to be living on the margins of society.

**Conclusion**
This chapter began by describing the wider social context in which members of Generation Y are reaching maturity. Blanket assertions about how this might be impacting upon spirituality ought to be made cautiously; factors such as gender, socio-economic status, race and education arguably exert far more influence on life outcomes generally and spirituality in particular. That said, it is possible to describe the conditions in which Generation Y are coming of age: a world characterised by individualism, consumerism, risk and uncertainty. Teens and young adults must negotiate this cultural and social context, some of which will impact on their values and beliefs. At the same time, their values, beliefs and practices – what we have identified as ‘spirituality’ – also enable young people to deal with and make sense of the world around them. We consider these more fully in the next two chapters.
Chapter 10
Spirituality and the rest of life

The values of Gen Y
There is more to life than spirituality, and more to spirituality than its strictly religious aspects. The Gen Y study asked about many other aspects of young people’s daily life. Some of these may be influenced by a person’s spirituality; others, more fundamental in the hierarchy of values, may be deeply rooted in the constitution of an individual’s personality, and contribute some influence towards the shaping of their spiritual outlook. Without attempting to decide in each case whether some attitude or activity is a cause or an effect of a person’s spirituality, or a mere concomitant of it, it is of interest to examine what else ‘goes with’ the different types and levels of spirituality – what is associated with them. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between spirituality and beliefs, values and attitudes and the things young people consider important in life and the activities they enjoy.

In the book *Making sense of Gen Y: The world view of 15-25-year-olds*, Sara Savage and her colleagues argue that English young people happily embrace a worldview which is self-centred and alien to the Christian Gospel. The central goal in life is happiness, achieved through relationships with family and close friends, and consumption of popular culture. Tim Clydesdale, who interviewed 75 US teenagers between 1995 and 2003, supports this view, claiming that teenagers gave priority to ‘the management of relationships, gratifications, educational requirements, and money matters.’ They stored their religious, political, and other critical identities in a ‘lockbox’, and gave little heed to anything else beyond their micro worlds.

A recent Australian study by Saulwick and Muller of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 also noted that young people were more concerned about their own lives and the lives of those to whom they are connected rather than wider societal issues: ‘The ambitions of Gen Y are, in the main, materialistic and conventional – the car, the house, marriage, children. Few express a desire to change the world’.

Are young people today as strongly self-oriented as indicated by these three studies?

What do Gen Y Value?
Values provide the framework for deciding what we hold to be important, right and good, and how we should live; they have a central role in defining relationships and meaning. Values are influenced by the traditions passed down from parents, by religion, and by the surrounding cultural milieu. The more society promotes individualism and consumerism, the more likely it is that young people will be drawn away from that concern for the larger community which is a basic tenet of Christianity and other world religions.

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People conducted research involving 126 young Australians aged between 8 and 15 years. It found that those young people wanted to behave according to their own sense of values and that ethical principles and actions were context-dependent rather than based on a fixed set of moral principles.

A national survey of young Australians by Mission Australia conducted in 2006 found that 72% said they valued family relationships, 67% valued friendships, and 14% valued spirituality/faith.
We asked a series of questions on what Gen Y valued, on what was important to their peace and happiness, and on their attitudes to themselves and others. Statements of values are relatively ‘low-cost’, compared with evidence of involvement in activities that reflect those values. There are many values, such as ‘helping others’, which nearly everyone approves in principle; the reality test is whether they are put into practice. Admittedly, the questions we asked on practice still relied on self-reports; objective assessment, only possible with a smaller group, might produce different results.

Survey participants were asked to respond to a number of value statements: ‘How important to you is each of the following?’.

Table 10.1 shows the level of importance young people placed on these values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Very unimportant</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>about self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deep friendships</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an exciting life</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot of money</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a spiritual life</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>about others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helping others</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world peace</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social justice</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protecting the environment</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national security</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Friendships were considered the most important, followed by, world peace, helping others, and having an exciting life. Only a small minority of Gen Y considered having a lot of money as highly important; nor was spiritual life rated important by many.

A recent three-nation study that asked young people what constitutes a good life, found that for Australians, ‘close family’, ‘interesting job’ and ‘love’ were close to the top of the list and ‘religion’ down the bottom. The results of our study are consistent with these findings as seen above. Young people put a lot of effort into making and keeping friends. For some, friends seem to have replaced family members as the most important source of support.

**Friends**

Friends were valued for a variety of reasons. Trent aged 15, links having friends to excitement when he says, ‘Probably friends are the most important, friends and humour. They are things that if you don’t have in life, it’s very boring.’ Ryan aged 18 and an Active Christian, stresses the mutuality of friendships and the intellectual stimulation they provide.

Probably my relationships with people. Not that people have to like me, but me valuing people that are important to me, and people that deem me important to them. I value them as well as they value me. .... Because I don’t think I could go and live in a cave for seven years and
survive. I like to talk to people about stuff and share opinions and find out why other people have those opinions and stuff like that. I guess it comes back to being curious. I like to find out not necessarily just what people think but why they think that.

Some young people were lonely and had few friends. Alison aged 15, talked about her lack of friends and how this affected her life (she spent a lot of her time watching videos and DVDs):

Me and my Mum are pretty close. Like, she’s my best friend at the moment, but since she’s moved, I’ve realised how many friends I have. The answer is none, except for my boyfriend.

**Role models**

During the face-to-face interviews, we asked if young people could tell us about someone they really admire and their reason for doing so. Many mentioned friends, teachers or older youth who inspired them. Some mentioned sporting heroes, pop stars or actors; others, parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. While we were aware of the importance of families to adolescent well-being, we were surprised to see how many young people spoke highly of their parents and extended family members. Some indicated that family members were effective role models as illustrated by Linda: ‘My grandmother’s given up her life for her kids, basically, given up work, and so I really admire her, and she never complains’. Many young people said that they liked spending time with their parents, appreciated their support and genuinely enjoyed their company as illustrated by Jacinta, aged 12:

I really admire my Mum. Because she’s caring. She always thinks about others before she thinks about herself. She’s just the best Mum in the world. I want to be like her.

Several young people discussed how much they admire their parents (or grandparents) for their courage in the face of adversity. Lee aged 12, put it this way:

I kind of admire my Dad in a way I guess because he had a really tough life because his Dad had like a drinking problem and he was never around for him and he owns his own business now and he keeps at it and supports us to go to school and get an education. And he really sticks at things when he does them, but he doesn’t really laugh that much at all.

**Impact of growing up in a consumer society**

As we noted in the previous chapter, today’s young people have grown up in a consumer society. They are increasingly encouraged to construct their identity around how they look and what they possess; the brand of clothes they wear, the music they listen to and the people with whom they identify. While these things clearly are having an impact on young people and their values, the results of our study and two other recent studies show that making money / being rich is a relatively low priority. It received the lowest rating in our survey with only 11% of young people indicating that having a lot of money was highly important to them. US political scientist Ronald Inglehart recently proposed that there has been a gradual intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist values and that since young people today experience relatively high economic security, they tend to elevate self-expression and quality of life over material concerns. His argument is plausible. An alternative explanation for this low rating might be that young people do not want to admit to the importance of acquiring money because this value appears to contradict other values they claim to hold.

The face-to-face interviews provide some interesting insights into the importance or otherwise of making money and pursuing a career. It is clear that many people regard getting a job and having a career as important goals, however, they do not value them above family and friends. Consider Sarah and Peter aged 18 and 19 respectively, both Active Christians,
representative of those for whom financial security and career – amongst other things, in Sarah’s case – were significant goals:

(Sarah) The most important thing in my life probably at the moment is making the right decisions in my university subjects. My dream before I entered university was to become just a normal old lawyer, that was the idea, but once I rekindled my passion for languages I realised that if I could combine the two there would be more areas that I could delve into, embassy work and things like that. Probably making sure that I have the right combination of subjects and pass uni well is probably the present most important thing at the moment. The most important thing in my life overall would probably be my family obviously.

(Peter) I think probably the most important thing to me is establishing a career, a future for myself, a career that I want, and one that will bring me both job satisfaction and, as well as financial security. Yes, financial security, so that I can get the things I want. Like, live the lifestyle like I want to live. So yes, it’s basically, my focus is getting on a career path. That was the most important thing.

Some young people who sought more hedonistic goals were not shy in admitting them. Justin aged 17, demonstrates this well:

Someone I actually really admire is my mate Jason. Jason has probably had more sex than any seventeen-year-old I know. He is pretty weird but he is always up for a good time, like we say, ‘we’re going to town’ and he goes, ‘yeah, we are going to town’ and it actually happens. ... We listened to some top music, drank some beers, I had sex with my girlfriend and then I felt pretty good actually. Primal instincts I think make you feel pretty much alive.

Justin, like many others, holds values that are in some tension with each other. He was involved in his community and was articulate in describing his concern for social justice issues at the same time as emphasizing his desire to acquire money and have lots of holidays and sex. ‘A spiritual life’ was not high on most people’s agenda: only 21% rated it highly important; however, we think that most young people, if they understood it at all, thought that ‘spiritual’ was just another word for ‘religious’.

Spirituality type differences
Table 10.2 shows the percentage of those in each spirituality type who said that a value about self and others was important or very important to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important/very important</th>
<th>Active Christian</th>
<th>Marginal Christian</th>
<th>Nominal Christian</th>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>about self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>having deep friendships</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an exciting life</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>having a lot of money</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A spiritual life</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About others

<p>| | | | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>helping others</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>world peace</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social justice</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protecting the envi</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Active Christians valued the importance of having money and an exciting life less than members of other spirituality types, but still valued excitement highly. Youth culture is strongly experience-centred. Three quarters of Active Christians highly valued a spiritual life while less than a fifth of Seculars did so. Having deep friendships received the highest proportion of important / very important responses in all spirituality types.

On items that show concern for others, Active Christians were more likely than Seculars to say that ‘helping others’ and ‘social justice’ were important values. Seculars were the least likely to claim ‘world peace’ was an important issue. New Agers were more likely than Marginal Christians to see ‘protecting the environment’ as important. About half of our New Agers were brought up as Christians; these showed a much higher level of concern for social issues.

**Age and Gender Differences**
Younger teenagers tended to be more self-centred and focussed on immediate rather than long-term issues. Deep friendships were rated more important by women; excitement and money by men. These findings matched those of The National Survey of Young Australians by Mission Australia.

Both surveys found that women valued friendships more than men, that men were twice as likely as women to rate financial security as very important; neither survey found a gender difference in the (low) importance given to spiritual life.

**Positive human values**
We developed a Positive Human Values Scale based on 11 items, all non-religious. The scale measures orientations which favour an ethical and rational life, self-discipline and justice for all, rather than self-orientation.

Respondents scored one point on the positive human values scale for each of the following:
- If they assigned importance to
  - social justice
  - helping others
  - world peace
  - caring for the environment.
- If they affirmed purpose in their lives.
- If they disagreed (or strongly) that morals are relative (‘there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody’)’
- If they did not choose ‘whatever would help me get ahead’ as their criterion for making decisions.
- If they disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that the following were important in life
  - having a lot of money
  - an exciting life).
- If they disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that the following were important as means of seeking happiness
  - using alcohol
  - drugs
  - shopping.

This scale could be fairly considered a measure of humanism in the older sense of the word, as an affirmation of human values / human decency / the good life (again, in the older sense)
without necessarily implying the rejection of religion. The scale has a range from 1 to 10, with a mean of 6.8. Figure 10.1 illustrates the differences according to spirituality type.

![Figure 10.1 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Positive Human Values by spirituality type (mean of positive human values scale for each type)](image)

In the last decade, many researchers from the US and UK and have noted the role that religion and spirituality play in the way that young people construct their values. Our results showed conclusively that Active Christians affirmed these positive human values more strongly than Marginal or Nominal Christians and Seculars. In other words, Christians were humanistic in proportion to their level of Christian commitment; few Seculars were humanists. In multiple regression, controlling for age, gender, social class and other spirituality types, the relationship between positive human values and Active Christian spirituality remained significant.

**Activities for enjoyment, peace and happiness**

In the face-to-face interviews, interviewees were asked what they found most enjoyable and what was the most fun they had. As noted in chapter 9, music is a central part of young people’s entertainment and general enjoyment. The trio of music, food and parties was often mentioned. For younger teenagers, just ‘mucking around with your mates’ was especially important for having fun. Lucy, aged 12, put it this way:

> I’ve had the most fun, went like down to Adelaide and went to the footy with two of my friends. We went on a bus and on the way home, we were just like having heaps of fun and being silly and screaming and yelling. I don’t think the other people on the bus liked it, but we did. It was fun.
In response to the questions about ‘fun’, a mere handful of people mentioned a religious event like a camp or church based activity. Kate, aged 14, mentioned a parish activity:

Well, I’ve been to a smaller version of the parish … [to] one of their church masses and that was really fun, because they got up and were dancing and moving around, but the Catholic Church is sort of so much more religious.

While spending time with friends was still a source of fun for older youth, they also mentioned more formal social gatherings and drinking as enjoyable. Michael, whom we introduced in chapter 1, said:

Most fun I’ve had. Whenever I think of the word fun, it’s always associated with peers. I don’t usually think of fun as being with older people or family or thing so it’s always being with camps with leaders my own age or theatre parties or stuff like that... So celebrating some achievement sure but all those things are the key to it, peers, alcohol, social.

Nearly three quarters of Gen Y survey participants strongly agreed with the statement: *The thing is to enjoy life and make the best of it here and now*. This was consistent with the views expressed in the face-to-face interviews. It was clear that many young people approved of living for the moment rather than worrying about the future. This was particularly true of younger teenagers. Gemma, aged 15, was one such:

Looking forward to tomorrow I guess. I just think you know tomorrow is going to be another day so anything that happens today is going to be over tomorrow and just let fate take its course and tomorrow will just be a whole new day.

Survey respondents were next asked: ‘How important for you is each of the following activities in finding a sense of peace and happiness?’ Seven activities were listed: listening to music, working or studying, being creative artistically, being close to nature, shopping, meditating and drinking alcohol or taking recreational drugs (Table 10.3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Unimportant</th>
<th>Very unimportant</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>listening to music</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working or studying</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being creative artistically</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being close to nature</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shopping</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meditating</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drinking alcohol/taking recreational drugs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Listening to music was the most popular activity: 39% said it was very important; it was followed by working or studying (30%) being creative artistically (23%) and being close to nature (23%). Only 12% rated shopping as being highly important and a mere 5% chose meditating. Drinking alcohol or taking recreational drugs was at the bottom of the list (3%); three quarters of all participants said it was (very) unimportant.
**Spirituality type differences**

In some instances, spirituality type made a significant difference to what was considered important for peace and happiness, as shown in Table 10.4.

**Table 10.4 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Activities for peace and happiness by spirituality type (percent of spirituality type)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity for peace/happiness</th>
<th>Active Christian</th>
<th>Marginal Christian</th>
<th>Nominal Christian</th>
<th>New Age</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working or studying</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being creative artistically</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being close to nature</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditating</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drinking alcohol / taking recreational drugs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Agers were more likely to state that ‘being close to nature’, ‘shopping’, ‘meditating’, and ‘drinking alcohol/taking recreational drugs’ were more important to the peace and happiness than other types. Not surprisingly a quarter of New Agers stated that meditation was important while less than one in ten Seculars did so.

Fewer Active Christians than any other type agreed with the use of alcohol or recreational drugs for achieving peace and happiness. We used multiple regression to test this set of relationships while controlling for age, gender and social class. Active Christians remained significantly less likely than all other types to rate drinking alcohol or using recreational drugs as important for achieving peace and happiness.

Shopping was less important for Active Christians and Seculars than for others.

**Age and gender differences**

There is quite a lot of consistency across age groups about what is important for their peace and happiness with some interesting exceptions. Listening to music, working/studying or drinking alcohol / taking drugs were more important to the 19-24 age-group. Being close to nature or meditating increased in importance with age. Shopping was more attractive to younger teenagers, with a strong gender difference: it was rated important by one in five females but only one in twenty males.

Females were more likely than males to rate 5 of the 7 items as very important to their peace and happiness (listening to music, working or studying, being creative artistically, being close to nature, shopping). In contrast, more males (14%) than females (4%) said that drinking or taking drugs was important or very important to their peace and happiness.

**Meaning and purpose in life**

In the face-to-face interviews, the interviewees were asked what gave their lives meaning and purpose. Some said that God, Jesus and their religious faith or secular beliefs like science provided them with their meaning and purpose. Active Christians tended to provide comprehensive and multifaceted responses as illustrated by 18 year-old *Amber*:
I think the meaning or the purpose of life for me is just to sort of have faith in Jesus and just trust him and rely on him totally in my life, and wherever he wants to take me, just go with it and yeah, just sort of glorify God in everything I do or I guess try to, not that that works all the time.

The interviewees who talked about the significance to them of their faith or belief in God also, more often than not, mentioned the importance of personal and close relationships. Amanda, a Marginal Christian aged 24, is a good example of this:

That’s a difficult question. What gives life its meaning? I don’t know. I guess a few things, like your relationships, whether it’s families or other loved ones. Belief gives you a purpose, gives you a direction I feel, whether it’s belief in God or a belief in your vocation, or whether it’s a belief in something else. I think it gives you a certain drive and it gives you a purpose. I believe in what I’m doing here at work. I believe that I’m good at it and I can see the results, even if it’s, you know, a student understanding a concept at the end of a lesson and saying, ‘Oh, I get that now, Miss.’ I mean, that makes you feel really good … or whether it’s something deeper on another level.

For others, the question does not make much sense. Lee, aged all of 12, was quick-witted enough first to quote Douglas Adams’ mocking response, then bluntly to endorse the self-interested option, and to defend his reply against criticism:

According to the Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, the meaning of life is 42. Yes. I’d have to say I think the meaning of life is just to go out there and get what you want out of life, just try and be happy. And I think trying to put a structure to it takes away some of the meaning.

**Purpose of life, sense of belonging and feeling hurt**

In an attempt to discover how young people felt about their lives, they were presented in the survey with four statements, and asked whether they agreed or disagreed with each one.

1. Deep inside I’m hurting and nothing seems to help
2. I feel I don’t really belong anywhere
3. My life has a purpose
4. My life fits into some sort of great scheme of things.

The results present a relatively positive view of how young people view their lives (Table 10.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements about life</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deep inside I’m hurting and nothing seems to help</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel I don’t really belong anywhere</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My life has a purpose</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My life fits into some sort of great scheme of things</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Less than one in twenty young Australians strongly agreed with the statement ‘Deep inside I’m hurting and nothing seems to help’. Richard Eckersley, an Australian scientist who studies well-being among youth, reports, on the basis of more searching psychological studies, that as many as a fifth to a third of young people experience significant stress or distress at any one time. Moving into young adulthood can be a highly anxious time for
young people who are trying to establish relationships, seek more independence from their parents, complete their studies and plan or launch a career.

Over half of Gen Y strongly disagreed with the statement *I feel I don’t really belong anywhere*; only 3% strongly agreed with it. Most young people had a strong sense of belonging. In the interviews they were able to detail why and under what circumstances they were included or excluded. For example, they noted that family, friends, their local community, sporting and other types of clubs all contributed to their sense of belonging. Sport provided camaraderie and acceptance, particularly for boys:

Football’s a really fun sport and I’ve got lots of good team mates that are pretty good friends and as well I’ve got pretty high in that, so I have lots of fun and enjoy doing it.

A significant proportion of young people saw their lives as fitting into a larger scheme of things. One in five young people strongly agreed with the statement: *My life fits into some sort of great scheme of things* and only 3% strongly disagreed with it. We cannot assume that a negative response to this question necessarily implied that a respondent was depressed or pessimistic. A negative response could simply mean that they did not believe there was any ‘great scheme’. Ben, aged 18, a budding Secular intellectual, is a good example of someone who did not think life had any purpose, but seemed quite positive in outlook:

I’m a fairly casual kind of person, in fact I suppose you could kind of describe me as almost nihilist really in the fact that I don’t think that things have a major purpose….. I’m agnostic bordering on atheism really but I was brought up Catholic and I’m baptised and confirmed and went to a Catholic primary school and college. I do subscribe to a theory of existentialism which I like to make my own doctrine I suppose you could say. I think that my life meaning is through what I do with it and I don’t read a religious text at all and I think my experiences are what I will live my life by and how I will find my own meaning if there is any since I am a nihilist, which means there is none at all.

How purposeful are young people? In the face-to-face interviews we asked: ‘So for you, what gives life its meaning and purpose? What makes it all worthwhile?’ Some said that they didn’t know – most of these were in their teens. Those who were older, better educated and involved with their community were more likely to provide more comprehensive and thought-out responses.

The sources of meaning varied. Some young people nominated friendships and relationships; a few mentioned their religious or secular beliefs; others the successful achievement of goals in their career or academic studies. Some spoke more generally of ‘being in control of my life’, ‘getting on with life’, ‘feeling alive’ and ‘grabbing every possibility’. There is an emphasis on avoiding stagnation, moving on, seeking new experiences and pursuing goals. Angela, aged 18, articulates this position:

The purpose of life I suppose is to live it, get the best out of it the whole time. So, make the most of opportunities and if it’s there take it. It’s presented to you for a reason.

**Spirituality Type Differences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10.6 Gen Y (aged 13-24): Meaning and purpose by spirituality type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(percent of spirituality type)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning and purpose</th>
<th>Spirituality type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
If we turn our attention to the results of the survey we can see that generally there was a strong sense of meaning and purpose across all spirituality types, with a level of hurt expressed by 11-24% of various groups. The sense of belonging expressed by nearly all was extremely high and only a little higher for those who are Active members of Christian church communities (Table 10.6). These findings might lead some to question the dire pronouncements of theorists about the alienation of modern youth; but we anticipate that, because young people’s sense of belonging rests solely on family and friends rather than also on a religious or community organisation, in the event that their network collapses, they face isolation. This may be a consequence even of moving interstate or overseas.

To sum up, Active Christians had more positive attitudes to life than any of the other spirituality types. They were less likely to be ‘hurting inside’, and to state ‘I feel I don’t really belong anywhere’. There were numerous other questions, reported in chapters 3 and 4, relevant to meaning for life in the case of Christians and followers of other traditional religions.18

Seculars were less likely than any other type to say that ‘My life fits into some sort of great scheme of things’, and were among the groups with higher proportions saying that they felt they did not really belong anywhere.

The US National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) also found that religiously active teenagers were quite different from the religiously disengaged in their values, their attitudes to others, personal behaviour and community participation. Active teenagers in both countries seem to have a more positive view of their lives than do those who are disengaged from religion.

A growing body of literature suggests that spirituality provides young people with the resilience to cope with a plethora of social and personal problems and so act as a protective factor against life’s stressors.19 Research also shows that religious beliefs and practice enhance health and happiness.20 People who have a relationship with a spiritual entity or divinity in the form of a caring and compassionate figure gain strength and confidence in life.21 A recent report into the wellbeing of young Australians surmised that the benefits of religion are derived from the social connections, spiritual support, sense of purpose, coherent belief system and moral code that religion provides and that while these things can be found elsewhere, it is not quite as easy to access them from other sources.22

**Age Differences**

Gen Xs were more likely than both Gen Ys and Baby Boomers to acknowledge that they were hurting inside, or didn’t really belong anywhere. On the other hand Baby Boomers
were more likely than Gen Xs and Gen Ys to agree that their lives fitted into a larger scheme of things.

**Conclusion**

Gen Y are sometimes referred to as the Echo-Baby Boomers – an apt title, because in many ways they are similar to their Boomer parents who have marched away from established religion and into a secular and individualised life. However, Gen Y young people are staying home until their mid-twenties and are reliant financially on parents for longer than previous generations. They are part of the consumer society; they value family, friends and fun, and their goals centre around having a career, living in a safe environment and having artistic or musical outlets.

The majority of young people in the study have a positive view of life and face the future with confidence. 23% of Gen Y reported feeling hurt or not belonging. Adolescence has always had its stresses, particularly for some, and is probably more difficult now than in the past. Certainly the trauma suffered by children when parents divorce or separate is much more widespread. However, fewer than 1% strongly agreed with both of these statements, and since it was not part of our agenda to engage in a deeper investigation of individuals’ psychological states, we hesitate to sound alarms on the basis of this evidence alone.

Active Christians stand out from other spirituality types in a number of ways, but particularly in their values. They are more oriented to the spiritual than to self-gratification. In contrast, Nominal Christians are as likely as the rest of Gen Y to enjoy drinking and recreational drugs, to feel they don’t belong, or to have no purpose in life.

Churches active in youth ministry are in a unique position to connect young people to each other and to the wider church community, and to provide them with values to inform their judgment on the ethical and social issues confronting them in today’s society.

The following chapter expands the horizon beyond the individual to inquire into young people’s interest in the wider social world, their concern for others and the practices in which this concern is expressed.
Chapter 11
Looking after yourself or helping others
Spirituallity and social concern

* I want to support my community and be a good member of society and make moral decisions. *(Fiona, aged 18)*

At the beginning of the 1990s in Australia there was a resurgence of interest in young people’s attitudes to citizenship. Active citizenship involves people acquiring civic knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they can actively participate in society in a manner that is oriented to the common good. Both Commonwealth and State Governments have expressed concern that young Australians are largely ignorant of the way our democratic system and political structures work and that they feel alienated from community affairs. In 1994 Prime Minister Keating announced the formation of the Civics Expert Group (CEG) which stated that there was a ‘civic deficit’ in Australia and recommended that new approaches be developed for teaching young Australians how to be active citizens, motivated to participate in a wide range of associations, organizations and institutions.

During the later 1990s, school systems adopted new approaches aimed at inculcating moral values, teaching practical competencies and fostering community participation. An Australian study conducted in 2000 found that in the previous 5 years volunteering by both men and women had increased across all age groups. The increase in the proportion involved in volunteering was particularly strong among those aged 19-24 (from 17% to 27%), and also among those aged 55-64 (from 24% to 33%). These rates, however, were still lower than in other developed nations. While some studies have shown a direct link between attitudes to community engagement and actual involvement, others have not found such a strong relationship. Researchers working on the 2001 Australian Temperament Project collected data from 1310 adolescents aged 15 to 16. They found that 90% of them reported a commitment to the ideal of individual responsibility for societal problems at the community or global level, but this did not always translate into action; 58% reported support for organizations helping disadvantaged people through voluntary work or giving money but only 10% reported that they often did so. This research confirmed that there was a large gap between young people’s ideals about how to enhance society and the practical application of those ideals. Why is this so?

In this chapter, we address the following questions: Are young people actively engaged in their community or are they self-absorbed and uninterested? How do Gen Y relate to those less fortunate than themselves? What type and level of community engagement is most common? What are some of things that move young people to become socially concerned and active in their community? How, if at all, are young people’s social outlook and activities related to their religious or spiritual lives? Do spirituality type or denomination make a difference?

**Civic Orientation**

Many young Australians are in part-time employment during secondary and tertiary schooling; they also spend a lot of time on the internet and watching television or DVDs as well as socialising with their friends. This does not leave them with a lot of spare time. Most young Australians do not include community service among their leisure time activities.
There are many different ways in which people can relate positively to their community and the wider society; we found in the literature that ‘civic orientation’ seems the most useful overarching concept to encompass the whole range. It includes an orientation to the common good, a sense of responsibility towards one's neighbour and community and a belief that despite individual differences, each of us has something to contribute to society.\textsuperscript{6} Civic orientation implies a sense of responsibility towards one's community and intentional and voluntary actions that help or benefit others apart from family or friends. It involves the perception of a shared identity with others and the belief that everyone has a role to play in resolving community and political issues.\textsuperscript{7} Previous researchers have identified four discrete dimensions of civic orientation.\textsuperscript{8} In this chapter, we will briefly describe each of these dimensions, and then make use of them to analyse Gen Y’s social involvement.

Table 11.1 Dimensions of Civic Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civic knowledge</td>
<td>Understanding of basic human rights, social/political structures, and mechanisms for social change, plus an appreciation for social justice, equity, cultural diversity, community engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic capacities and skills</td>
<td>A range of skills and personal competencies, a capacity to make autonomous choices and decisions, to exercise personal control and to argue effectively for one’s views without denigrating those of others and to work in a team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic attitude</td>
<td>Actions and attitudes that show an orientation towards the common good, i.e. caring and respectful attitudes towards others, and support for legitimate authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic participation</td>
<td>Engaging in volunteering and community service, political activism as well as donating money, and doing acts of kindness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Examples of different levels of civic orientation**
Young people in the face-to-face interviews varied greatly in their responses on these issues. We have selected five young interviewees to demonstrate the differences in the way young people relate to society.

*Lisa*
A small group demonstrated strong civic values, high skill and participation levels and a firm appreciation of basic human rights and showed a great deal of confidence in tackling new and sometimes scary ventures. 21-year-old Lisa is an example of someone whose ethical views appear to drive her behaviour. Her spirituality type is Secular; although she went to a Catholic school and occasionally prays, she does not see herself as religious. She is highly articulate – able to talk about current issues in the wider society and to list a range of areas where she believes an injustice occurred. Not content to let others take on these complex issues, she claims that she wants to have input into alleviating inequality and injustice:

I think that it is an injustice to a woman to have to stay in an environment that is degrading and is violent towards her when people think this is the year 2003 and this should not happen... I feel very strongly about homelessness and drug use because I live in [an area] of Sydney and it is a massive homeless area with heroin addicts in the streets. A thirteen-year-old girl came into work the other day and she had holes in her arms. In addition, with the volunteer work for [name removed], I feel strongly about it and I wish there was something that could be done about, it’s a horrible, horrible situation.

Katherine
In contrast to Lisa, who was remarkable in the way that she engaged with the community, other interviewees were less socially concerned and aware. Katherine, aged 15, was a Nominal Christian attending a Lutheran school. She is an example of someone who has some sound civic attitudes but less awareness of political or social structures than the older young woman quoted above. Katherine could not think of any public issues of social justice on which she had a view apart from animal welfare. While her knowledge of political and current affairs was not extensive, she did read the newspaper and watch the news on television each day. In this, she is unusual; the 2000 Australian Government study on Citizenship and Democracy found that only 50% of households that included fourteen year olds received a newspaper daily and only 62% of teens in the study would consult a newspaper if they wanted to find out specific information. Katherine was interested in the welfare of others and willing to help friends or family when required. Her community activity involved a level of skill and initiative – boycotting goods that used animal parts and starting a knitting group for the benefit of disadvantaged people:

I guess I just want people to remember me as a person who loves other people, who is happy to contribute who is very open and making a big difference to people’s lives... I initiated a knitting group to knit for the less fortunate, down at the community service, the kindergarten... It just felt really nice, people who were disabled and what you are doing to make a difference, it’s great.

Rohan
Those young people who were less engaged with their community and less socially concerned varied in their civic knowledge and personal capacities/skills: some were indifferent and a few quite anti-social. Rohan aged 15 was an example of someone who is apathetic. He had a supportive family and no obvious academic or personal difficulties but did almost no community service or volunteer work. His spirituality type is Secular and although he had been to school church services, he was not interested in religion or in spiritual issues. He showed limited civic knowledge, few personal capacities/skills for social involvement and little evidence of thought-out civic attitudes. He was not antagonistic to the idea of civic responsibility but it did not seem to be relevant to him. However, Rohan had a basic knowledge of human rights and social and political structures. He named the Iraq war and
President George Bush’s role in starting and maintaining it, as a major concern. He could not recall any example of injustice not centred on himself. He was quite concerned about what family and peers thought of him and wanted to be remembered for doing something memorable (by which he meant adventurous). He was indifferent to the needs of those outside his immediate circle and to civic involvement generally:

I mean, I don’t want them (family and friends) to be like ashamed of me or anything. I’d just like to try lots of things, just get as many things as I can do under my belt, and just say, oh, I’ve done that. Probably jumping out of an aeroplane or something, climbing a mountain. Do something good to tell my kids or my grandchildren.

**Alison and Nathan**

*Alison* and *Nathan* from Spin Cycle, a juvenile justice diversionary program are examples of two young people who have little family or community support. *Alison* aged 15 was baptised and confirmed as a Catholic and was a Nominal Christian. She had few opportunities to become part of a wider circle or to be involved in civic participation. Her civic knowledge was limited and her civic values seemed unable to flourish because her own precarious situation meant that she was more focussed on her own needs than those of the wider society. She stated that George Bush was a warmonger responsible for both the Iraq war and the September 11th attack in the United States, but did not go to any anti-war protests or rallies although she knew they were on. She once did volunteer work for two full weeks at an opportunity shop run by St Vincent de Paul and was distressed that people rip the dockets off clothes to try and get them at a cheaper price. Her immediate goals were to get a job and to stop using marijuana:

Just life in itself is a bit unfair ... That’s just the way it goes. ...I can control what I like myself, but I have no control over my life, other people. .....I spent too much of my life worrying about other people and hassles in my life, so it’s all about me now, me and my boyfriend and my family.

*Nathan*, aged seventeen, demonstrated anti-social attitudes and behaviour. He was aggressive during the interview, swearing and leaning over towards the interviewer. He seemed to delight in making her uncomfortable; she found him quite intimidating. He liked rap and heavy metal music: his favourite bands were Metallica, Snoop Dogg, Dr Dre and Xzibit. His concern for others in society was minimal – less than that evidenced by either *Rohan* or *Alison*. He had never done any volunteer work. He was hostile towards religion: responding to a question about belief in God with: ‘I don’t know. I honestly couldn’t give a shit’. His concerns were self-centred: he would like marijuana legalised. He showed animosity towards his family: he was ‘kicked out’ of the house by his mother, and when asked for an example of a time when he felt most alive, he described the following scene:

Just before I got booted out, me and my Mum were arguing and she grabbed me, so I grabbed her and then my Dad grabbed me by the throat, so I grabbed him by the throat and smacked around his face, and that was cool. I felt alive. Yeah, that was sweet.

**Civic orientation scales**

The interviews gave us a good grasp of the four civic dimensions of civic orientation, and enabled us to develop questions and scales that we later used with participants in the survey. Scales are more reliable than single questions because they tend to even out discrepancies in
the ways people understand and respond to each question. Thus we developed eight civic scales (Civic Knowledge, Civic Skill, Compassion, Civic Values, Altruism, Generosity, Volunteering and Social Concern) to measure the four dimensions of civic orientation as shown in the table below.

### Table 11.2 Civic orientation scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic dimension</th>
<th>Civic orientation scale</th>
<th>Measuring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Civic Knowledge</td>
<td>Political and environmental awareness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Skills</strong></td>
<td>Civic Skills</td>
<td>The ability to write/email or speak out about an issue of concern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Attitude</strong></td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>The extent to which participants were personally concerned about the needs of others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civic Values</td>
<td>The extent to which participants were personally concerned about community and environmental issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic Participation</strong></td>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>Actions which participants engaged in to benefit others without seeking any personal reward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>The amount of money people donate to charities or good causes in a typical month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>The number of hours spent in volunteer social service activities in a typical month.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civic knowledge, skills attitudes and participation</strong></td>
<td>Social Concern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next section, we explore the relationship between these seven measures of civic orientation on the one hand, and spirituality type, denomination, age, gender and family intactness on the other.

**Civic Knowledge: ‘I don’t really watch the news’**

There was no significant difference between spirituality types or denominations on Civic Knowledge. The level of civic knowledge is likely to be the result of factors such as age, education and the socio-economic status of the family rather than religiosity.

As would be expected, younger Gen Ys (13-15) had less Civic Knowledge than older Gen Y participants. Older respondents (19-24) were more likely to have recently discussed politics and environmental issues and watched or heard the news.

We found that those who attended Other Private schools scored higher on Civic Knowledge than those who attended Government schools.

Not surprisingly, young people scored higher on Civic Knowledge if the area in which they lived had higher education/occupation levels and was less disadvantaged, as indicated by the SEIFA scores on these two indices for the respondent’s postcode of residence.  

**Civic Skills: ‘I stand up for what I believe in’**

Civic skills is the second of the four dimensions of civic orientation. We report on both the scale and its individual items: ability to write/email or speak out about an issue of concern.

Civic Skills was partially related to spirituality type: New Agers scored the highest, significantly above Seculars but not significantly better than the other spirituality types.

As would be expected, older Gen Ys scored higher on the Civic Skills scale than the two younger age groups; the 13-15 year old group scored lowest. Table 11.3 outlines the differences between age groups within Gen Y on specific civic skills.

| Table 11.3 Gen Y (aged 13-24 years): Civic Skills by age group (percent of age group) |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| **Civic Skills**                              | 13-15  | 16-18  | 19-24  | Gen Y  |
| Contacted an MP or a member of a local council on a public issue (yes) | 6      | 11     | 14     | 11     |
| Level of confidence that could clearly state opinion (writing letter/e-mail about something of real concern) |        |        |        |        |
| - Very confident                              | 15     | 21     | 39     | 29     |
| - Not confident at all                        | 5      | 4      | 3      | 4      |
| Likelihood of speaking up and expressing opinion |        |        |        |        |
| - Very likely                                 | 22     | 35     | 43     | 36     |
| - Unlikely                                    | 7      | 5      | 5      | 6      |

19-24 year olds demonstrated more skill in each of the three areas noted in the table.
Females were more confident than males in their ability to write a letter of concern about a social issue. There were no differences based on type of school attended.

Civic Attitudes: ‘Life in itself is a bit unfair’

*Compassion* and *Civic Values*, the two scales that measure civic attitudes, are discussed separately.

*Compassion*

To gauge participants’ compassion we asked how they regarded those less fortunate than themselves. When spirituality types were compared, we wondered why New Agers scored so high on *Compassion*, as they did on a number of other dimensions of civic orientation. Seeking an explanation, we compared New Agers who were raised Christian with those who were not, and found that only the former had high scores on this variable. They and Active Christians scored the highest on *Compassion*, significantly higher than Nominal Christians and Seculars. Evidently, as Robert Wuthnow found, the Christian values they learned in childhood continue to influence their attitude to the less fortunate. An alternative explanation, that New Agers scored high because relatively more of them are female, was not sustained: the difference in compassion between New Age males and females was not significant.

The only significant difference in *Compassion* by denomination was that Catholics performed significantly better than the No Religious Identification group.

While there was no significant relationship between age and the *Compassion* scale as a whole, there were some age differences on individual items, which were not always in favour of the older group. It was the younger age group who cared more about Aboriginal reconciliation: 44% of 13-15 year-olds said they cared ‘very much’, compared to 34% of 19-24 year-olds. However, on ‘equal treatment for all Australians’ 74% of 19-24 year-olds expressed high concern vs. 64% of 13-15 year-olds; and on ‘the needs of poor people in Australia’ the respective percentages were 33% of the older group vs. 21% of the younger.

Table 11.4 compares responses on individual items within the *Compassion* scale by gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Needs of poor people in Australia</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Care very much</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Don't care at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equal treatment for all Australians, whatever their race, religion or culture</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Care very much</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Don't care at all</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Refugees in detention centres</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Care very much</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Don't care at all</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11.4 Gen Y (aged 13-24 years): Compassion by gender (percent of gender)
Females scored higher than males on the *Compassion* scale as a whole, and on 3 of its 4 items, but the difference on Aboriginal reconciliation was not significant.

Family intactness (for those aged 13-18 years) was related to *Compassion*: those who were living with only one of their biological parents (and who had previously lived with both of them at least until they began secondary school) were higher on compassion than those living with both of their original parents. The reasons for this are unclear; perhaps the absence of the other parent as a result of death, separation or divorce influenced these young people to be more sympathetic towards others who face difficulties.

*Civic Values*

To assess values we asked young people about their attitudes to a number of current social issues. The *Civic Values* scale was made up of responses to questions on: the environment, social justice, national security, world peace, and helping others.

Table 11.5 Gen Y (aged 13-24 years): Civic values by spirituality type and gender (mean on values scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Active Xn</th>
<th>Marginal Xn</th>
<th>Nominal Xn</th>
<th>New Age Xn</th>
<th>Secular Xn</th>
<th>Other Xn</th>
<th>Gen Y Xn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active Christians and New Agers scored higher than Seculars on *Civic Values*. Care for the environment, concern for world peace and helping others are prominent in the ethos of most New Age belief systems. The high score for Active Christians is consistent with research findings from the United States, which note that Christians who take their faith seriously are more likely to follow the values it teaches. Females scored higher than males within all spirituality types except Secular.

Comparing *Civic Values* by denomination, Catholics scored the highest, significantly higher than the No Religious Identification group. Catholics have had a long history of concern for others based on Catholic teaching on social justice. Followers of other world religions also scored highly – most of these religions also promote concern for the poor and needy. The relatively low score for Seculars may reflect their greater openness to individualism and consumerism and their lack of involvement in organisations that promote concern for others.

There was a generational difference: Gen X and the Baby Boomers scored higher than Gen Y on *Civic Values*. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aboriginal reconciliation</th>
<th>Care very much</th>
<th>Don’t care at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Civic participation: ‘I've attended protest rallies’
Now we will consider the three measures of civic participation: Altruism, Generosity and Volunteering, examining the three composite scales and some individual items as well.

Many young people demonstrated caring and respectful attitudes to others, particularly towards family and friends but far fewer translated these attitudes into action beyond the bounds of their family. It was typical of a considerable number of participants that helping family or friends by babysitting, lending money and visiting the sick was the sum total of their service to others, apart from an occasional selling of raffle tickets or door-knocking to collect for charity.

Altruism
Altruism includes activities like visiting the sick and lending money to friends. There was no significant difference between denominational groups. Among spirituality types, New Agers brought up Christian scored higher on Altruism than Marginal Christians, Seculars and Others.

Young people scored higher on Altruism if the area in which they lived was higher on the SEIFA indexes of advantage-disadvantage, and education/occupation.

Family intactness related to Altruism: as was the case with compassion, those who were living with only one biological parent (but had previously lived with both up to early secondary school) demonstrated a higher level of altruism than those whose original family was intact.

There were age-related differences among Gen Y, those aged 19-24 were more altruistic than the younger age group. In the face-to-face interviews, most interviewees under 16 years of age could not name anything that they did for someone else in their community, apart from family and friends. But this was true of few who were 16 or over.

Generosity
In the survey, participants were asked specific questions about donating to charity or worthy causes, as well as to the Tsunami Appeal. Some respondents claimed to have given large amounts; it is more appropriate to report the median amounts given in the previous year to any cause: $21 for 13-18 year olds and $94 for 19-24 year olds.

Generosity was related to spirituality type according to the familiar pattern: Active Christians were significantly more generous than all other spirituality types in giving to charity. 25% of Seculars but only 8% of Active Christians gave nothing to charity in the previous year.

On the Generosity scale, which adds together general charitable giving and gifts to the Tsunami appeal, Active Christians again scored higher than all other spirituality types.

Individuals differ by denomination in their generosity levels. When we compare giving to various charities (including one’s local church) with gifts to the Tsunami appeal an interesting pattern emerges (Figure 11.1).
Figure 11.1 Gen Y (aged 13-24 years): Average amount donated to charity or a worthy cause in the past year for each denomination

Other Christians were the most generous in giving to charities/good causes and significantly more generous than all other denominations except for Other Religions (perhaps because some of them give tithes to their local church). But in responding to the Tsunami appeal, Other Religions were the most generous and significantly more generous than all other groups except Catholics. Perhaps those in the Other Religions group identified more closely with those who were affected by the Tsunami, either because of historical connections, common religious background, or a more ‘international’ sense of identity.

The Australian giving and volunteering study, based on 6,209 interviews conducted in 2005, found that those who attend religious services at least weekly are likely to give higher sums to charity than those who attend less frequently, and much more likely to give more than those who have no religious allegiance. However, much of this giving was to churches or church-related organisations rather than to non-religious charities. Further, it was religious observance, not belonging to a particular denomination, that was related to high levels of giving. We also found that Active Christians whatever their denomination, give more than Nominal Christians or Seculars.

Mark Regnerus and colleagues, analysing the US 1996 Religious identity and influences survey found that religious people gave more to charity, and that there was no support for the view that theological conservatives are indifferent to the needy. They were as likely to give as members of liberal denominations. ‘The more one attends church services, and the more one considers one’s religious beliefs to be important, the more one gives’.

Studies of ‘hypothetical generosity’ show a relationship between generosity and religious affiliation. Will and Cochran in their US study of a decade ago showed that conservative and moderate Protestants were significantly less generous than Liberal protestants and Catholics.
Catholics gave over $25 a week more than mainstream Protestants, with highly religious Catholics being even more generous.18

We asked participants the following hypothetical question: ‘Suppose you won $100,000. Would you keep it all to yourself or give away $10,000 or more? If so to whom?’ (The response options were: Family & friends / A charity or good cause.) Participants were quite generous (hypothetically) with only 22% saying they would keep it all to themselves; the rest would give $10,000 or more to friends (41%) or to charity (37%). Females appeared more generous than males: 17% of females said that they would keep it all for themselves vs. 27% of males. Females (42%) were also more likely than males (33%) to say that they would give a tenth of the amount or more to charity or a worthy cause.

Table 11.6 shows responses by denomination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If you won $100,000</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Oth Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep all for self</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give $10,000 or more to family/friends</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give $10,000 or more to charity</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a significant difference in (hypothetical) generosity between denominations: Other Christians and followers of Other Religions (46%) were more likely to say they would give away 10% of the money to charity than those with No Religious Identification (33%).

Those who were employed and those that scored higher on the SEIFA advantage-disadvantage index said they would give significantly more to charity or a worthy cause.

**Volunteering**

The Gen Y survey found that 71% of young people did no volunteering or community service in the past month. Out of the 29% who had done at least an hour of volunteer work, 17% had done between 1 and 5 hours and 12% had done more than 5 hours. Only 1% of participants engaged in over 70 hours of community participation per month. The average for the whole of Gen Y was 3.3 hours per month.

The main areas of volunteer work were as follows: fundraising/sales (21%) followed by befriending / supporting / listening / counselling (18%), repairing / maintenance / gardening (16%) personal care/assistance (9%), teaching (7%), clerical work (6%) and coaching or refereeing sport (6%).

Travis and Anthony are typical examples of those whose community involvement took place by working as volunteers in sporting activities:
Travis: Coaching? Oh, I love it. I’ve got the passion there for the sport and I enjoy the kids. I’m not actually one to worry about winning but actually seeing a team improve. It makes you feel good when a kid learns a new skill and improves.

Anthony: Even though I’m not a member of the rowing club any more I still go down there when they have their regatta and give them a hand.

Many participants indicated that they assisted in sporting activities but few were involved in coaching, refereeing or teaching others.

The interview data gave us some insight into the extent to which members of Gen Y translate civic attitudes into participation. While it might be assumed that young people’s civic participation arose out of strong civic values, this was not always the case. In some instances voluntary service arose out a desire to be with friends engaged in the same activity.

The volunteering experience sometimes led to more developed and articulated civic values, as demonstrated by Stuart, aged 16:

The school I went to in the UK also really encompasses community service. For example, there were huge floods in a place in Scotland and they had billions of dollars worth of damage and I went for a few days helping people . . . I am really open to community service. I think it is good . . . I am more aware of the need for helping in certain places and I am more active in things like that. If I see someone who needs a hand I will go and help them. If volunteers have been asked for in certain areas I will probably go and do that because I realise how much of a difference it makes.

Some young people engage in volunteer and community work entirely within their church community. However, some church communities encourage and foster participation in the wider community on the part of their young members. This can provide an ideal starting point for young people to develop a liking for service to others and move into more challenging volunteering experiences, as related by Melanie:

Well in the past I’ve been involved with my church in different ways like running the youth group and things, so I’m good friends with my parish priest and when I left my job I went to just to have a chat to him and he said to me, ‘Well, if you like to come along and do something like this, it will be a good way for you to use your teaching skills with the kids’.

Lack of education did not hinder civic involvement. Young volunteers with fewer civic skills tended to restrict themselves to the local community.

In the survey, we found that two-thirds of Gen Y who were aged sixteen or more did some kind of paid work. However, surprisingly, work commitments did not diminish the number of volunteer hours people contributed; many who volunteered were students with part-time jobs.

A small proportion of young people in the face-to-face interviews took their civic participation into the national or international spheres. They had started to get involved at the personal and local levels and moved into the larger arena. For example, one young woman in Year 12 was involved in a local and a national debating team as well as being involved in a range of social justice issues with an international focus that demanded a great deal of confidence and ability.
Chris aged 20 combined several volunteer activities:

I play a lot of hockey and I also enjoy umpiring hockey. I also adjudicate debating and coach a debating team and am really into getting involved in that in a public speaking side and watching people develop confidence and being able to help them develop their own confidence. I guess that’s why I’m interested in umpiring hockey as well, taking control of the game and then let other people enjoy the game within the confines of the rules. I really enjoy hockey and debating.

Younger respondents restricted their activity to the personal or local arenas. It was those in their early twenties who sometimes branched out into the national or international arena through organisations like Amnesty International, World Vision or Community Abroad.

THE OUTLOOK FOR VOLUNTEERING

Robert Wuthnow argues that in the US, while service organisations and long-term volunteering are declining, innovative forms are taking their place: younger people are finding new ways to help one another in short-term, task-oriented bursts, using the internet to connect with like-minded people in distant locations.19

We did not share Wuthnow’s optimism about Gen Y’s level and type of community engagement. No doubt the new forms of civic engagement he describes are occurring – many of our interviewees indicated that they did a series of one-off activities like door knocking for a major charity or a walkathon – but there is no evidence that they are happening on anything like the scale needed to replace the forms of service that are languishing.

A small number of young people are doing a good deal for their community, but they are not typical and do not appear to be trendsetters.

How do spirituality and denominational difference relate to volunteering? Christian Smith, author of Soul searching, found that US adolescents’ spirituality and religiosity have a significant influence on how they relate to the society around them.20 A study of young university students in Brussels also found that religiosity and spirituality were associated with helping people.21 Robert Putnam reports: ‘Religious involvement is an especially strong predictor of volunteering and philanthropy’.22 Why is this so? One explanation is that religion provides its adherents with strong altruistic beliefs and values that provide powerful motivation for action.23

Table 11.7 shows some marked differences in the average hours of volunteering of those belonging to different spirituality types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours of volunteer work</th>
<th>Active Xn</th>
<th>Marginal Xn</th>
<th>Nominal Xn</th>
<th>New Age</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While 51% of Active Christians did no volunteer hours in a month, the same was true of 77% of Seculars. Actives were also more likely to do larger numbers of hours of volunteer work than all other groups.

In further analysis (not shown in this table), we were intrigued to discover that although Active Christians were more likely to engage in volunteering than New Agers raised Christian, the latter group actually contributed more hours of volunteer work per month than even Active Christians!

Then we remembered that Active Christians attend church at least monthly (many of them much more often) and are usually also involved in other activities within their church community such as study or prayer groups, apart from their church- and community-related service activities. These activities may leave less time for volunteering. Further, volunteering has some associated costs for travel and incidentals. New Agers are typically older and better resourced: many New Age activities are client services or have other costs attached.

Bethany, aged thirteen, provides an example. She attends a Lutheran school and a Christian church with a strong youth club. Her parents are socially aware and enthusiastic environmentalists actively involved in protesting against the exploitation of Third World countries. Bethany volunteers in the church crèche, assists with morning tea after church services, and has written to local and state governments on environmental issues and Aids, as well as assisting in the distribution and signing of petitions. Her actions and values are clearly driven by her faith.

Even some Seculars who engage in a large amount of volunteering admit that their values are based on Christian principles or derived from a Christian-based organisation to which they belong. This view is illustrated by Chris aged 20 and Brett, aged 23:

**Chris:** I haven’t really done a lot of study into religion; I don’t really understand the teachings of any particular religion very well. I guess growing up in an Australian society I have probably adopted many Christian values, but I wouldn’t say I’m conservative at all, and I think I am very open-minded. I don’t think that I have adopted any sort of religious values necessarily except for societal values that are derived from those religious values.

**Brett:** Youth Voice is a Christian organization and I’m not Christian, but the base values of Youth Voice, Christian values of honesty, caring, respect and responsibility, I’m cool with that, because I think they are good human values.

**Volunteering and Religion**

In studies conducted in Australia and in other Western countries, religion has been found to be a strong contributor to civic engagement: people who endorse religious values put self-interest aside in favour of assisting others in the community. Robert Wuthnow found (in the US) that people are more likely to give time, even to secular causes, if they are church members. The Australian study: *Young people and volunteering: A report by volunteering Victoria in the international year of volunteering*, reported that religiously involved students were more likely than non-religiously involved students to volunteer and do community service as well as to hold normative assumptions that these activities were important.
Comparing the findings from seven studies on civic responsibility and religious tradition across the United States, Corwin Smidt notes that church attendance is related to engaging in volunteer activity as well as making charitable contributions. ‘Those who choose to be unaffiliated with any religious body stand apart from those who are affiliated, in terms of joining voluntary associations, volunteering for social programs, contributing to charitable causes, and exercising civic skills.’

He goes on to state: ‘Religious life promotes civic knowledge and civic skills that ‘spill over’ to life outside the institutional domain of the church as well’.

Table 11.8 shows denominational differences in the amount of time Gen Ys spend on voluntary work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours of volunteering</th>
<th>Anglican</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Oth Xn</th>
<th>Oth Relig</th>
<th>No Rel ID</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 5 hours per month</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other Christians were the denominational group least likely to do nothing, most likely to engage in at least some volunteer activity, and most likely to devote a higher amount of time to it. Those with No Religious Identification come next in hours spent on voluntary work. Is this surprising? No – by now the reader will realise that ‘No religious identification’ consists of two non-Christian spirituality types: New Agers (who averaged 14.7 hours per month of volunteering) and Seculars (3.6); it is certainly the New Agers who are responsible for the relatively high score of the ‘No Religious Identification’ group, 11% of whose members gave more than 5 hours per month.

International studies indicate that members of different denominations vary in the ways in which they view and respond to the surrounding society. In a recent study of 29 nations, Pui-Yan Lam notes that religious participation encourages voluntary activities and that ‘Although both Catholicism and Protestantism promote altruism and the pursuit of the common good, the value orientation of each denomination might favour a different course of action’. Catholics are less likely to be members of voluntary associations compared to Protestants, but the difference between Protestants and other groups is not significant. Lam argues that the individualist emphasis of Protestantism makes voluntary groups an appealing option for social change, while Catholicism provides the ideological framework for individuals to demand that the government (and therefore all taxpayers) take responsibility. Lam also found that the religious tradition and composition of a nation affect individuals’ propensity for voluntary membership independently of the effect of individuals’ religious affiliation.
The Spirit of Generation Y study did not ask about the number of organisations to which participants belonged, so no direct comparison with Lam’s findings is possible. However, we did not find any support for the notion that Catholics were less involved in community participation or had less social concern than Protestants, and on some measures, Catholics excelled above the other groups.

Age makes a difference to civic involvement: those aged 19-24 were more active than the youngest Gen Ys (13-15). They have more control over their time, more opportunities, more developed skills and more resources, and are less reliant on parents or others for transport.

Again, there was a generational difference: the Baby Boomers engage in more hours of voluntary work than Gen Y.

Across all age groups, males undertook more hours of volunteer work than females. In the younger age group, parents may be more protective of girls, and may be uneasy about some kinds of community engagement. But this does not explain why older Gen Y men are more involved than women. Perhaps it is because of their greater involvement in community sport as administrators, coaches or referees.

Moving out of a comfort zone: ‘It is good because you get out of your comfort zone’.

In the face-to-face interviews, we came across a number of young people engaged in volunteer activities that required a great deal of skill and confidence. One young man said that initially, he was ‘incredibly nervous and intimidated at having to work on a kids’ holiday program for a week’. From this shaky start, he became ‘addicted’ to volunteering.

Interviewees who had managed to become involved in more challenging areas of service told us that it was quite an intimidating exercise at the beginning and took quite a lot of courage and support. Olivia aged 18 said:

> It was quite scary because there were people there that were not only old but mentally disabled too. There was this one lady and you had to make sure you had your hands in your pockets because she would just walk up to you, wouldn’t even look at you, just grab your hand and wouldn’t let go and just walk around with you all day. It was excellent but really hard to start off with.

We sought to discover what motivates young people to move out of their comfort zone and into more emotionally demanding areas of civic participation, while others with a strong value and community service ethic did not.

Analysing the data from the face-to-face interviews, it was apparent that some young people had access to greater resources and to wider networks than others, and that these factors appeared to influence their civic participation. Most seem willing to assist family and friends in quite practical ways while others widen their circle to include sporting or activity clubs. Previous research supports our finding that young people spend a great deal more time helping friends and members of the local community than being involved in wider social justice issues and that they are reluctant to move out of their comfort zone.
Why do some young people restrict their volunteer activities to their local community while others are involved at a national, and in a few instances, at an international level? We discovered that young people are more likely to move out of their comfort zone if they have a well-organised and supported entry point.

**Support for more demanding activities**

Family and friends as well as institutions provided the support and access points for those young people who did take on more demanding volunteer activities. For a number, it was their parents who got them involved. For some, school voluntary service was the route to more challenging community service, for others it was youth or sporting organisations. By way of illustration, Angela, aged 18, was asked by how she became involved in volunteering. Her motivation came from her parents who gave her the chance to make the connections she needed to get started:

I did work in a retirement village for a while and I’ve done work for charities. My Dad’s in Rotary, so I spend a lot of my time at their fund raisers and doing things like Give a Life and giving money to the polio programs and things like that.

So it was your Dad’s involvement in Rotary that got you involved?

Partially and just doing Red Shield, I’ve been involved. It’s just a bunch of students between the ages of sixteen and eighteen or twenty where we all get together once a month and do fund raising or we put a team into the We Love Life. We hold events. Things like that just to raise as much money as we can and then at the end of the year we donate it to a charity or just a different charity each year.

**Friends**

Friends are very important sources of information and influence regarding volunteering, but so too are organised clubs and groups. Previous research has found that those who belonged to youth groups are twice as likely to be members of civic organizations when they are adults. Participation in organised groups during adolescence has a lasting impact and makes civic engagement a part of who they are. They also take away from it skills that have become habitual: e.g. working as a member of a team, developing shared goals.

**Church youth clubs and organisations**

Church youth clubs and other organisations also provide young people with the opportunity to be involved in volunteer activities within the church structure. Analysis of the interviews showed that some churches provided young people with the opportunity to take part in volunteering in the wider community, particularly within the welfare sector. In so doing they helped them develop a range of skills and civic values and at the same time boosting their confidence. Ashley aged 15 said:

I’ve always wanted to be a vet or a doctor. I attended a church service here on the weekend and there was a book launch and that really opened my eyes to the world and I’d like to be a doctor for a few years or whatever and raise money and then go over and help underprivileged people or something.

We heard that community service was both encouraged and organised by church communities, particularly Pentecostal and evangelical churches. Christine, aged 17 years, is a member of a large Pentecostal church who started her community participation by playing in the church band and teaching Sunday school. The church school that she attends reinforced her interest and
commitment. The school sought volunteers for charity-based door knocks and she signed on. Her involvement in the wider community has influenced how she views those less fortunate than herself and has resulted in her making volunteering a central part of her life:

I definitely believe we can [make a difference] by just getting involved in everything and then when you’re there you can have an impact and an influence. I mean, just in writing to the government or whatever. I’ve signed email petitions, for the deforestation… I do recycling and do my bit for the environment sort of thing. I’ve done the door knocks and stuff – with the Red Cross. These little kids, from age zero to five – just what they had to go through. It made me realise how lucky I am sort of thing.

Even quite young teens told us about the volunteer activities they did within their own congregation, often commencing by helping adults, assisting in the crèche on Sunday or with the children’s band.

**Church-based schools**

Church-based schools played a significant role in providing opportunities for service as well as teaching students the connection between Christian values and civic responsibility. As Peter, aged 19, and an Active Christian said:

I think the Brothers really reminded the school of its history. They also were instrumental in the establishment of Christian Service Programs, running programs like Amnesty International charity collections; they sent out the boys from the school to go and collect for the missions and that sort of thing, and organise things like the Mission Fun-run and the pilgrimage to India, and that sort of thing. They were really very good. I suppose they initiated it and fostered the social conscience of the school.

**Mentors**

Having a mentor who could support them in learning the necessary skills assisted young people to move out of their comfort zone and into more challenging types of community service. For those who were able to engage in serving the wider community, the benefit that flowed back to them in terms of satisfaction and meaning was enormous. For example, according to Ryan, aged 18:

As you can see from my T-shirt, I am a member of Amnesty International and I’m also a member of the School Welfare Conference. As well as that I have done some volunteer work teaching people to play music. The first time I ever did volunteer work was as an assistant tutor at a music camp and I was basically imparting my knowledge to younger people who weren’t as skilled as I was in playing lower brass instruments. That made me feel good because I was helping them improve their skills. Recently I have been more involved with, the thing that our school does a lot is help the underprivileged children in our community, we take them to the movies maybe once every two months, then maybe two months later we will have a picnic for them and play games and stuff like that. That has been really fun and I have enjoyed doing that.

It appears that once they had a positive experience of volunteering, interviewees were ‘hooked’. They spoke about their enjoyment at doing volunteer work in these challenging fields and took great pride in their achievements. It is interesting to speculate how many of the readers of this report (or the writers) were engaged in this level of community work while still in their teenage years. Transport and technology were limited and schools tended not to organise volunteering experiences for their pupils.
Social Concern: ‘Youth can change anything in the community that they want to change’

The Social Concern scale was constructed from 25 items covering all four dimensions of civic orientation.31

Table 11.9 outlines gender and spirituality differences in Social Concern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Active Xn</th>
<th>Marginal Xn</th>
<th>Nominal Xn</th>
<th>New Age</th>
<th>Secular</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Gen Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

New Agers received the highest score on Social Concern, closely followed by Active Christians. By now, there will be not much that the reader finds mysterious in this result; we have seen all of its ingredients before: New Agers score high on this ‘omnibus’ scale because many of them were raised Christian, and because they tend to be older than average, and more of them are women. All of these characteristics, as we have seen, favour higher scores on all or most of the elements of civic orientation. What gives New Agers their slight edge over Active Christians is that they are both older than typical Actives, more likely to be women, and likely to have more time for civic involvement. Perhaps social service is their ‘church’!

Among denominations, Catholics scored highest on Social Concern, significantly above the No Religious Identification group. Historically, Catholics have shown explicit interest in issues surrounding the alleviation of poverty and strongly endorse values of common humanity. Social justice is a term that has a long pedigree in Australian history and Catholic social thought and action. Catholic theories of justice, as well as the Catholic social movements in Australia and overseas, point to a sound heritage of concern about social justice. Our findings reflect these sentiments.

Yet again, Gen X and the Baby Boomers scored higher than Gen Y on Social Concern. The lower level of Gen Y is at least partly due to the age of their youngest members, to their relative inexperience and their limited exposure to those who are disadvantaged.

Those with higher scores on the SEIFA education/occupation index were also higher on Social Concern.

Civic orientation and spiritual practices: ‘I believe that God’s there to help you make the right choices’.

The previous section presented a number of examples of the relationship between spirituality types and the dimensions of civic orientation. Previous studies indicate that young people who hold religious or spiritual beliefs that are linked to principles that encourage working for the common good do not necessarily translate these beliefs into action, either in terms of their religious practice or in how they engage with the wider community.
In a study of 47,000 6th to 12th graders in the United States, Roehlkepartain and Benson found that religious belief is often disconnected from people’s level of religious activity, whereas it is religious activity that is more likely than mere belief to translate into service to others.\textsuperscript{32} We were interested to know whether this was the case with our Generation Ys.

We examined the relationship between civic orientation and religious activities like Scripture reading, private prayer, attending church, listening to religious tapes, and exploring other religions. We found that these religious activities related to a number of civic scales including \textit{Generosity}. For example, praying frequently and regular church attendance were related to high scores on \textit{Social Concern} and \textit{Altruism}. Those who prayed frequently were more likely to discuss environmental and political issues with friends than those who did not. Previous studies also found that religious activities like prayer seem to act as a stimulus to public life and are associated with higher levels of community service.\textsuperscript{33}

Frequent church attendance is positively associated with caring about the needs of poor people in Australia, and about refugees in detention centres. It is also linked with volunteering. 52\% of those who attend church weekly give at least one hour a month in community service, compared with only 18\% of those who do not attend. Christians are more likely to be active community participants if they are involved in activities like prayer, Bible Reading, and church attendance. These results match previous findings that there is a link between Christian practice and community participation, particularly in more conservative churches.\textsuperscript{34} This is illustrated in 20 year-old Tina’s remarks, where she indicates the influence of her faith on what she does for others:

\begin{quote}
Yes. I express it through the way I live – I think we have certain standards, like code of living, like we don’t drink or smoke and try and live healthy lives and take care of our bodies, and we pray a lot and read the scriptures and they have like – go to Bible Study, and I try to see, like help, the elderly people in our church.
\end{quote}

The pattern of association between Christian practices and \textit{Social Concern} found among Active Christians is not unexpected given that Christian values include compassion, duty to others and charity.

Thus those who base their lives on ethical principles and take part in practices associated with beliefs based on those principles are more likely to be involved in activities that promote the common good than those who do not. They also have a framework upon which to base decisions about how to behave. Those who have no clear set of ethical principles (and this would include not only many Seculars but a high proportion of less committed Christians as well) must consider each new issue on a case-by-case basis, ‘and thus the native hue of resolution …’.

We posit two factors that help explain the relationship between spiritual practice and civic orientation: the transferring to wider community settings of (a) values gained from active pursuit of one’s faith, and (b) organisational and interpersonal skills resulting from being an active member of a church or religious community. Thus Seculars are less likely to have broad-based civic skills than those who are affiliated with a religious tradition, unless they have had similar
opportunities to develop confidence and skills in leadership and service to others and a comprehensive value system that is oriented to the common good. Research supports the view that church membership not only provides members with values that are consistent with community service but also a variety of skills that can be transferred to service in the wider community.35 ‘Simply put, what is preached from the pulpit and talked about in the pews influences church members’ activities, not just in the church but also outside the church’.36

Christian Smith supports this view, claiming that religions in the US promote specific cultural moral orders of self-control and personal virtue grounded in the authority of long historical traditions and narratives into which new members are inducted and which they use to guide them through life choices and moral commitments.37 They provide dense network ties in which they form relationships with a number of adults and peers. In order to understand adolescents’ inclination to be involved in the wider society it is important to take into account their need to establish and maintain close relationships to friends. If their friends are no longer involved in organisations (like the church youth clubs, the Scouting movement, YMCA or YWCA) that were based upon civic duty and Judaeo-Christian values, how are they learning to attach importance to civic participation?

The tendency towards individualization influences the dwindling participation in both unions and churches. Werner Weidenfeld of the (German) Bertelsmann Foundation claims that it is harder to integrate society by way of shared values when there is a strong desire for personal autonomy and the freedom to act as one sees fit, and less willingness to conform to traditional roles or to view commitments as set in stone.38 Yet this reflects today’s society and there does not seem any indication that a reversal back to a collective way of operating will occur.

Conclusion

What do the findings reported in this chapter tell us about our young people? Cross-national research on citizenship by Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood paints an unflattering portrait of young Australians: Australian students’ scores are significantly below the international mean on three of the four Civic Engagement scales used in the study.39 We also saw little cause for optimism. We acknowledge some young people are heavily involved in their community and are extremely socially aware. Comparative data is not available on levels of community involvement of Gen X and Baby Boomers when they were the same age as Gen Ys are now. However, the results from The Spirit of Generation Y study indicate that young people are unlikely to match the level of social concern manifested by their parents in their youth.

Active Christians show a higher level of civic orientation than those who had no strong belief system. The US National Study of Youth and Religion found that religious belief and practice shape many other dimensions of adolescents’ lives in positive directions.40

What is it about active membership in a church that underlies this tendency to be community minded? Let us summarise the explanations that we have proposed in the course of this chapter.

Many values fundamental to community service are grounded in religious faith: honesty, compassion and selflessness. Most religions encourage commitment to social justice and
service to others; thus the link between values and service is embedded in their teaching, and evidenced in their programs. Parents who encourage their children to attend churches are likely also to hold these same values, which further reinforces them in young attenders. Many churches or religious organizations typically provide direct exposure to explicit ideological orientations or worldviews that are designed to promote the common good. This exposure helps provide young members with the moral underpinnings of sentiments supportive of human community.

Secondly, active church membership itself encourages relating to and being concerned for the welfare of those in the church community. There are responsibilities and obligations that are associated with being a member of a church community. They require putting the central humanitarian teachings of one’s faith into practice. Putnam argues that it is the connectedness, not merely the faith, that is responsible for the benevolence of church people. The habit of belonging and of working for the good of others is catching, and the skills learned in that setting can easily be transferred to other settings.

However, it is not necessarily lack of commitment that stops people volunteering outside their own church community, but lack of opportunity and of assistance in making what can be a challenging and intimidating entry into an arena outside their previous experience. Young people need assistance to enter new volunteer experiences; without it they are inclined to stay within their personal arena. Churches are but one of many avenues that provide networks and links to more demanding types of service. School and secular youth organisations can fulfil these functions. Young people begin to volunteer through community service and volunteer programs at school, through family connections and parental involvement in voluntary work.

Church-based youth clubs provide young people with a number of skills that assist them in becoming involved in their community and provide them with the opportunity to engage in challenging volunteer work. Many private and government schools have school chaplains and welfare coordinators who assist in organising voluntary service. Other organisations, as well as parents and mentors also fulfil this role, but the role of schools and churches should not be underestimated. Young people need a helping hand to move out of their comfort zone and into more demanding areas of community service. Church organisations and both religious and Government schools help in this process by providing supported entry points to volunteering opportunities. Churches also encourage young members to develop confidence and skills through involvement in church-related activities.

Thirdly, churches provide opportunities for young people to practice their skills by encouraging them to take on roles and responsibilities within the faith community. These skills can be easily translated into those required for working in community service. Having values that incline one to working for the common good does not automatically produce the necessary knowledge and skills or the opportunity to put the values into practice. Without some base level of civic knowledge and skills, individuals are less likely to aspire to be involved in community engagement. Parents can also provide contacts for service and can be role models for their children. Previous research has shown that parental involvement in political and social causes is associated with children’s greater participation. Parents may model this behaviour or they may provide opportunities and contacts for their children’s entry
into civic engagement. Likewise, non-profit and charitable organisations give young people meaningful experiences that have long-lasting impact by exposing them to the worldviews, values and norms of the sponsoring organisations, and by providing them with opportunities to put them into practice. Sharing a common interpretation of life animates participation.

Fourthly, active membership in a church supplies people with the contacts and networks that provide young people with the opportunity for service and forges associational ties. Contacts made this way can provide additional entry points to young people who would like to be involved in volunteering as well as giving them the confidence to commence.

While most young people appear willing to assist those closest to them, and are concerned about a number of social issues, their interest in and commitment to serving the wider community may well be extended with encouragement and support.

It was Active Christians, not those who were Marginal or Nominal, whose values inspired a high level of civic orientation. But they are only 17% of Gen Y. The low and still declining level of church membership, religious belief and practice among Gen Y, impacts directly on the four processes listed just above, and must be expected to further reduce the proportion of Gen Y who are strongly inclined to become actively and positively involved in the society around them.

As we have said before, Generation Y are, far more than they realise, what society has made them. And they face challenges that never confronted earlier generations. Those we met in person often left us full of admiration for their courage, generosity and decent instincts. In the concluding chapter which follows we cite some hopeful, if still uncertain signs of the beginnings of a movement to reject the materialism and individualism of the dominant culture, and to place more importance on relationships, justice, spirituality and care for the earth. There is reason to believe that in the depths of human nature there lies, not only an instinctual ‘oceanic ego’ which sees the world as existing to serve its needs, but also a learned but profound impulse to care for others – the root of human civilisation, perennially throwing up fresh shoots.

A green blade or two have a way of springing through the cracks in even the thickest concrete.
Chapter 12
Generation Y – where to?
Conclusions

In this chapter we first summarise the more significant findings of the study, then move on to discuss and interpret the meaning of what was found, leading to a statement of conclusions.

Key Findings
Without recapitulating at length the findings stated in each chapter, we draw together in summary form the most important of them.

Traditional spirituality
1. Just over half of Generation Y said they believed in God (51%); 17% said they did not believe, and 32% were unsure.

2. Almost half of Australian young people between the ages of 13 and 24 do not belong to or identify with any religion or denomination. 46% consider themselves Christian, 17% pursue New Age forms of spirituality, 28% are Secular, 6% belong to other Traditional world-religions, and 3% believe in a God, but do not identify with any religious tradition.

3. Gen Y Christians (46% of Gen Y) hardly differ on most measures of belief and practice from those of their Baby-Boomer parents who are still Christian.

4. But there are major differences between these two generations in other respects; one of the most important is that young women are now no more religious than young men on a wide range of measures.

5. There is a generally low level of interest in and involvement with religion or spirituality among Gen Y: only a minority (about 41%) are really engaged with any of the 3 major types of spirituality – only 17% with any form of Christianity.

6. Gen Ys from conservative Protestant denominations manifest much higher levels of religious belief and practice than Catholics or Anglicans, and also higher levels than their parents’ generation within the same denominations.

7. A majority of all denominations agreed that it was ‘okay to pick and choose your religious beliefs …’; and a majority of Gen Y agreed (although less than half of Other Christians and Anglicans) that ‘morals are relative, there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody’.

8. Australian young people are reluctant to declare that only one religion is true – only 13% of Generation Y make such a claim.

9. There is a strong drift away from Christianity among Generation Y: some previously attended more regularly, but have stopped doing so; others once believed in God but now do not; before they reach the age of 25, about 18% of those who used to belong to a Christian church are already ex-members.

10. Overwhelmingly it is practising parents who are enthusiastic about their faith that influences young people towards a more committed level of Christian spirituality. No effect of attendance at church schools was detectable, except in the case of ‘Other Christian’ schools. However, a majority of those who believe in God and attend church schools say that religious education at school is helpful/very helpful in strengthening their faith. About a third of the more religiously committed students reported sometimes being pressured or made fun of at school because of their religious beliefs and practices.
New Age Spirituality

11. About half of Gen Y have explored religions apart from Christianity, but mostly ‘just finding out general information’. Those who have ranged most widely over other religions are themselves the most religious, especially because they are much more likely to attend church schools, and to take up the comparative religion units offered in the last two years of high school, which can be credited towards their high school certificate.

12. 31% of Gen Y ‘definitely’ believe in reincarnation, the idea that people have lived previous lives, and 24% in astrology, that stars and planets affect people’s fates. For most of those who believe in reincarnation, this belief is not based on an understanding of reincarnation in the setting of a Traditional religion like Hinduism or Buddhism, but is more like a folk-belief.

13. For Generation Y, New Age practices are simply not important. 4 out of 5 members of Gen Y have never participated seriously in Yoga (as a form of spirituality), tai-chi, Eastern meditation or Tarot reading.

14. Of the 17% of Gen Y who were classified as New Age in their spirituality, slightly less than half ‘New Age Believers’, people who hold an eclectic mix of New Age beliefs but have not undertaken any New Age practices. The remainder can be described as ‘New Age Participants’, people who both hold an eclectic mix of New Age beliefs and have got seriously involved in one or more New Age practices. The majority of the New Age type are not involved in a Traditional religion, but many hold one or two Traditional religious beliefs.

15. Demographic and social factors associated with being a New Age Believer include watching more TV, living away from home and living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. Factors associated with being a New Age Participant include being older and being female. Overall, females are much more likely than males to be exploring New Age spirituality.

Secular spirituality

16. 17% of Gen Y do not believe in God, 19% hold that there is very little truth in any religion and 23% believe that there is no life after death.

17. Of the 28% of Gen Y who follow a secular path in life, 10% are Nonreligious, having never believed in God and rejecting New Age beliefs, 4% are Ex-religious, having once believed in God but now rejecting both Traditional and New Age beliefs, while 14% are Undecided, unsure about whether God is real, but also not accepting New Age beliefs.

18. Demographic and social factors associated with being either Nonreligious or Ex-Religious include being male and living away from the family home. Being older makes no difference to the likelihood of a person’s being either Nonreligious or Ex-religious.
19. Gen Y are a media-focussed generation: more than a third of them spend between twenty and fifty hours each week in front of a screen – watching TV, playing video games or surfing the internet, while a further third spend between ten and twenty hours.

20. While there is a popular appetite for TV shows and movies featuring the paranormal and the occult, these shows seem more a reflection of the interests, tastes and beliefs of many of those who watch, rather than an influence persuading audience members to believe in ghosts, psychics or vampires.

Values and social concern

21. Young people indicated that they placed a high value on close relationships with friends and family, and on having an exciting and enjoyable life. They also wanted a peaceful, cooperative, just and secure world. Religious or spiritual concerns were generally not considered important.

22. Most young people said they had purpose in their lives, although some felt that their lives did not fit into any wider scheme, that they did not really belong anywhere or ‘were hurting deep inside’.

23. The activities rated most important for enjoying peace and happiness were listening to music, work or study. Most rated meditation very unimportant.

24. Active Christians who put their religious beliefs into practice are more likely than Marginal or Nominal Christians, and much more likely than New Agers not raised Christian, or Seculars, to have positive civic attitudes, to demonstrate high levels of social concern and to be actively involved in service to the community. Christians were humanistic in proportion to their level of Christian commitment; few Seculars were humanists.

25. Gen Ys from conservative Protestant denominations show higher levels of social concern and involvement than members of more liberal denominations.

26. New Agers who were raised Christian, and Secular women (but not men) raised Christian, showed higher levels of social concern, especially in volunteering.

27. Churches and youth organisations can and do help young people to move out of their ‘comfort zone’ and become involved in high levels of civic participation. They are important avenues for the provision of both skills training and volunteering opportunities.

Expectations, findings, discussions, conclusions

This section proceeds by looking back to the hypotheses / expectations which were formulated in the process of reviewing previous research and theory, then reviewing the principal findings on that topic to see whether the hypotheses were confirmed by what was found, or not; sometimes discussing the findings in a broader context of interpretation; and finally arriving at a conclusion on the topic.

The topics we will take up in this concluding synthesis are: spirituality, changes in religion, and individualisation.

Spirituality

Being raised religious
We expected, following the lead of Robert Wuthnow, that respondents who had been raised Christian, even if they later adopted some other form of spirituality, would show differences in their spirituality and in some of its consequences, from those raised secular.

Both New Agers and Seculars who had been raised Christian were much more likely than those who had not, to retain a range of Christian beliefs, including belief in God or a higher being, and also much more likely to show social concern and to be actively engaged in activities for the benefit of others. They were less individualistic and materialistic.

The hypothesis was confirmed with a reservation: ‘Growing up religious’, in Wuthnow’s phrase, certainly makes a difference which lasts beyond a person’s abandonment of their earlier religious identification and involvement. The reservation: Gen Ys who had ceased to practice or also to identify with a religion were still not many years past that point. But we also cite strong evidence that over the longer haul, deprived of the reinforcement of involvement in a community of co-believers, one’s former beliefs fall away and their effects on one’s attitudes and actions wanes.

Wuthnow also suggested that for today’s young people, spirituality is a journey or quest rather than a home – a place where one settles. The metaphor suggested the fragmentary, temporary, experimental character of the spiritual ‘shelters’ constructed along the wayside by today’s youth.

A high proportion of Gen Y had no religious identification, and a substantial minority of these had abandoned an earlier identification since they were aged 12. We noted some ‘switching’ between denominations within Traditional religion, and cited other studies which have found that this is very common. The New Age is experimental almost by definition. But there is a wide, short road leading to Secular spirituality, and the traffic on it is nearly all one way.

The hypothesis was confirmed with a reservation: In spiritual terms, our young people were ‘leaving home’ and setting out on their journey when undertaking the transition from primary school into high school, if not earlier. The reservation is that for many, the journey was short – only down to the creek to share a hut with their friends and enjoy life, indifferent to larger concerns. For some the journey does continue, and can truly be described as a quest: those who continue to wrestle with whether their faith is compatible with science, with the secularity of the surrounding culture, with the ‘fun lifestyle’ urged on them by their peers, constrained only by the ‘relative morality’ of ‘does it feel right?’. In our reckoning, these seekers are few.

Despite our reservations about the ‘spiritual marketplace’ thesis, which predicts that an eclectic form of spirituality, largely drawn from non-Traditional sources, would be the
dominant type among young Generation Y Australians, we expected that we would find a fairly strong uptake of New Age forms of spirituality.

**Findings**
We found a stronger maintenance of Traditional spirituality, and a much lower uptake of New Age forms than the ‘marketplace’ perspective led us to expect. Some New Age beliefs were widespread, but serious involvement in New Age practices was very uncommon.

**Conclusion**
Not confirmed: Despite a few New Age beliefs having very wide currency, only a small proportion of Gen Y are seriously involved in New Age practices.

**Expectation 2**
Among New Agers, we anticipated a high level of eclecticism – the tendency to put together non-matching components of spirituality from disparate sources.

**Findings**
However, commentators such as Roof and Wuthnow were right on target in what they wrote about eclecticism. While this was most evident, as expected, among New Agers, we were especially surprised at the level of eclecticism among the followers of Traditional religion, who, while they did indeed pick up some New Age beliefs (though mostly without much real involvement), were also highly eclectic in choosing among the elements of their own and other traditions, accepting some and rejecting others.

**Conclusion**
Confirmed in spades: New Agers are certainly highly eclectic, but, unexpectedly, so are those who still identify with Traditional spirituality.

**Recent changes in religion in Australia**
**The decline in gender difference in Traditional religion**

**Expectation**
Despite some theorists’ assertions that women’s higher religiosity than that of men is still universal, and despite some Australian surveys (e.g. the IsssA) continuing to find this in the population as a whole, we expected that among Generation Y, there would be little significant gender difference across the whole range of measures of Traditional religious beliefs and practices.

**Findings**
As noted in Chapter 3, when reporting levels of belief in God, that within Gen Y, although younger teenage boys (44%) were less likely to believe than either girls or older young men (55%), there was no difference between young men and women aged from 19 to 40. Comparing Gen Y as a whole with the two older generations showed no difference among males; but two-thirds of women aged 40-59 were believers, compared with half of the women belonging to the two younger generations.

In chapter 6, we observed that gender also had little influence on whether someone whose spirituality type was Traditional would be in the ‘Active’ category, i.e. Committed or Regular: 16% of males and 18% of females were Active. This lack of gender difference
among adherents of Traditional spirituality is repeated across many other measures of religious beliefs, values and practices.

And in the summary of findings on Traditional religion in the same chapter, we said that the slightly higher scores of young women compared with young men are now only a faint, non-significant echo of what was once a major difference. If we look beyond the boundaries of Gen Y to the older generations, although there is no male-female difference in the proportion of Actives in Gen X, among the Baby Boomers 19% of women are Active, compared to only 9% of men; in the pre-Boomer generations, the difference was much higher again. As previously noted, the Boomers are the last generation to retain some clear signs of gender difference in religiosity.

DISCUSSION
The decline in gender difference represents a great change from the situation depicted in Hans Mol’s seminal study of religion in Australia forty years ago, when women of all ages were more ‘religious’ than men on all indicators. The difference was found so universally that it was virtually an axiom of sociology of religion, and is still true in the US in the general population and also among teenagers.

Mol offered the following explanation of what had been a perennial finding: Religious orientations support the conflict-resolving, emotionally healing, and integrating functions which have Traditionally been associated with the female role. Males, by contrast, are socialised in a way that promotes drive and aggressiveness, and places a higher value on accomplishment. Secular values of ‘masculinity’ and ‘success’ provide the legitimation for these characteristics. ‘In the history of comparative religion, femaleness stands for what includes and holds together; what is soft and receptive; masculinity is associated more with intrusion, fragmentation, aggression, bestowal, hardness.’

Today, however, the evidence on religious belief and behaviour points to a fading of this difference among younger women. One explanation which has been proposed in the past, based on the considerations cited in the previous paragraph, is that these younger women have been ‘socialised’ (formed as members of society) very similarly to males. Girls and boys, men and women now study the same subjects at school and university, have lifetime employment careers, and come to view the world in a manner shaped by similar experiences. If, as some maintain, there is a genetic basis for the psychological differences described in the previous paragraph, upbringing also takes a hand in bringing them to the fore or repressing them – and in this instance, ‘nurture’ seems to triumph over ‘nature’.

A complementary argument notes that since the dawn of the Industrial Age, women have continued to lose the status, power and social significance they had possessed in presiding over the domestic economy. The consumer society replaced domestic manufacture with mass production of food, clothing and all necessary goods. Home and family lost economic significance, and their social functions were also greatly diminished, serving only as the locus of private relationships, some recreations, and the early stages of the raising of children. Thus a large part of women’s distinctive role and their particular zone of authority and power were correspondingly reduced. So was the capacity of that zone to nurture a holistic human culture as a counterweight to the narrow focus of the marketplace on technical rationality and ‘dog-eat-dog’ economic competitiveness.
Some authors see this displacement of women as one important influence on the genesis of feminist ideologies and the discontent they express with institutional authority structures. Today, paid employment is a necessity for most women, and an opportunity for some. Thus they lose their former insulation from the secularising currents of the industrial process, and become as vulnerable to them as men.

Yet although it is undeniable that there has been some evening-out of gender differences in social roles, and a degree of ‘masculinisation’ of society, women are still far more strongly represented in occupations calling for characteristics considered ‘feminine’, such as nursing and teaching – especially at kindergarten and primary levels. There were strong gender differences on nearly all our measures of social concern, women scoring considerably higher than men. Furthermore, in terms of spirituality, we found that women are more likely to be attracted to New Age forms, which appeal more to ‘feminine’ characteristics, and in which women often take leading roles: young women are twice as likely as men to be New Agers, while males are twice as likely to take the Secular path.

Evidently there are still significant gender differences in attraction to secular occupations, in attitudes and actions manifesting social concern, and in the attraction to non-Traditional forms of spirituality. We need to explain why this is not the case in the attitude of the younger generations to Traditional forms of spirituality.

One obvious possibility is that younger women, strongly egalitarian in principle, and taking the imperative of sexual equality for granted, are more receptive to the feminist viewpoint, and have been alienated from the churches (especially those which, like the Catholic church, do not admit women to clerical status) by their allegedly ‘patriarchal’ and ‘sexist’ structures – a critique strongly voiced by elites of educated women both within and outside these churches.

This line of thought leads to a further possibility: it could well be that it is not only the consciousness of women which has changed, but that the more traditional churches, now perceived by many as excessively masculine both in the present and the past, have also in fact changed in the last half century to become even more so.

Mainstream churches appear to have moved with the cultural tide away from an emphasis on communal, affective, devotional life, towards a more organisational, rational style in which religious belief, feeling and commitment are privatised, and the predominant emphasis is placed on upholding moral principles in public debate on social issues, supporting the struggle for social justice, and enlisting adherents for works of charitable service to the wider society. Religion is an affair of heart and mind, and psychologists claim that in Generation Y, the ‘feeling’ type of personality predominates. If the churches are experienced as more coolly rational, their young members, especially women, will look elsewhere for spiritual nourishment.

**CONCLUSIONS**

So, notwithstanding their attempts to respond to the feminist critique by admitting women to committees and synods within their bureaucratic structures, the more traditional churches, attempting at the same time to modernise themselves, may have unwittingly further alienated women by reducing their emphasis on those aspects of their religious style which were formerly more attractive to women than to men.
Mothers have long been known to have great influence in the religious socialisation of children. As shown in Chapter 6, the level of their mother’s religious practice is still by far the strongest predictor of a Generation Y child’s being Active in a Traditional faith. So whatever the reason for the reduced level of participation of women in Traditional religion, one of its consequences is clear: it greatly reduces the likelihood that the mothers of tomorrow’s children will have the special concern for the Traditional religious upbringing of their children that distinguished them in the past. And given the small proportion of both men and women of parenting age who are Active, it is likely that an even smaller proportion of the children of the next generation will be Active in Traditional religions.

**Decline in believing, belonging and attending**

**EXPECTATION 1**
That Generation Y would show lower levels of belief and practice than previous generations.

**FINDINGS**
Almost half of Australian young people between the ages of 13 and 24 do not belong to or identify with any religion or denomination. 46% consider themselves Christian, 17% pursue New Age forms of spirituality; 28% are Secular, 6% belong to other Traditional world-religions, and 3% believe in a God but do not identify with any religious tradition. Barely half of Gen Y believed in God; another third were uncertain. There is a generally low level of interest in and involvement with religion or spirituality among Gen Y: only a minority (about 41%) are really engaged with any of the 3 major types of spirituality – only 17% with any form of Christianity. So levels of practice are low.

Lower than previous generations? Yes, but measuring this is complex. See the section below on stages of secularisation.

**CONCLUSION**
Confirmed: Gen Y show low levels of belief and practice, and although the Boomers at this stage of their lives are similar on many measures to their Gen Y children, this is partly because they have also continued to move away from faith since they were the same age as Gen Y are now. We shall show the evidence for this in the discussion below on continuance of the secularisation process.

**EXPECTATION 2**
In contrast to Evans and Kelley, the IsssA investigators, who found little change in religious belief, and doubted that the decline in church attendance was due to religious reasons, we anticipated that there would be evidence of considerable change in belief, identification and attendance among teenagers (who were not included in the IsssA). However, these declines do seem likely also to result from increased ‘individualisation’.

**FINDINGS**
We showed continuing change within the short lifetimes of Generation Y: the changes in belief and practice (i.e. rejection of beliefs, decline in attendance, disaffiliation), which used often to take place after finishing high school, moving out of home and entering university or the workforce, now occur around the transition from primary school to high school. If parents are practising, children are likely to follow parental patterns of belief and practice until late in primary school or early in high school. We believe that increased individualisation is a
separate factor influencing the decline in church attendance. It may be the ‘not yet clear’ factor referred to by the authors of the IsssA. See the next section on secularisation.

**DISCUSSION**

Weekends are now fraught with intense competition for time from family activities, weekend paid work, housework, sport, and the chauffeuring of children to a wide variety of activities. When both parents are employed, it is often also their only opportunity to spend time together. Churchgoing is losing its place in the competition; it is retained only if the participants consider it of high value. Part of its attraction in the past was social. The local churches of many denominations were centres for meetings, charitable and fund-raising activities and entertainment of many kinds. They were particularly attractive to youth by fostering sporting clubs and dances. Most of these functions have been taken over by secular organisations. Women were formerly the mainstays of congregations, often depending on the church as their sole escape from a domestic scene dominated by their care for small children. Now they have access to the same opportunities as men for socialising in their work environment or in other zones of their social network.

**CONCLUSION**

Confirmed: We argued in chapter 2 that the IsssA measure of belief is insensitive to change. Even if beliefs, which may have become mere religious opinions, appear to be maintained, there has been a major decline in faith in the holistic sense of the word, among Generation Y. Evans and Kelley’s conclusion that the decline in attendance was not caused by religious factors seems less convincing in the light of the evidence we have found of loss of belief and commitment. But individualisation may have been the more potent factor, inhibiting ‘joining’ of all kinds, religious and non-religious.

**Stages of secularisation: the cultural revolution of the 60s and 70s; continuing secularisation**

**EXPECTATION 1**

We thought it probable that major secularising changes in Australian culture (‘a cultural revolution’) took place in the 1960s and 70s; and consequently expected to find a fair amount of similarity in levels of religious belief and practice between our youngest respondents in Generation Y, and the Baby Boomer members of our control group, indicating that all three generations were maintaining a considerably lower level of religion than the generations which preceded the Boomers. We expected to find that there had not been further major or sudden declines, but rather, smaller incremental changes with successive generations.

**FINDINGS**

Gen Y Christians (46% of Gen Y) hardly differ at all on most measures of identification, belief and practice from those of their Baby-Boomer parents who are still Christian. Both generations had a high proportion who did not identify with a religion, or who did identify, but were Marginal or Nominal members; who did not believe in God or were uncertain, who approved of ‘picking and choosing’ one’s religious beliefs, and agreed that there were no definite rights and wrongs for everybody.

At first sight, there seems, contrary to what we expected, to be no difference between Gen Y and the Boomer generation to which their parents belong. One would also get the impression that, if a leap of secularisation had ever taken place, the process had now stopped. These
impressions disappear when we ‘zoom out’, widening the picture to bring in some other findings:

1) At the date of our survey, Generation Y were aged 13-24, and the Boomers, 40-59. To compare like with like, we need to find out the Boomers’ level of belief when they were in their teens and early twenties. Fortunately, there was a World Values Survey in Australia in 1981. In that year, the youngest Boomers, born 1952-66, were aged 15-29.12 The following table compares responses from exactly this age cohort at two time points 14 years apart (1981 and 2005), to the identical question: ‘Do you believe in God?’ (Yes / Uncertain / No).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Belief in God</th>
<th>In 1981 at age 15-29</th>
<th>In 2005 at age 39-53</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ‘Yes’ response declined 13% over these years; the ‘No’ response also decreased by 7%; the percentage who were uncertain increased by 19%.

2) Second, unbelief was much less common in the generations before the Boomers.13 In 1981, the generation born 1932-51 were aged 30-49; 81% of them responded ‘Yes’ to belief in God; of those born before 1931, 90% gave the same reply.

DISCUSSION
We have examined responses on only one question, albeit a central and symbolic one; a comprehensive treatment of the secularisation process in Australia would require much more detail than would be appropriate here; but other studies of religious change across these generations show that the decline from the pre-Boomers to the Boomers extended to the whole range of religious identification, beliefs and practices.14

The Baby-Boomer generation was so massive in numbers, and so idealised in the mass media (television began in Australia just as they entered their teens), that its attributes (similar to those of youth in all generations) took on the status of norms for the whole culture. The rejection of traditional authorities (parental, civic, ecclesiastical), always a feature of youth subcultures, shook those authorities to their foundations. In this setting, the authority of personal experience came to be seen as the appropriate replacement for other forms of authority.

Only a sociology that is also deeply historical can provide a full account of the factors shaping the Baby-Boomers and Generations X and Y. We have confined ourselves to studying their spirituality, but the changes we have noted must be seen in the context of the world economic developments and political movements of the last half-century which have impacted on Australian society and culture, such as the student revolutions of the late sixties and seventies, the Vietnam war and the polarisation of Australian society around it. Although many studies of this period have already appeared, historians and sociologists will be
engaged for many years yet in weighing the consequences of these developments for today’s society and its youth.

To summarise:
- there was a large decline in level of religiosity between the pre-Boomers (81%) and the Boomers when the latter were in their youth (68%);
- the decline continued in two ways: over the 24 years from 1981 to 2005, the Boomers’ confidence in their belief in God declined further from 68% to 55%;
- the Boomers’ children, Generation Y, aged 13-24, 51% of whom replied ‘Yes’ to the question, are starting out at an even lower level than the Boomers have reached in their fifties and sixties. They are undertaking the developmental tasks of adolescence, and entering their adult lives, in a quite different world from that of the Boomers’ childhood, when there still existed strong traditions;
- as recalled above, there is a remarkable decline already measurable among Gen Y in the short time since they were aged 12. There is a strong drift away from Christianity among Generation Y: some previously attended more regularly, but have stopped doing so; others once believed in God but now do not; before they reach the age of 25, about 18% of those who used to belong to a Christian church are already ex-members.

**CONCLUSION**
Confirmed with a reservation: These findings provide empirical support for the theory that a ‘cultural revolution’ took place in Australia in the 1960s and 70s, a rapid and major advance in the ‘secularisation of consciousness’, and secondly, that the secularisation process is continuing. The reservation is that there has been more continuing decline than anticipated among the Boomers in the 25 years since the end of the 70s, and their children are taking off from this later low level, and are themselves already declining from that point.

There is no ‘generation gap’ between Generation Y and their (Baby Boomer) parents, as there was between the Boomers and their parents. More precisely, there is no gulf between the worldviews and values of parents and children. In these respects Gen Y (with plenty of individual exceptions, no doubt) are remarkably similar to their parents. The contrast between generations is much more marked in the *lifestyle* dimension of popular culture: especially communication and self-presentation in language, music and fashion. Here, each new generation strives to achieve a distinctive style to differentiate it from its predecessors.

So the decline in belief is not an ‘age effect’ of adolescence or early adulthood among Generation Y, nor among their parents – not a stage that successive generations pass through and recover from. We could conceptualise what occurred in the 1960s and 70s as a strong ‘cohort effect’ among the Baby Boomers, who went through their teens during that time: a large decline over a short period, followed by a continued decline comparable in magnitude but spread over a longer period. (A cohort effect is attributable to the particular experience of one age group and affects only that group). The continued decline affecting Gen Y could be conceived as the inter-generational transmission of the Boomers’ experience, but this appears to be a somewhat laboured and inelegant explanation, especially since parental example and influence is only one of numerous forces acting on the youngest generation.

A better-fitting model would define the whole sequence of decline – that of the Boomers in their youth and their subsequent continued decline, and also what Generation Y are experiencing – as a ‘period effect’ impacting on the Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y, on all those who have been living through a particular era – that of ‘late
modernity’, since the early 1960s. In Chapter 9 we explored some of the underlying forces driving this change:

- technological: the communications revolution and its offspring, especially the internet and the mobile phone
- social-structural: continued social differentiation, globalisation, economic restructuring, the collapse of ‘mediating structures’ between individuals and the State, the decreased stability of the family, and most of all, individualisation (see the next topic)
- and cultural: the increased influence of science and ‘scientism’, the impact of secular public cultures and the associated increase in the privatisation of religion).

We noted that Gen Y are more affected by these changes than the two earlier generations.\(^{15}\)

**EXPECTATION 2**

In view of the fact that the main influences promoting secularisation among young people in Australia were by no means unique, but common to other Western developed societies, especially the English speaking ones, we expected that there would be evidence of similar trends in those countries as well, even in the US (the often-cited exception), allowing for differences due to historical developments and local circumstances peculiar to each country.

**FINDINGS**

In international comparisons, citation of statistics for entire populations often obscures changes taking place especially, or perhaps only, among those under 30. Our purpose in the following brief summary is to highlight this age-group, and show some indicators of religious change among them.

Table 12.2 shows a range of comparisons of belief in God among those aged 15-29, by different countries, drawn from the World Values Surveys at the turn of the millennium. The question was: ‘Which, if any, of the following do you believe in? … God’. The response options were: Yes / No / Don’t know. The table indicates the percentage of those aged 15-29 who responded ‘No’.\(^{16}\)

**Table 12.2 World Values Surveys 1997-2001; Youth aged 15-29: Non-Belief in God by Country\(^{17}\)**

(Percentage responding ‘No’ to belief in God; sorted in ascending order)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country / Year of Survey</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Country / Year of Survey</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philippines 2001</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>Australia 1995</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil 1997</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Austria 1999</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rico 2001</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Russian Federation 1999</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile 2000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spain 2000</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland 1999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Britain 1999</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy 1999</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>West Germany 1999</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repub of Ireland 1999</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Japan 2000</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA 1999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>France 1999</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia 1999</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hungary 1999</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada 2000</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sweden 1999</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variations in religious belief, affiliation and practice between societies cannot be fully understood without a study of the unique factors in the history of each country which gave rise to some entirely contingent developments, but the scholarly historical sociology of English sociologist David Martin in his *A General Theory of Secularisation* revealed a set of complex cross-national patterns transcending the purely particular; and these patterns have held up well across the years of turbulent change since his study was published.\(^{18}\)

Taking as an example the pattern most relevant to the focus of this book: Martin drew attention to a set of countries with the following characteristics: a Protestant majority, no north/south geographical division between Protestant and Catholic, and varying degrees of establishment of religion.\(^{19}\) Across this set, he noted that the strength of Christianity varied inversely with the level of establishment. Twenty years later, this pattern still clearly held among young people.

- At one end of this continuum, the Scandinavian countries, with the Lutheran church strongly established, showed the lowest levels of belief and involvement; in the table above, belief in God in these countries among young people aged 15-29 is towards the low end of the international spectrum; the ‘No’ response ranges from 40% in Denmark to 47% in Sweden.
- Next, Britain (excluding Northern Ireland), with the Anglican church established in England, but enjoying a lower level of legal privilege than the Lutheran Church in Scandinavia; here the ‘No’ response was 29%.
- Third, Martin considered together Canada and Australia; New Zealand is similar. These former British colonies had, historically, a strong Anglican ascendancy, which might be thought of as a quasi-establishment, but have no established religion. In this group at the end of last century, the ‘No’ response among young people to the question on belief in God varied from a high of 20% in Australia to 18% in New Zealand and 15% in Canada.\(^{20}\)
- Finally, in the U.S.A., with its firmly anti-establishment tradition, only 7% of young people were unbelievers.

Zooming in from the worldwide panorama to focus more closely on the four English-speaking countries in Martin’s set, we add more detail: belonging to a religious denomination, attending religious services; moreover we can look back twenty years on all three indicators and observe the direction and magnitude of change across the period.

World Values Surveys were conducted worldwide at both the beginning of the 1980s, and again at the end of the 1990s. These data provide us with a way of observing continuing religious change among young people in these four societies after the 1970s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Belief in God</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Belief in God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>East Germany</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Viet Nam</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12.3 World Values Surveys, selected countries, population aged 15-29: Change over time in proportion not believing in God, not belonging to a denomination, attending religious services once a month or more often, by country and date (percent of those in the age group and country in year of survey)\(^{21}\)
Table 12.3, comparing those aged between 15 and 29 in Britain, Australia, Canada and the USA, at two dates about 20 years apart, shows that the changes in ‘beliefs’ were relatively small, but the increase in the proportion who belonged to no denomination, and the decrease in attendance at religious services, were considerable in all four countries, notably in the USA.

**CONCLUSION**

International comparisons of the findings of research projects on teenagers show that the patterns found by David Martin appear to be holding. Changes across time, however, show that while ‘low-cost’ items such as religious ‘beliefs’ remain more stable, there is considerable movement towards the European pattern: a significant decline, even in the more ‘religious’ countries like the USA, in the proportion who are members of religious denominations and attend religious services. This finding refutes the thesis of ‘European exceptionalism’, and shows that the continuing secularisation detected in Australia is part of a broad trend among young people extending across a range of very different English-speaking Western societies. There is a large literature on similar developments in other Western countries, and globalised communications networks now carry the best and worst of Western culture to Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia (including the world’s most populous nations: to India and gradually even into China), with effects still to be seen.

**The future of Traditional religion**

**DISCUSSION**

As noted in chapter 6, Gen Y, compared with their Boomer parents, are beginning at a lower starting point. On the basis of what is known about their spirituality now, what are the prospects for Traditional spirituality among this generation as they age?

Discernment of the most probable future depends on how the developments that have already taken place are interpreted.

It seems evident that there have been major changes affecting Traditional spirituality, but one view would see these as not at all recent. In this view, after centuries of more gradual change, the period of the nineteen sixties and seventies, when Gen Y’s parents were in their youth, was a decisive turning point for the role of Traditional religion in Western societies – a period when, like many other Traditional social and cultural institutions, religion lost much of its authority and influence. After this once-and-for-all change, the situation has been more
stable. It would be reasonable, in this view, to envisage Traditional religions, and the personal spirituality based on them, to continue within Generation Y at something like their present level.

A second possible interpretation would add that more change in Traditional religions and Traditional spirituality is to be expected, because Generation Y’s present level of Traditional spirituality is partly an effect of their age; as they move into new stages of life and are more exposed to the secularising influences at work in the economic, political and cultural spheres, there will be an incremental decline in Christian spirituality at the personal level.

A third interpretation seems more plausible: one which perceives a more fundamental kind of change coming to bear on religion and spirituality, which is only now rising to full power, building on earlier changes, fuelled to a higher intensity by the communications revolution and the economic and cultural globalisation processes to which it has given rise.

This interpretation would draw attention to a radical isolation of the individual in post-traditional society: something quite new, not an increase in ‘individualism’, now an outdated concept, because it assumes an integrated society and a functioning set of social norms from which an individual deviates in relatively trivial ways.

What is the evidence for this new, radical isolation? Consider the contrast between the childhood of the Boomers and Gen Y. The Boomers were initially socialised within a Tradition: in a society in which the authority of civil society, of the local community, of parents, were legitimatied, ultimately if not always directly, by the largely unquestioned authority of (Christian) religious tradition. Of course, that was to change later in their lives, but their personalities acquired security and resilience from this relatively stable environment, and were supported by a strong set of environing social structures, which, in this country, had not suffered the devastation of the two world wars. Although the influence of Traditional spirituality within their lives was diminished significantly in the social and cultural turmoil occurring after mid-century, it was not extinguished.

In contrast, the cradles of Gen Y were set on no such firm foundation, but on the lonely treetops of modern ‘nuclear families’, rocked by the rising cyclone of universal flux. The surrounding society no longer sets its pocket watches by the chimes of the venerable timepiece in the church tower; now, when electronic signals from the scientists’ atomic clocks dictate a ‘leap second’, the stock markets of the world obediently synchronise their computers.

The ‘cognitive style’ of religion is that of authority.  Founding myths do not offer a selection of ‘scenarios’ of creation for discussion over drinks, but proclaim ultimate truths – and even then, not for mere intellectual enlightenment, but as the foundation of a comprehensive set of imperatives for conduct. Authority does not exist in a social vacuum, but requires stable social structures which maintain its plausibility. It is these networks of social support, reaching far beyond the individual and the family, that no longer exist for Generation Y.

Yet there is no evidence from this study of a widespread plague of meaninglessness, social alienation or lack of social support. But then half of those under the age of twenty-five were still living at home. Although broader support structures such as church and local community have grown weaker over the last century, families appear to have compensated by increasing the intimacy of family life. More weight also has been thrown on friendship networks, and
young people now enter intimate sexual relationships at an earlier age. By these means, Generation Y appear to be successful, for now, in holding at bay the threats to personal security inherent in the altered relationship between individual and society. But the threats seem likely to impinge more sharply as this generation ages, and they lose the support of their parents.

It seems most likely that those who have remained religiously committed and involved from childhood into their late teens have not yet been fully exposed to the most challenging contrary forces, but likely will experience them later. Several informants in their late teens come to mind, whose religious beliefs and practices were anchored in very strong ethnic family structures. Unlike many of their peers, their family of origin is still their primary reference group. But there are potential future threats to this support structure: entry into a new peer group at university, or finding a partner who does not share both their ethnicity and their religion.

A mature spirituality in adulthood cannot simply be ‘retained’ from childhood, but must be re-attained through the developmental struggle and in confrontation with adult challenges and real-world alternatives.

In earlier eras in the West, young teenagers were more securely supported in the interlocking matrices of society, community and family. To the extent that cultural ‘breaking out’ occurred, it did so in early adulthood. In varying degrees across societies, families have lost much of their former influence over teenagers, and even younger children. The accelerating rate, and the scope of this loss are features of the late modern period. At the same time, parental abdication of control is evidence of the declining significance of religion. In some cases, socialisation into a religious worldview in early childhood seems to have been undertaken with sufficient seriousness to be ‘successful’ in engendering a religious identity, in other cases not; but there is frequently a marked discrepancy between the ‘worlds’ available to the child in primary socialisation (in early childhood) and the secondary socialisation taking place at adolescence. This lack of consistency has consequences for the place religion is likely to assume in the person’s life: either a detachable component of one’s identity, relevant only in a few limited roles, or a mere collection of opinions having no influence on behaviour.

Some commentators argue for a hopeful view of the future of Traditional religion: Australian sociologist of religion Rowan Ireland concluded his review of theories of secularisation as follows, citing a set of trends discerned, at least as possibilities, by Touraine and Habermas, indicating that the engine of secularisation may be sputtering to a stop; the massive bureaucratic apparatus of the modern state losing hold, beginning to crumble, and a more human politics and society beginning again to flourish in the gaps; all kinds of concerns, perhaps even including religion, returning from their exile in the private sphere into an expanding communal space:

The modern, bureaucratised state, like many an invader, is stalling under the weight of its successes. It is tending to fall apart .... As states and surrounding institutions such as political parties fall apart, there is greater scope for new social movements (ecological, women’s liberation, peace movements, for example) to initiate a new politics through which re-invasion of the public and bureaucratised spheres by the erstwhile private and communal sectors is possible. The crisis of the state in the West ... makes way for the moral vision and concerns nurtured in the private sphere to become public issues. ... The new theorists of modernity ... have documented that there is a lot more contestation and contradiction, lack of systematisation and indeterminacy in the structures and cultures of the modern world than theorists such as Bryan Wilson have seen.
And commenting on an Australian survey which revealed that a significant proportion of respondents reported having had various kinds of religious experiences, Ireland concludes:

If Australian society has been and is being secularised, as declines on several other dimensions of religion interact, there might still remain the pastoral challenge of dialogue with [all those] who still know that there is more to reality than meets the materialist’s eye.\(^{28}\)

Richard Eckersley notes that there are some faint signs that among Generation Y, and perhaps also in the wider population, there is a movement to reject ‘the dominant materialistic and individualistic ethos’ and ‘place more importance on personal relationships, social justice and equity, spirituality and environmental sustainability’.\(^{29}\)

Christian Smith suggests that ‘historically rooted religious traditions may provide a grounded counterbalance to what may feel lacking or unsettling in the new digital age, making religion more attractive to youth’.\(^{30}\) ‘Religion, as one high-profile representative of mainstream adult society, may become the focusing-point of more generalized frustrations with double standards and unfairness’.\(^{31}\)

In any case, Christians worship a ‘God of Surprises’.

**Individualisation**

**EXPECTATION I**

Reviewing, in chapter 2, various theories about the changed social location of the individual in contemporary society led us to expect that Australian youth, especially those without strong attachments to communities, would show signs of being highly individualistic (or individualised).

**FINDINGS**

Despite our having expected that Generation Y would show as highly individualistic, the evidence of the extent of this characteristic only crept up on us gradually; some of it surprised us, other evidence we did not at first recognise until after much re-analysis and discussion.

It was present in the face-to-face interviews, not so much in the frequency of mention of having fun and enjoying life as aims, but in the relative lack of more outwardly-oriented or idealistic ones; in the very strong stress on autonomy and freedom, the frequent assertion of the idea that it was wrong to ‘put your values on others’. This taboo came across with real moral force (among ourselves we joked that it was the strongest moral value we encountered). Then there was the antipathy to institutions, especially churches. But we knew the interview sample was not representative of the whole of Generation Y, so tended to discount all of these signs to some extent.

As we analysed the survey data, we still were not expecting to find such a high level of individualisation among even many of those more highly committed to Traditional religion.

Our expectations on the proportion who would identify with various religious denominations were based on analysis of results from the 2006 Census for the Gen Y age group, which showed that 35% responded ‘No religion’, or gave no reply. So it was surprising to discover from the survey that 48% of Generation Y did not identify with any religion or denomination, including a significant proportion who had formerly identified, but later dropped this link.
The greatest surprise was that, in response to the question: ‘Do you agree or disagree that it is okay to pick and choose your religious beliefs without having to accept the teachings of your religion as a whole?’, a majority of those from all denominations agreed (Table 3.15). And when asked: ‘Some people say that morals are relative, that there are no definite rights and wrongs for everybody. Do you agree or disagree?’, a majority of Gen Y agreed (although less than half of Other Christians and Anglicans).

Australian young people are reluctant to declare that only one religion is true – only 13% of Generation Y make such a claim. This measure of ‘religious exclusivity’ was included for comparability with the US study, but the alternative option, ‘aspects of many religions may be true’ appealed strongly to Gen Y’s preference for tolerance of diversity (Table 3.14). A much higher minority of Other Christians, as expected, favoured the ‘one religion’ option, but generally, large majorities of all denominations rejected exclusive truth claims.

The final surprise: these patterns of response found in Gen Y were not at all unique to them, but were shared by their Boomer parents and Gen X.

**DISCUSSION**

Taken together, these responses indicate a high level of religious individualism: almost half of Gen Y see no need to belong to a religious community; and very few of those who do identify with one are active participants. In matters of religion, ‘truth’ means what is true for me; what is true for someone else may be quite different, and has its own perfect right to exist independently, without being constrained by any standard external to the individual. The same strong and widespread consensus applied to values and morals. This principle is seen as a matter of universal agreement, beyond challenge or argument, and in no need of justification.

Since, on any given topic, there will be people who have opinions or convictions opposite to those of others, this subjective approach to ultimate truths and fundamental values entails a radical relativism, and considerable scepticism regarding the human capacity to attain ‘objective’ truth. However, although it may be difficult for those (like the present authors) who take a more realist view, to stand in the shoes of Gen Y on this issue, their position is by no means absurd or intellectually incoherent, nor does it necessarily lead to a quagmire of contradictions.

It can perhaps best be construed as follows: many people (and not only the young) now regard religious or spiritual beliefs as having nothing to do with the realm of history, fact or ‘hard reality’; but instead as each person’s imaginative construction of their world, a work of art, not science; akin to a musical composition, a poem or a painting: a personal response, a figurative expression of their experience of life, not a description of the universe. While this view clashes violently with the Traditional view of religion as (also) making statements about reality, Gen Y’s view is coherent, free from self-contradiction, and has one aspect with which traditionalists would enthusiastically agree: faith is more than intellectual assent to a series of propositions; it does involve the life of imagination and feeling as well. The traditionalist would of course add that nonetheless, faith is not reducible to pure subjectivity.

Among those who did not identify as followers of any Traditional religion, some (17% of Gen Y) were New Agers, but many more (28%) took the Secular option. These adopt the full-blown secular version of individualism.
**Conclusion**

Our hypothesis was confirmed: all three generations: the Boomers and Generations X and Y, are profoundly affected by the beliefs and values of secular individualism and relativism, except for the most committed adherents of Christianity and other Traditional religions.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is a ‘new spirituality’ among Boomers, X and Y: many of those who are still apparently Christian are actually not Christian in the religious sense (either sociologically or theologically). That is, they do not accept any church’s creed or moral code or form of worship, or acknowledge any religious community as having claims on them. What makes them appear Christian is that they have adopted some Christian themes within an eclectic spirituality focussed on self-development.

**Individualisation (continued)**

**Expectation 2**

We expected that Australian and US teenagers would be similarly individualistic.

**Findings**

The following two tables show measures of religious individualism and moral relativism in Australia and the USA. The data for the US are from the National Survey of Youth and Religion. To be able to compare our findings with those of the NSYR, we included only teenagers 13-17, and used (in Table 12.5) the same ‘religious ideal-types’ as the US study: the NSYR’s Devoted and Regular are similar to our spirituality types Committed and Regular; the Sporadic and Disengaged are similar to those we called Marginal and Nominal – similar but not identical; so we reclassified our teenagers’ spirituality types using those employed in the US study.

*Table 12.4 Indicators of Religious Individualism by Denomination Group by Country (Percent of Denomination Group within Country)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination Group / Country</th>
<th>Conserv Prot</th>
<th>Mainline Prot</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>No Relig ID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many religions may be true (Agree)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OK to pick and choose rel beliefs (Agree)</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to be involved in a congregation (Dis)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 12.5 Moral relativism by Religious Ideal-Type Type by Country (Percent of Religious Ideal-Type within Country)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Ideal-Type</th>
<th>Devoted</th>
<th>Regular</th>
<th>Sporadic</th>
<th>Disengaged</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
<td>AUS USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morals are relative; no def right/wrong for all</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Christian Smith, author of *Soul Searching*, the report of the US National Survey of Youth and Religion, concludes:
American youth, like American adults, are nearly without exception profoundly individualistic, instinctively presuming autonomous, individual self-direction to be a universal human norm and life goal.\textsuperscript{36}

He goes on to provide a penetrating analysis of the consequences of individualism among youth: there are no obligations, only choices; the individual is the authority over religion, not vice-versa; religion is something one chooses to use, not something to which one devotes oneself; you don’t have to be part of a religious community to practice your religion; there are no right answers to religious questions – they are matters of opinion, incapable of proof; no one has a right to judge the chosen beliefs, commitments, desires or lifestyle of another; you don’t have to be religious to be good, since decency is a simple matter of common sense on which all can agree.\textsuperscript{37}

And he later comments wryly on the inherent cultural contradiction between individualism and respect for any form of authority:

Adults often tell teenagers that they must learn to respect authority, yet most sacred of all American values is the inviolability of the individual conscience, derived from liberal individualism, embedded in widespread American distrust of the government and other institutions of authority, and incessantly depicted in television and movies, particularly those directed at youth.\textsuperscript{38}

Given all that has been written about the continuing high level of religiosity in the US, and the alleged lack of secularisation there, it was stunning to find comparably high levels of individualism among US youth. It is not likely that these attitudes would be shared by US Boomers to quite the same extent as in Australia, but we read the strong signs of religious individualism among US teenagers as presaging a more rapid drift toward lower levels of Traditional religion in the US as their Gen Ys grow older.

CONCLUSION
Comparing the religious individualism of Australian and US teenagers (13-17) confirmed our hypothesis that it is a very strong feature of youth religiosity in both countries.

Individualisation (continued)

EXPECTATION 3
Thirdly, we expected that, as a result of their predominantly individualistic orientation, Gen Y would not be strongly influenced by social concern nor much involved in citizenship activities.

FINDINGS
In the survey responses on what was considered important in life, we found that even the most committed Christians rated having ‘an exciting life’ as important or very important. Everyone scored ‘having deep friendships’ highest, but for Gen Y as a whole, the exciting life was equal third, after friendships and helping others. ‘Spiritual life’ was rated next to lowest; evidence from earlier face-to-face interviews made it seem very likely that ‘spiritual’ was interpreted as meaning something vaguely the same as ‘religious’.\textsuperscript{39}

Among ‘ways for finding peace and happiness’, it was astonishing to some of us that nearly a third of Gen Ys (mostly young women) considered shopping (very) important. Listening to music was rated highest by all spirituality types.\textsuperscript{40}
Numerous measures of ‘social concern’ in the survey went beyond ‘cost-free’ statements of attitudes about what was valued or considered important, to explore the extent to which these values were lived out in practice.

We found that Gen Y young people are not skilled in exercising their civic responsibility, nor are they likely to speak out about a public issue of concern. About two thirds of those aged 13 to 24 have neither the confidence nor the inclination to do so. Only 28% said they ‘cared very much’ about the needs of poor people in Australia, 22% about refugees in detention centres, 32% about the environment and 34% about social justice. Very few indicated that they ‘Don’t care at all’; but their main concerns were centred on themselves, their friends and their family. Assisting friends had a high priority: 77% of Gen Y had helped someone in a crisis in the past year, 69% had visited someone in hospital, 53% had tried to stop someone abusing alcohol or drugs and 31% had loaned money.

While attending to the needs of friends and family was important to young people, only 29% had done so for even one hour in a month. And although some young people were very generous and gave large amounts of money to charity, most were not: 17% gave not a single dollar to a worthy cause (including to the Tsunami appeal) in the previous year, and 39% gave less than $25.

While for the most part, the data support the view that young people are individualised and not much interested in the welfare of others, there was a small but significant group of ‘ideal citizens’ who had an awesomely high level of involvement in their community and showed a great deal of social concern. While many of these came from a strong religious tradition, a smaller proportion based their actions solely on well-defined humanistic principles and eschewed religious belief and involvement, even while acknowledging religious tradition as the source of these principles.

There was a relationship between people’s sense of belonging and their volunteering. Those who disagreed with the statement ‘I feel I don't really belong anywhere’ rated higher on the social concern and positive human values scales than those who agreed with the statement. This result does not tell us whether a sense of belonging encourages volunteerism, or even whether volunteerism promotes feelings of belonging. One might assume that there could be influence in both directions: young people who were involved in quite demanding volunteer activities told us how service to others had become part of their life and had many flow-on benefits, including feeling that they were part of a larger community.

**CONCLUSION**
The hypothesis is confirmed: Gen Y are not strongly influenced by social concern nor much involved in citizenship activities.

**REFLECTIONS ON THE CONSEQUENCES OF INDIVIDUALISATION**
Are Generation Y too readily condemned as selfish? Perhaps they should not even be described as ‘individualistic’, since that implies a blameworthy choice of self over others, over common goods; but they have had little or no choice; rather their ‘individualised’ condition has been imposed on them by contemporary society and culture. If they are self-preoccupied, it is at least partly because of the need for constant maintenance of their fragile identities. They are condemned to it; and to the ‘pulling oneself up by one’s own bootstraps’ task of creation of the Self in isolation from others. In a perfection of solitary confinement, their doors are locked from the inside, since the culture has convinced them that the world
within is their true home. Nonetheless, there is most likely, in varying degrees, an element of choice, and hence a moral dimension, in their social participation and concern for others.

They value individual freedom above all else, but focus primarily on ‘negative freedom’: ‘freedom from’ external influences, obligations, commitments: a situation in which all possible options are kept open. It would be more accurate to call this ‘indeterminacy’ rather than freedom; it can be experienced as a paralysing void. They face the dilemma that every decision to act reduces this ‘freedom’ – to decide to do X means one is losing the opportunity to do Y if the two are incompatible. As a consequence, they have very little ‘freedom for’, since every choice surrenders some of these precious options; and the strongest choices – e.g. of a career, of a partner, limit alternative options most! The traditional concept of freedom sees it as most fully realised in large, long-term choices, in action rather than passivity; sees it enhanced, not reduced, by undertaking commitments.

Their freedom, such as it is, is also compromised by strong pressures towards conformity from marketing and institutional structures, and from the fellowship of their own generation, to whom they cling so desperately amid the waves of constant change. The strongly anti-institutional element in individualist ideology obscures their view of the structures which regulate so much of contemporary life, so they are socially naïve rather than critical. They do not perceive how their behaviour is structured and controlled, and indignantly deny that their choices are influenced by anything except their own spontaneity, while at the same time conforming closely to the pattern of these invisible norms.

They are reluctant to get involved in collective action, alliances, memberships, since these involve institutions and limit ‘freedom’ by imposing obligations and responsibilities; as a result, a host of secondary ‘mediating institutions’ located between the individual and the State are ‘greying’ and slowly withering away for lack of support: local communities, service clubs, unions, local sporting organisations, hobby groups and clubs, churches, political party branches.

This development constitutes the greatest threat to democracy, to civil rights, to social justice, and to the sustainability of societies whose political-moral vision depends on the constant, committed involvement and activity of large numbers of ‘citizens’, by means of secondary organisations. Not all of these organisations need to have a directly political focus; rather they express shared, collectively cultivated interests, economic and other. Despite some outstanding exceptions, Australian youth are not much interested in ‘citizenship’, nor much engaged in it.

The decline of the ‘mediating structures’ leaves a massive concentration of social power in the hands of the large corporate interests and the State; as if Machiavelli’s wildest dream for his Prince had come true; a pliable mass populace ‘divided and conquered’, incapable of organisation or collective action to vindicate their rights against what their bureaucratic masters impose, what the fashionable intellectuals dictate, or what suits the interests of the corporate and governmental elites.

The prospect of a society with an even higher proportion of individualists than today is rather chilling: it promises to be a grim, driven and tightly controlled environment, uncannily and uncomfortably akin to the imaginary worlds created by authors like George Orwell, Robert Heinlein and Iris Murdoch.
It has long been an axiom of social science that humans are ‘radically social’ beings: to threaten their sociality threatens their humanity. In this light, the socially isolated condition of youth – the dependence of their personal identity on fragile primary relationships: family of origin, friendship networks, and immature sexual partnerships – leaves them insecure, but is strongly entrenched and resistant to change.

**Finding meaning in life**

**EXPECTATIONS**

We expected that most of our young people would find their lives meaningful; that the traditionally religious would derive meaning from their faith, that some proportion would have found meaning for life in alternative spiritualities, and that the non-religious would either have adopted a secular life-narrative, or take a sceptical stance on the meaning of life, and pay little attention to the question, preferring to live immersed in the here and now.

**FINDINGS**

Almost all of Generation Y felt that their life had purpose; there was no strong evidence of a search for meaning. Active Christians very clearly derived meaning from their relationship with God: believing in God and the afterlife establishes a transcendent dimension of meaning which can transform the significance of even the smallest of life’s details. In addition, nearly all of the Committed, and two-thirds of the Regular said that they had made a ‘personal commitment’ to God. But only a third of Gen Y as a whole had done so. It was easier to explore people’s sense of meaning in the face-to-face interviews; there we learned more about how the non-religious made sense of their lives.

A small proportion of those who followed New Age spiritual paths appeared to have engaged seriously with an underlying philosophy capable of bestowing meaning, and could be regarded as ‘seekers’. Some few (aside from immigrants or their children who were raised in these traditions) had studied and seriously practised Eastern forms of spirituality such as Buddhism or Hinduism. A strong belief in astrology or the divinatory power of the Tarot would seem inevitably to locate a person’s life within a larger universe governed by the stars or the Fates. But there were very few ‘seekers’ among practitioners of Yoga or Eastern forms of meditation, most of whom did not engage at all with the philosophy and ethics behind these disciplines. The same was true of most of those who believed in reincarnation.

But all of these sources of meaning seem to be accessed by only small proportion of Generation Y. What about the Marginal and Nominal Christians, the less serious New Agers, and the large group of Seculars? For the Christians who retain some basic ‘beliefs’ but have low involvement in their religion, it would seem that a residual ‘safety-net’ of meaning is available in emergencies; but it is doubtful if their fragmentary beliefs and low commitment would have much impact on the meanings with which they operate from day to day. What framework do all these employ to make sense of the individual experiences of each day and each year of their lives?

**DISCUSSION**

In the interviews they conducted as part of their study of young people in Britain, *Making sense of Generation Y*, which was published only after our fieldwork was completed, Savage et al could find very little evidence of traditional ‘grand narratives’ – religious, supernatural or spiritual concepts, whether traditional or alternative, being used to make sense of life; nothing beyond the here and now. Yet their informants too did not seem lost in a meaningless world, but found their meaning and significance in the world of everyday life.
The researchers found what they called a ‘Happy midi-narrative’, projected strongly in popular culture and internalised by youth:

My goal is to be happy by being myself and connecting with others, having fun, enjoying leisure activities, making use of all the information available, opportunities for creativity; … when bad things happen I will find support from friends and family .. with these and other resources available today, I will be able to move back towards happiness’.

Savage et al. have provided an apt description of the meta-narrative of secular individualism. Our less religious respondents appeared to rely on a very similar narrative; their goals were the same, so were their sources of support in family and friends.

Despite their insistence that they decide every issue for themselves, the responses of young people on particular issues are not random or inconsistent but show some clear and coherent patterns. It seems useful to try to discern the underlying principles that they reflect: the Generation Y meta-narrative, if you like – a set of basic beliefs and values, widespread in contemporary Western societies, that could be called liberal, secular individualism in its postmodern form. We are talking only of broad currents in the mainstream of Generation Y, with plenty of individual exceptions. Nor do we imagine that the members of Gen Y would agree with all of these principles, or even with any of them stated as abstract generalisations. Nonetheless, something like the following seems to be implied, underlying their actual views, attitudes and behaviour:

The fundamental value in this ethos is the supreme worth of the human individual, and the inviolability of personal freedom and autonomy: freedom in cultural, moral (especially sexual), political and economic terms; freedom from every kind of restriction, censorship, oppression or discrimination whether based on race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion, gender, sexual preference or age; also freedom, as far as possible, from commitments and responsibilities; and as a natural corollary, a strong emphasis on personal autonomy, self-development and self-realisation.

Egalitarianism is strongly affirmed.
The individual is self-sufficient; social participation is a choice.
The only ‘truths’ are those from personal experience or science; everything else is free for all to imagine as they choose; so any attempt to impose doctrines or ideologies is oppressive; individual reason is sovereign; in a democracy of ideas, one person’s opinion is as good as anyone else’s.
Values are for each individual to choose; imposition of values is oppression, an attack on personal rights and freedom.
Tolerance, consequently, is much broader than that of earlier generations on many issues; but narrower and more moralistic on others, and is combined with intolerance of those who propose limitations on individual freedom in the name of common goods.
Religion is a relic of primitive, mythic beliefs which science has exposed as false, but which is still used by authoritarian agencies (churches, traditional families, States) to support the imposition of values and norms which control and oppress individuals.
Life has no meaning except for the meaning you give it yourself.
Individual rights are preferred to law as guaranteeing freedom; rights are to be maximized, laws minimised; there is an emphasis on human rights and social justice within this context.
Sacrifice is disvalued because self-denial is seen as contrary to the primary value placed on the self, and is unjustifiably contrary to self-fulfilment; and similarly with other traditional self-effacing virtues such as repentance, humility, obedience, service.
Spontaneity is in principle preferable to formality, structure. Personal fulfilment is achieved by asserting and expanding the Self to its maximum potential, transgressing imposed boundaries, rejecting attempted limitations.

The philosophical parentage of this mixture is complex – there are elements of classical liberalism, existentialism, nihilism, libertarianism and postmodernism; some of its progenitors (leaving out the ancient Greeks) date back to the 17th and 18th centuries, such as Locke, Hume, Rousseau, Hobbes, Mill; others are more recent: Nietzsche, Sartre, Ayn Rand; and finally, postmodernists such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard. 

**CONCLUSION**

Our expectation was confirmed, with the reservation that a higher proportion of the generation than expected did not identify with any religion. Some of these followed New Age paths, but again, a higher proportion than expected were Seculars. Only a few of the latter had an explicit non-religious story, or set of goals, which they used to integrate their lives; the remainder seemed uninterested in the question, but their worldviews were consistent with the meta-narrative of secular individualism.

It seems that the highest ambition of many would be to be able to say of their life: ‘I did it my way’.

**REFLECTIONS ON MEANING AND IDENTITY AMONG GEN Y**

Earlier generations of social theorists may have overestimated the minimum degree of value-consensus among citizens necessary for a viable society, without which all dissolves into chaos. In the late modern era, States have discovered that they no longer need such a value consensus to legitimate their power and to secure the social control of a large and diverse populace. Consequently, they ceased some time ago to cultivate the means of obtaining it, one of which was religion. The need has passed because governments now possess technological means of social control which operate with or without the consent of the governed: massive and increasingly integrated intelligence networks; public relations and media management systems used to put a favourable ‘spin’ on information; manipulable mass media; and above all, the taxation and social security systems financially tracking and controlling every individual life-long.

Eckersley makes a similar point:

> In contrast to the loosening or liberalisation of ‘informal’ norms, values and constraints associated with individualisation, people’s lives are, at least in some respects, becoming increasingly circumscribed by the ‘formal’ constraints of laws, regulations and rules. More broadly, the growing social, economic and technological complexity of life today also tends to work against individual agency and empowerment.

It is ironic that while insisting on freedom as an absolute value, and believing that their choices are theirs alone, uninfluenced by others, Generation Y, all unaware, conform closely to the patterns dictated by the legal, social and economic structures shaping their lives, and also to their own generation’s language and lifestyle norms.

It seems that we need to readjust older assumptions about the basic human ‘hunger for meaning’; that, as by feeding sweets to a hungry child, the hunger can be staved off, perhaps indefinitely, by short-term, low-level meanings, by a lifestyle filled with ‘distractions’ and ‘noise’:
• ‘Bread and circuses’: spectacles and entertainments.
• ‘The latest’: gossip, inconsequential chatter, ‘news’; TV provides a vast range of such distractions; the Internet, now as accessible as TV, an inexhaustible source of them.
• ‘Why haven’t you called me?’: networking for the regular shoring-up of fragile identities may be one of the principal uses of young people’s mobile phones.
• ‘Decisions! Decisions!’: the press of trivial choices: opportunities for reflection, for meaning-making, are crowded out by the need to make hundreds of trivial choices each day because much that was formerly ‘institutionalised’ in roles, norms, rights, mutual obligations and commitments, etc. must now be constantly re-decided.\textsuperscript{48}
• ‘Hyperdrive’: the artificially hyped intensity and rapid pace of life: diverse activities closely sequenced; the urgent, hectic tone of media, even of conversation.
• ‘Muzic’: constant high-volume sensory input from Ipods and similar.

Does it matter?

The long debate on whether human beings require meanings and meta-narratives dealing with the great Transcendences will probably never be resolved, since it has its roots in complex and powerful ideologies on both sides, capable of accommodating themselves to any and all facts or discoveries. Obviously theists and secularists take opposite positions. However there are anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and religion studies scholars in between, whose contributions do not necessarily stem from unshakeable prior value commitments to either position.

Attending just to their empirical evidence, while ignoring ‘doctrinal’ statements beamed from both ideological poles, it is not yet clear that the secular meta-narrative can hold together and stave off a personal descent into chaos when individuals experience crisis encounters with ultimate boundaries: for example, the death of a child, the breakdown of an intimate relationship, the prospect of death, disemployment, drastic financial loss, severe illness or pain, inexplicable misfortune, the onset of old age … Perhaps Gen Y are too young for many of them to have come up against these limits, and research on this question should focus more on older generations. Nevertheless, the older half of Gen Y are within the age-range plagued by suicide; the jury is still out on the causes, and on the proportion of these events which fit Durkheim’s ‘anomic’ model, in which it is lack of meaning (literally ‘normlessness’) which leaves a person unable to continue their life.\textsuperscript{49}

Moreover, research based on societies where there is still a strong religious culture may not provide much guidance for more secularised societies. It is often be the case that even though an individual has not personally internalised the resources necessary to deal with some personal crisis, he or she will be able to grasp and use them if they are readily available and well-legitimated in the cultural stock-in-hand of the society. So people turn to religion in time of need. But these resources are far less readily available if religion, in that society, is a marginal and depreciated option.

In short, it may be that contemporary youth, to the extent that individualisation is imposed on them, have been forced back to a more elemental level of human development, for which they and society will pay a price in years to come. Their struggle to transcend that level, particularly to attain the liberality and civility inherent in a full humanity, has had steep obstacles placed in its way; yet intermittently, the spirit of Generation Y, like the human spirit itself, shows signs of an indomitable drive towards what it senses as its fulfilment, its potential for ultimate freedom.
Chapter 13
Implications

The practical application of the findings of our study goes some distance beyond the main focus of this book, and the competence of the authors. We are not youth workers or secondary school teachers; expertise in these fields also is required to adapt practical plans and programs to take account of any new findings on the spirituality of Generation Y. However, since practitioners in many areas of work with youth are among those most likely to make use of our work, we attempt in this final chapter to offer some general suggestions on the implications of what we have found for understanding, communicating and working with young people of this generation.

Implications for communicating with Gen Y
Readers who attended university in the pre-digital era will remember what tertiary education was like. Lectures lasted a full hour, no breaks, with the lecturer speaking uninterrupted while students dutifully took notes. Some notable points might have been scrawled on the chalkboard, only to be wiped off at the start of the next lecture. The follow-up tutorials allowed for discussion of the lecture material and an in-depth consideration of the readings set for that week.

Generation Y has an entirely different university experience. The traditional lecture/tutorial format is ‘old school’ and out of fashion. The new emphasis is mixed-modes and flexible learning. For those students who feel like a face-to-face learning ‘experience’, teaching is done in an interactive way – a two hour seminar of 100 students, in which the pedagogue might speak for 30 minutes (using the ubiquitous Microsoft PowerPoint), take questions at any time, show a video and allow students to ‘break out’ into small groups to answer questions designed to help them relate the material to their everyday experiences.

Those who can’t make it to class can download overhead slides from a secure website and listen to a Podcast of the seminar on their MP3 player. More tertiary students than ever before are learning ‘on demand’, fitting their university work in with their paid employment and other obligations.

Gen Y’s preference for this educational style reflects two of the features that characterise this generation: the emphasis on the individual (e.g. ‘how does what I am learning relate to and work for me?’) and their skill and familiarity with information technology.

Drawing on insights from our research and from observations put forward by leading Gen Y researchers such as Sydney-based McCrindle Research, here are some suggested strategies on how to get through to Gen Y, for those with a message to communicate.

Make use of technology
Social researcher Mark McCrindle argues that for Gen Y ‘the digital language and technology is almost their first language’. While most successful educators (and religious organisations) understand that Gen Y prefer to learn using technological assistance, it is also important to recognise that many Generation Y like interactive technology, such as the internet and mobile phones. Having control over what is being consumed seems paramount: the outcome of shows like Big Brother is determined by SMS votes, while it is mandatory
that any film released on DVD must have ‘special features’ that can be controlled by the user. This desire for control is reflected in the number of tertiary students who would rather do their learning at home using broadband internet than actually attend class. McCrindle and Beard note that if ‘the medium they are offered has little or no interactivity then … it is unlikely to engage them’.  

**Make sure the message is not didactic**

As noted in the introduction to this section, teaching in the tertiary sector is increasingly centred on relating the material to ‘real world experiences’ and encouraging the student to learn through participation and experimentation. This appears to be an important element of successfully communicating a message. Writing about effective marketing strategies for Gen Y, McCrindle and Beard observe that ‘the hard sell of the past is no longer an effective marketing communications tool … Today’s empowered consumers are not afraid to push back on heavy marketers with a reminder of who is king’. It appears that for any message to have resonance, it must be delivered in a way that is non-didactic and allows for the individual to approach what is being learned in a way that suits them.

**Allow flexibility and choice**

A recent experience of one of the three authors lecturing to first year university students served as a reminder that members of Gen Y cannot readily be pinned down to a timetable. The most often-asked questions from students was not about the content of what was being taught but about accessing the material out of class time: ‘Are your notes on the web?’ ‘How long after the lecture finishes can I download the Podcast?’. Those who offer the greatest flexibility when it comes to presenting a message will probably be the ones who have the greatest success in having their message heard.

**Are my friends into it?**

We have discussed in chapter 10 the abiding importance of friends in the lives of Gen Y, notwithstanding the profound influence that individualisation has on this generation. And herein lies the paradox, expressed here by McCrindle and Beard: ‘Despite the individualistic world in which we live, humans have a timeless desire for social connection.’ They note that while traditional forms of community have largely disappeared since the 1950s, the desire for connection and community remains strong, as evidenced by the popularity of virtual communities like MySpace® and Facebook®, and the reverence in which family and peer relationships are held. For a young person to accept anything new or different, they have to know that what is on offer will give them a sense of community.

**Implications for ministry**

**Issues arising for ministry**

- How do ‘choosers’ come to accept external authority in beliefs and morals – authority such as that of Scripture, the teachings of their religion, natural or civil law or community standards?
- How do ‘individualists’ acquire a sense of Church?

**Prerequisites for those who minister**

Most of those living in Western societies have been ‘evangelised’ to some extent by the secularism of the dominant culture. Not a few practising Christians have uncritically absorbed the assumptions of today’s highly individualistic version of liberalism, which we found to be unquestioned, indeed unquestionable, among youth. Only those who have
themselves been liberated from taking the truth of this dogma for granted can help to free others.

**Styles of ministry**

Current approaches to youth ministry vary widely depending on their pastoral analysis of the situation and their underlying ecclesiology. Some of the variety among the multitude of real-world models of ministry may be helpfully crystallised into pairs of contrasting emphases, (often both containing indispensable insights). For example:

‘Ministry from alongside’ versus ‘Ministry from in front’

‘Ministry from alongside’ is found more often in older ‘church-type’ religious organisations, both Catholic and Protestant, which are strongly integrated into the mainstream of society, and take a relatively positive view of the secular world and a ‘reconciling’ stance towards it. They tend to favour classic liberal Protestant, and more recently, liberal Catholic, approaches to ministry with the following features, which show influences from both contemporary theology and also of modern psychology as applied to management and leadership:

- ‘walking with’, companioning, listening, learning from, waiting, a Socratic approach;
- ‘ministry from beside’ that accompanies; drawing out resources from within the person;
- avoiding ‘telling’, ‘deficit’ models, in which those to be evangelised are seen as lacking something which the evangelisers possess and try to transfer to them; rather, the ministers themselves need to be evangelised by the ‘poor’;
- individualist anthropology & ecclesiology: emphasising individual uniqueness and autonomy, and individual solutions; minimising the need for communal / institutional involvement.

Have these approaches, invaluable for the new respect for persons they brought to evangelisation, now largely been colonised by the individualist and relativist viruses of the secular view? Do they result in effective ministry to youth? Youth seem conspicuously absent from these churches.

‘Ministry from in front’, is found in more ‘sectarian’ religious groups, which may be either Protestant or Catholic, with a history of never having been fully at home in the mainstream of society; and which take a more critical view of the secular world and a ‘prophetic’ stance towards it. These groups tend to favour more ‘evangelistic’ approaches to ministry with features such as the following:

- directness in outreach, drawing people into discipleship in a demanding community;
- ‘ministry from in front’; not pushing, not commanding from the rear, but setting an example, calling forward and strongly inviting;
- no hesitation in ‘telling’, seeing those to be evangelised as lacking knowledge, and also (all) other resources for salvation, for a full human and Christian life;
- dethroning of the autonomous self; these groups emphasise obedience to God, to the Word of God in Scripture, to Christ’s law of life; to other legitimate authorities;
- communal anthropology and ecclesiology, recognising the radical sociality of the human; salvation is by incorporation into a saved people; so communal / institutional involvement is not just a ‘requirement’, but of the essence.

This style of approach appears to be more effective; youth are conspicuously present in these churches; the challenge for them is to avoid fundamentalism. Despite their reputation for being ‘market-savvy’ and resistant to the ‘hard-sell’, Generation Y are naïve and innocent in
many respects, especially when their hungry hearts are touched by powerful immediate experiences. Ministry must respect this vulnerability and avoid taking inappropriate advantage of it; not only is the religious freedom of each person a paramount value to be respected, but decisions made under pressure will later be rejected.

**Points of contact for ministry**

Surely the most difficult challenge faced by youth ministry is that of finding points of contact at which an invitation to hear the Gospel can be issued.

There has been a good deal of research on two approaches much favoured in the past: the use of mass-media of communication, such as radio and TV; (internet websites, podcasts, and broadcast SMS to mobile phones are newer technologies with a shorter history of use); and second, the use of large-scale youth rallies.

Mass-media seem likely to have little effect when they employ the ‘spot advertisement’ format lasting only a few minutes, favoured by some religious organisations because of the high expense involved; but more likely to generate interest if they tell a compelling human-interest story convincingly linked to faith.

Youth rallies are no longer so often used; post-event evaluations of their effectiveness questioned whether they reached more than the already converted. Two of the keys to enabling change are companioning and community: people rarely move onto new spiritual paths unless invited, or at least accompanied, by someone from their trusted personal network: a friend or family member, and welcomed into a compatible and nurturing community. But with these provisos, large events of this kind may still be valuable points of contact.

A humbler starting point, but one well proved, and the only avenue available in many situations, is that of silent witness and service: when visibly linked to faith, clear and strong, they stir spiritual hunger and prompt inquiry, but require patience.

Also well proven, and today indispensable, is the ministry of ‘like to like’: youth to youth, parent to parent, etc.. The ‘generational consciousness’ of Gen Y, even sharper than that of earlier generations, makes it difficult for them to trust messages from those who do not share their age-specific situation and experience.

Organisations often touch the lives of youth at several points: e.g. schools, chaplaincies, churches, youth clubs; not all of these are appropriate contact points for ministry, nor likely to provide the right context. However, evidence from the present study indicates one fruitful avenue: schools and other agencies can and do provide ‘catalytic experiences’, for example, immersion in the situation of the poor and powerless; encounters with others who are experiencing life-crises. See the findings on this issue in Chapter 10.

We were hardly able, in our study or in this book, to do more than touch in passing the area of personal religious experience; however other studies focussed on that theme emphasise its profound importance for religion, spirituality and ministry. A recent review of a range of research, some of it Australian, shows that religious experience is widespread, and discusses the variety of its forms. Against this background, it is possible to discern another potential point of contact between youth and religious organisations which they see as accessible (such as schools and sometimes churches), a point attractive to those who are beginning to be
aware of such experiences and seeking their meaning; a point at which a safe setting is
provided in which personal spiritual experiences can be explored and interpreted.

**The process of ministry**

Obviously both the process and the content of ministry will vary widely from one religious
tradition to another. We cannot specify either of these in detail here, only point to some
implications for both that arise from our findings.

Those who approach religious communities because they are no longer content with what a
secular culture can offer could be compared to refugees of other kinds: they seek both
nourishment and healing, and both need to take place at the same time.

For most of them, there is a good deal to un-learn. They are probably only beginning to
question the taken-for-granted worldview of secular individualism into which they have been
socialised. Its dominant themes are very deeply ingrained. Perhaps the most powerful
ingredient in the mixture is a picture of the world from which all traces of God are airbrushed
or edited out; a world constantly projected in the media.

Generation Y are not only spiritually starving (because, unlike the Baby Boomers, most of
them were not originally nourished on any tradition), they are also comparable to those
suffering from anorexia or bulimia; they have been fed an ideological diet in which religion is
seen as an oppressive power, attacking the individual’s core values, and attempting to take
away his/her freedom. The relentlessly repeated message is that autonomy is beautiful,
external authority in all forms is oppressive. Besides, science has proved that religion is all
myth; it’s childish; uncool. This generation have an acquired allergy to religion; they can
only very slowly be reintroduced to a nutritious spiritual diet.

Discussing our findings on meaning for life, we noted that the environment of Gen Y is filled
with ‘noise’, inhibiting the reflection necessary for meaning-making. This may well be partly
a choice: it serves to assuage the horror of aloneness; to evade the angst accompanying all
brushing up against human existential boundaries: reminders that my life is transitory, the
fragility of my identity and of all that supports it: family, friends … . Some of the sources of
‘noise’ of which we became aware were listed on p.00 under the heading: ‘Reflections on
meaning and identity among Gen Y’.

Part of the process of ministry is the provision of a low-noise decision-space for reflection
and choice about real life-issues. This cannot be accomplished without tailoring some basic
structures for day-to-day life for each individual, such as regular prayer, reflection and
reading. Such structures cannot be imposed, only offered, and must be sensitively adapted to
the needs of individuals which differ according to their age and stage.

The research by Mark McCrindle which we cited earlier has some pertinent recommendations
designed for the workplace, but which also apply to ministry: ‘Gen Y have a strong
relationship ethic. They are collaborative learners, enjoy working in teams, and thrive in a
relaxed, consensus-driven group.’ He found that unless leaders operated in an inclusive,
participative way, demonstrating people skills and not just technical skills, retention declined.
Leaders more successful in working with them were of the ‘feeling’ type, rather than
‘thinkers’ or ‘doers’.

**Initiation**
Anthropologists and students of religion and of ritual have extensively studied processes of initiation. Christians have often viewed these studies rather patronisingly as interesting descriptions of the rites of passage of primitive peoples, but irrelevant to ‘higher’ religions like Christianity. In more recent times, many Christian scholars (except those whose theological stance defines Christianity as having nothing in common with religion) have conceded that these processes deal with fundamental processes of human and religious development, and that their basic structures can be discerned also in the process of coming to Christian faith (maintaining, of course, all the specifically Christian understandings of the process as these are defined in Scripture, elucidated in theology, and in some churches, mandated by appropriate authorities).

These scholars propose that initiation takes place in three stages: trial, instruction, insight.

**Trial (Sometimes Called Ordeal)**
Descriptions of this phase of initiation in ancient religions are familiar to all educated readers. It is essentially a break with an old environment, and entry into a new one, in which a candidate will be prepared for membership. In some uses, it serves to discourage the unprepared, the unserious, the dilettante, motivated by mere curiosity. In today’s context, creating some distance from one’s previous close associates, coming into the orbit of a community of faith, and meeting some of its minimal requirements is more than sufficient.

**Instruction**
Instruction needs to be at first experientially focussed; instruction in how to do rather than how to think. It is part of the process of ‘discipling’, and contains an element of self-examination. (See the next section on the content of ministry.)

**Insight**
Insight is almost impossible to define except in terms of the theology specific to a particular Christian denomination. It is always a rich blend of knowledge and experience, given rather than achieved. Some see it as occurring in a moment of illumination; others conceive it as gradual, even lifelong, and impossible to pin down to any single time or experience. [Commentators have long noted the ‘primacy of experience’ as particularly characterising modernity; but Generation Y seem to have a uniquely low level of trust in other sources of guidance. So there is a great deal that they are unwilling or unable to learn in any other way, and experience is more crucial than ever.12] Within the limits of the present context, we can only suggest that for Gen Y, insight seems to arise through transformative personal experiences: recovering their sense of wonder and mystery, learning to recognise the presence of God in everyday life, through reflection on key life events in which transcendence is encountered.

**The content of ministry to Gen Y**
All of the studies of Generation Y that we reviewed which had explored their belief and involvement in Christianity at any depth, emphasised how little was known or understood about the content of Christianity by all but a small proportion of the most committed. In our face-to-face interviews, we made the same discovery. What was even more surprising was that it applied also to those who had attended church schools from Prep and sat through eight to twelve years of religious education classes. This is the age of the information deluge; Gen Y are even more selective in their perception and retention of information than previous generations. What does not appear acceptable, successfully passing through the filter of their worldview and ethos, is ruthlessly discarded. So much for the Western cultural tradition, built on the Bible and Shakespeare! Hence instruction must begin at the beginning. In most cases,
neither prior learning from a tradition in which the person was raised, nor knowledge from subsequent instruction can be assumed.

Experiential learning
The basic learning of any tradition is experiential: one learns by observing, by doing as others do, by listening to the stories of others and of the community, by sharing and re-conceiving one’s own story. The Christian tradition is passed on through the experience of living in a Christian community, engaging in Christian practices, hearing the Christian story. For those in their later teens or older, there is great benefit in actually residing for a time with a Christian family or group of young adults. There are many details of everyday life which can be best learned by observation and imitation in such a situation: how Christians pray together, how women are respected, etc.

Some aspects of the lifestyle of such a Christian community will be counter-cultural for Generation Y:
• Sharing possessions and responsibility for one’s life – a gradual surrender of the ‘total autonomy of the individual’
• Ethical reframing of personal relationships: with parents, friends, boyfriends / girlfriends, partners, children – abandoning the ‘total relativism of values’ and coming into obedience to God and to the Gospel
• Self-examination, growing self-knowledge leading towards repentance and moral conversion.

Reflection
Reflection on experience is fundamental to personal learning, and may be a new skill for refugees from a high-noise culture operating at ‘hyperdrive’ speed. Research on religious experience indicates that the kinds of encounters with transcendence in which people most often reported a sense of wonder or mystery, or a sense of the presence of God were:
• A death in the family or among friends
• The birth of a child; or a special moment with a child
• Experiencing the beauty of nature
• Listening to music
• An answer to prayer.

The development of critical consciousness
An important element of ministry to Generation Y is ‘conscientisation’: the development of a critical consciousness bearing on the dominant culture surrounding them. Although part of this learning is experiential and value-based, it also requires a robust intellectual component: a well-reasoned and convincing critique of the distorted understandings of individuality, autonomy, freedom and morality which form the core of postmodern liberal secular individualism. Resources for this critique are abundant, but urgently need to be developed into practical, accessible and usable forms, and widely disseminated.

Analytical skills
Analytical skills are important, and can be taught. They enable young people to detect the ‘spin’ inherent in supposedly neutral presentations of ‘information’: the hidden assumptions, selective emphases and omissions, value-laden premises and emotive arguments. These are key techniques by which secular individualism is promoted in the dominant culture.
In particular, the aggressive claims of ‘scientism’ must be roundly refuted. Teachers of science and of religious education in religious schools need to coordinate their treatment of evolution: perhaps teach it jointly, showing the harmony between scientific and religious perspectives. At least in mainstream Christian traditions, this can be done without compromising the integrity of either discipline. Theologians in mainstream denominations have long since made their peace with scientists on accepted evolutionary theory, but this is poorly understood at the popular level, and particularly among teenagers, as we frequently found.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Cognitive learning}

Cognitive learning needs to be take place, supplementing the more experiential kind, adapted to the person’s age and education. High-quality resources for all ages have been developed in virtually all churches over the last thirty years; but till now have mostly been wasted on the unready or completely uninterested. Here, Generation Y have an advantage: they are much more geared to lifelong continuing learning than were earlier generations.

\textit{Creative use of Music}

Given the importance Gen Y assigned to music as a major resource ‘for finding peace and happiness’ it goes without saying that ministry to them needs to place considerable emphasis on the creative use of music.

Different individuals will require different resources and lengths of time to accomplish the goals of the process: to experience intellectual and moral conversion and entry into a personal faith-commitment. The road to full church membership may be quite lengthy in some cases. It is unlikely to be crowded. But small (and authentic) is beautiful.

\textit{Literature on ministry to Generation Y}

There is a large theological and pastoral literature on ministry to contemporary youth which is beyond our scope to survey. However we refer the reader to three items, two of which have the additional merit of being based on original research on Generation Y which we found reliable and useful. Two studies of Generation Y that we have cited more than once in earlier chapters were written by authors who were Christian, and who insightfully drew out the implications of their findings for the church. In the ‘Concluding unscientific postscript’ to \textit{Soul Searching}, Christian Smith offers ‘Observations and implications of NSYR findings for religious communities and youth workers’.\textsuperscript{15} Sara Savage and the other authors of \textit{Making sense of Generation Y} provide similar guidance in their concluding chapter, entitled: ‘Reconnecting with Generation Y – and all those like them’.\textsuperscript{16} Rowan Ireland’s \textit{The Challenge of Secularisation}, while it is not based on empirical research nor focussed specifically on Generation Y, contains an insightful critique of theories of secularisation, and ends with a chapter entitled: ‘Back to the pastoral’, which also draws out useful implications for ministry.\textsuperscript{17}

\textit{Implications for pastoral care in church schools}

\textit{Pastoral care for all students}

The very large body of past research on ‘school climate’ indicates that the most potent, potentially beneficial element in the ‘hidden curriculum’ of a school is its institutional culture and ethos: the way in which it gives witness through its structure, administration and style, to the values it proclaims. It is what the school \textit{does} rather than what it \textit{says} that carries weight with students. They \textit{experience} the school as a whole, as well as all the people and activities that make it up.
Some of the school’s values will be intellectual, such as a spirit of open inquiry, and a high value placed on intellectual achievement (versus, say, sport, or the acquisition of marketable qualifications). In a Christian school, other values will be religious in character. Perhaps the key Christian virtues which need to be reflected in the praxis of the school as a whole are mutual love and care, social justice and fairness in the treatment of students and staff.

These values are embodied first of all in the ethos or style of relationships within the school, especially:
- administration-student relationships, disciplinary policies and practices
- teacher-class relationships: especially methods of discipline and control
- teacher-student relationships one-to-one
- student to student relationships.

Second in importance only to the culture of the school as a whole is the student culture. By nature this is informal, and less amenable to influence from school authorities. There will be parts of it that no teacher will ever see. Relying primarily on the selection and training of suitable student leaders, and only secondarily on direct interventions, this culture can be shaped to promote an ethos of care for all and ‘gorilla goodness’, with no bullying, and particularly, no discriminatory treatment aimed against students who are religious.

The school’s religious values are also expressed in its activities. The power of school rituals (that is, large-group activities from routine assemblies to major celebrations) in shaping the spirit of a school is often entirely overlooked. When well-crafted they can be exhilarating instead of dull for students, and can inculcate school values with particular force. Most of the subjects students study have little overt religious content, but alert curriculum designers and teachers realise that all subjects and learning areas have their religious or spiritual aspects, which come to the fore in particular topics, and they plan to make the most of these learning opportunities.

Science and religion
The polarisation of religion and science in 19th century Britain gave rise to a new breed of passionately anti-religious scientific rationalists. They found common cause with other intellectuals in the promotion of ‘scientism’: the doctrine that science is superior to all other forms of knowledge, and that religion is irrational myth. Richard Dawkins is the best known current exponent. The most damaging effect of scientism is to destroy wonder at the beauty of the natural world, at human beings, at children, at relationships, and the sense of mystery. Experiences of wonder and mystery are the natural precursors of religious faith.

‘Scientism’ appears to ‘trickle down’ quite strongly. Youth cite fundamentalist bible beliefs which their own churches do not hold, as reasons for abandoning religion. The scientific strategy of exaggeration and ridicule seems most effective. Bible teachings are pilloried as absurd, and religion portrayed as a relic of primitive, mythic understandings which science has exposed as false. Those who cling to such beliefs and practices have various discreditable motives attributed to them. Although probably few abandon faith as a result of intellectual conviction, it is likely that many turn away out of social conformity and fear of ridicule.

In the previous section, we pointed out the urgent need for collaboration between religious educators and science teachers in treating the topic of evolution; this should be expanded to include at least an outline of the history of the struggle between religion and science.
Religious education

If religious education is more broadly conceived to include all the concerns listed above, there is less chance of an impossible burden being laid on the school’s specifically religious activities, such as worship and prayer, religious education classes, camps and retreats, community service activities. And conversely, unless this is so, these specifically religious activities are likely to prove difficult for teachers, boring for students, and generally ineffective.

There are always groups and individuals among the students who require particular care, such as recently arrived immigrants, students with learning difficulties or those whose home lives place them under stress. Our research findings show that students in the first year or two of secondary school are another such group. We found that the changes in belief and practice (i.e. rejection of beliefs, decline in attendance, disaffiliation), which used often to take place after finishing high school, moving out of home and entering university or the workforce, now occur around the transition from primary school to high school. In some cases, these represent unnecessary ‘casualties’ which could be averted by appropriate pastoral care. It is important that younger, impressionable students from practising families who have an active faith experience the school as a welcoming place for believers. At the same time, they can be prepared for the more spiritually pluralistic environment of the secondary school.

The informal student culture can be oppressive to believers

Beneath the ‘formal culture’ of a school, shaped by official policies and reflected in the curriculum, there is an ‘informal culture’ among students which may be quite at variance with the formal culture, may have its source in cultural influences outside the school, and is much more difficult to influence. It does not take a majority of students to establish and enforce its norms, only a number of key ‘influentials’. If the informal culture of a school dictates that religion or spirituality is not something to be taken seriously, and that, for example, voluntary attendance at church services outside school hours is a sign of childishness, lack of independence or of intelligence in the face of overwhelming evidence from common sense (or from science) that religion is nonsense, then the years in school may be a lengthy period of potent ‘religious de-socialisation’ of any student who happens to have ‘familial’ faith – that is, it may lead to the unlearning of faith; to loss of faith. A lesson about spirituality is being learned, but not the one intended by the school. Some of the more religiously committed students in our survey and in face-to-face interviews reported sometimes being pressured or made fun of at school because of their religious beliefs and practices.

Schools which operate under the auspices of churches and other religious organisations commonly include among the student body some who do not share the faith of the sponsoring organisation. Pastoral care for all students requires particular respect for the religious freedom of these students: there should be no compulsion of those with genuine conscientious objections to participation in worship and prayer services or religious education.

Summary: Religion in schools and Gen Y

Findings which are of particular relevance to religion in schools can be summarised as follows:

Students now reflect the more secular Australian society of the third millennium
- many students who identify as Christian will be Marginal or Nominal Christians
- some don’t believe in God, many more are uncertain
- some believe in Jesus’ divinity and resurrection, others are uncertain
- many believe it’s okay to pick and choose beliefs, and that morality is relative
- some students who were raised in a tradition will no longer identify as Christian
- among those who identify with the school’s religious tradition, only a small proportion are likely to be regular attenders at a local church or youth group
- despite attending a church school, some students have no religious tradition in their background, and often no family support for faith or practice
- they may share the culture’s low interest in spirituality / religion
- Gen Y place high value on relationships with friends and family, but they distrust organisations and are not ‘joiners’
- their identity is relatively fragile, especially when not reinforced by belonging to communities or organisations
- their outlook is experience-centred; they have little confidence in the possibility of objective knowledge unless it is accompanied by the guarantee that it is scientific.

The discussion of influences on traditional spirituality in Chapter 6 concluded with the following statement: ‘The Spirit of Generation Y project and many other studies have established beyond doubt that family support for traditional spirituality is available to only a small minority of young people. However, where that support exists, and where other necessary conditions are met, there is every reason to expect that religious schools can, even if on a much more modest scale, make a most valuable contribution to the enhancement of traditional spirituality among students.’

Even in today’s situation, these ‘other necessary conditions’ can be met; we have tried to suggest some of them in the foregoing discussion; the three most important are: first, to equip teachers with an understanding of the spirituality of Generation Y, second, to prepare a curriculum which will nurture it; and third, to find ways, in the school situation, to identify and work with those students who are open to the possibility of a fuller spiritual life.
Appendices

The following additional appendices are available on the project website:

Appendix I

Technical report on the survey

Appendix II

The demographics of Generation Y

Appendix III

Survey questionnaire
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NOTES

Introduction


Chapter 1

1 All informants have been assigned pseudonyms, and any other potentially identifying details have been altered.
2 In addition to transcripts, we have observation notes from our interviewers, which contain such valuable sidelongights as the one just cited.
3 Some Catholics in Australia are members of Eastern (Catholic) Churches in union with the (Western) Catholic Church – which implies that they, or their parents or grandparents, immigrated from countries where these churches are based. These churches (principally Maronite, Melkite or Ukrainian) have their own Patriarchs in the home country, their own bishops or eparchs in Australia, their own liturgy and law, and a network of local churches. Monique and her family attend one of these churches, quite some distance from where they live.
4 In the spirituality of Eastern Christian churches generally, there is a strong stress on the limits of human understanding of God; there is far more to God that we cannot know than the little that we do understand. This apophatic tradition goes back to the writings of the Eastern ‘Fathers of the Church’ in the first centuries of the Christian era, and is still a part of the teaching of those churches, as we see reflected in Monique’s spirituality.
5 In quotes from interviews, the interviewer’s speech is in italics.
6 Of course, pop singer Madonna also adorns herself with crosses, yet would seem to share few of Monique’s values! Crosses are popular; their significance for the wearer can be known only from the fuller personal context. In Monique’s case, this context makes it solidly plausible to interpret her wearing of the Cross as a badge of identity.
7 There were eleven photographs, selected from the ‘Photolanguage Australia’ series (Cooney & Burton 1986). These are quite dissimilar, in content and purpose, from the well-known TAT (Thematic Apperception Test) illustrations. They are described as: ‘black-and-white photographs which have been chosen for their aesthetic qualities, their capacity to stimulate the imagination, the memory and the emotions, and their ability to challenge the viewer to thoughtful reflection. Photos which can be described as symbolic become a key to enable a person’s past experience and sub-conscious to find a conscious expression’ (Cooney & Burton 1986, p.2).

Chapter 2

1 Oxford English Dictionary.
2 In the late 20th Century, from an almost exclusively Christian usage, ‘spirituality’ expanded to embrace the world: of the twenty-five volumes of World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, (Cousins 1985) only three volumes were devoted to Christianity.
3 Australian Young Christian Workers (2006), Touching the sacred: Spirituality inquiry, unpublished paper available from Australian YCW [a Catholic youth organisation], based on a survey of over 500 young people, most of them affiliated with the YCW, but including non-affiliated senior school students.
5 ‘Rational choice theory’ would provide a further, and radically contrasting analysis of spirituality in the new situation of young people, but is not reviewed here, because we find its central principles so ill-suited to the analysis of religious / spiritual institutions and activities. Its root metaphor of market exchange grossly distorts religion, (and culture generally), and its reduction of motivation to cost-benefit analysis is simplistic and erroneous psychology. For a systematic, book-length rebuttal, see Bruce (1999).
7 Wuthnow 1998.
8 Batson, Schoenrade & Ventis 1993.
Notes

9 Wuthnow 1999.
10 We use ‘late modern’ when referring to the contemporary situation, which others describe as ‘post-modern’, because we do not subscribe to the thesis that there is a radical discontinuity between the contemporary situation and modernity.
14 Schneider 2000.
15 This is a ‘stipulative’ definition. It does not claim to capture the essential nature of what is defined, but simply states what the word ‘spirituality’ means in this research project. The development of the definition of spirituality employed in the study was described in a journal article (Singleton, Mason & Webber, 2004).
16 Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973, pp. 94-109) deploys these terms with memorable effect in his classic definition of religion, but they have wider applicability, and are used here in a broader sense still much indebted to his elaboration of them. The late Clifford Geertz (who died in October 2006) was an American cultural anthropologist who taught at the University of Chicago and later held the position of professor of social science at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Study. Although his contributions ranged widely over many theoretical and applied areas of cultural anthropology, he was particularly interested in religion, and published a number of books and essays on religion in Bali and Morocco, the two primary areas of his own fieldwork. He is best known to students of religion for his magisterial essay ‘Religion as a cultural system’ (Geertz 1973). Our study is particularly indebted to his thought, and we honour the memory of a gifted scholar.
17 In his study of the formation of identity in adolescence, Erikson (1968) highlighted the importance of what he called ‘ideology’ – a kind of map, a simplified or summary picture of the world and of one’s place in it, which contributes to identity by locating the self in social space.
18 Geertz 1973, p. 89.
19 It may be helpful to think of ritual in its most general sense as ‘stylised and reiterated figures of movement and/or language’.
20 A martial arts practitioner provided this striking statement of the transforming power of ritual: ‘At first, it’s you doing the form; gradually you find it’s the form doing you.’
21 A reference refers to something; what it refers to is its referent (Crystal 1985, p. 989).
22 Luckmann 1967, pp. 43-49.
23 Earlier onset of puberty: in Australia now, puberty typically begins at 11 in girls and 12-13 in boys, but often earlier; the normal range extends as low as 9 years. In 1900, the average age of menarche, a girl’s first period, was between 14 and 15. Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service, South Australia (2007).
24 This finding was reported from the Australian Study of Health and Relationships, conducted in 2001/2002 by the Australian research centre in sex, health and society at Latrobe University (19,307 respondents) (Smith et al. 2003).
27 Touraine 1998 p. 177.
28 Bauman 2000a, pp. 45-46.
29 Bauman 2001b, p. 44.
33 Putnam 2000, p. 66.
34 Gilbert 2003.
35 See Rights talk (Glendon 2004). These questions clearly preoccupied Robert Wuthnow, the doyen of American sociologists of religion. In two lengthy studies published in the early nineties, he documented the ways in which contemporary young people were still ‘learning to care’ (Wuthnow 1991, 1995).
36 Tocqueville 1839/1997.
37 Much popular writing has taken this moralistic line with the Boomers and Generations X and Y; all three generations have at different times been described as ‘the Me-generation’. ‘Rational choice’ theorists, by contrast, describe this ‘free-riding’ (referring back to the text of the chapter) as the most rational behaviour in the situation.
Max Weber famously argued in his *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, (1930) against the economic determinism of Karl Marx, that even if much in human life was determined by the economic substructure of ‘relations of production’, nonetheless there were some ways in which the ‘superstructure’ of ideas and beliefs exercised influence even over economic conditions.

Crystal & DeBell 2002.

E.g. Crawford and Rossiter 2006.


E.g. Dawkins 2006.

This is the approach taken by Aristotle; it has been retrieved in recent times by a number of philosophers. Cf. Eagleton 2007.


Geertz 1973, p. 100.

Frankl 1964.


Eckersley 2005. Richard Eckersley is an Australian scientist who has extensively studied youth well-being.

Eckersley 2005, p. 180. German social theorist Arnold Gehlen first suggested this tension between freedom and the habitualisation and institutionalisation of behaviour; see the discussion of his work in Berger and Luckmann (1972, pp. 53-4). Bauman sounds a similar note in his concept of individualisation as a fate rather than a choice in late modern society, as discussed above.


Holism is the notion that the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Husserl’s concept of ‘appresentation’ and Polanyi’s account of ‘tacit meaning’ capture something of this.

See Geertz 1973, p. 91; Schutz 1967.


Wynn 2005.

Bauman 2001a, pp. 7-8. Perhaps this is no more than a rephrasing of Znaniecki’s famous axiom ‘situations that are defined as real are real in their consequences,’ but the application to young people as they fulfill the distinctively late-modern task of constructing their life-narrative on a blank page, without a template, without authoritative canonical forms as a guide, uncovers an important new aspect of their experience: how they define their freedom.

Bouma & Mason 1995; Mackay 1997; Roof 1999.

Mol 1985, p. 58.


Bouma 2006.

Religion in Australia Survey (Mol 1985), World Values Survey (Inglehart 1990), National Social Science Survey (Kelley 1984). Studies focused on groups such as students in particular schools, see Rymarz and Graham (2005, 2006a, 2006b); McLaughlin (2005); Engebretson (2004, 2006, 2007). One study of this type notable for its large scale and long-term perspective is Flynn and Mok (2002).

The most comprehensive, long-term, large scale study of religion in Australia is the series of surveys by Jonathan Kelley and MDR Evans, begun in 1984 as the National Social Science Survey at the Australian National University, and repeated most years since then. In more recent years, it has been known as the International Social Science Survey Australia (IsssA), and has been hosted since 1998 at the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research at the University of Melbourne. Typical of the sample size for Australia was the 1994 sample of 1779 respondents.

Evans & Kelley 2002.

Evans & Kelley 2002, p.36.


Despite the sophisticated analytical methodology of the IsssA, its treatment of religion is less than comprehensive. (It is an ‘omnibus’ survey covering a wide range of topics, not a specialised study of religion.) As we have argued in refuting the ‘belief without belonging’ thesis, religion, even in a strictly sociological sense, does not consist assent to a small number of beliefs and practices. ‘Beliefs’ can survive as religious opinions long after ‘faith’ and even religion, is gone. The IsssA’s measure of belief omits vital
items (belief in Jesus Christ, central to Christian faith, is not part of the scale) and includes others of much less importance; and does not appear sensitive to significant changes in belief that other studies have noted. The procedure used to combine the qualitative, ordinal belief and practice items into continuous variables for use in regression does not appear to result in substantively satisfactory measures.

68 Smith 2005.
70 ‘Creed, Code, Cult and Community’ the succinct summary is from Joachim Wach. Sociologists who treat these residual, private beliefs as religious are implicitly adopting a Jamesian style of definition of religion: ‘The feelings, acts and experiences of [individuals] in their solitude so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine’ (James 1961, p. 42). This definition arises within a highly individualistic psychology, and completely ignores religion’s sociological dimensions.
71 This is a basic premise of the approach to sociology of religion based on the sociology of knowledge, which shows that all knowledge is ‘socially constructed’. Berger and Luckmann pioneered this approach in their treatise on the sociology of knowledge, The social construction of reality (1972), and in each author’s application of this perspective to the sociology of religion (Luckmann 1967; Berger 1969).
72 Charron 1975, pp. 3-9, cited in Gallagher 1990, p. 43.
73 Bellamy et al. 2002, pp. 48-49.
74 Gallagher 1990, p. 45. The explanatory phrases in square brackets are not part of the quotation, but have been added for clarification, representing what Gallagher says elsewhere in his text. For the further development of his thought, see Gallagher (2001, 2003).
75 ‘Unus Christianus, nullus Christianus’ – Joachim Wach’s expression highlights the integral significance of religious belonging for religious faith.
77 France is often cited as an example; Australia retains a reference to God in its Constitution, and sessions of parliament open with the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer; but religious references in political discourse, and even in public debate, are likely to generate negative reactions from secularists. In The culture of disbelief (1993), Yale law professor Stephen Carter argues that the same tendency is evident in the US
78 Chadwick 1975; Martin 1978; McLeod 2000.
79 The literature on the secularisation debate is enormous; for a representative selection, see Bruce (2002). Here some elements will be drawn from the masterly historical treatment of secularisation by David Martin (1978), and from two of the earliest and most sophisticated of secularisation theories: those of Thomas Luckmann and Peter Berger (though the former, because he viewed religion as continuing in a privatised form, centred on self-development, did not regard his theory as a theory of secularisation, and the latter now prefers to emphasise instead the endurance and vigour of religion everywhere else but in Europe). But note also the savage polemical rejection of the secularisation thesis by Stark (1999).
80 ‘Modernisation’ is here defined neutrally – stripping off, as far as possible, the various ideological overlays which have sometimes been attached to it: especially the ‘social-evolutionary thesis’, that modernisation is by definition progress, improvement, betterment of the human condition; that the developed West, especially the USA, provides the ideal template of modernisation; that less modernised societies are inferior, and may in their own interest be compelled to engage in modernisation; that the process is one of liberating peoples from the darkness of religion into the clear light of reason …
81 Bruce 2002.
83 Davie 2002.
84 Luckmann 1967; Berger 1969; Chadwick 1975; Martin 1978; McLeod 2000; Bruce 2002.
85 Lechner 1996.
86 Brown 2001. Brown radically challenges the way social science defines and quantifies religion, emphasising that the core of religion consists, not of individual, countable beliefs or practices, but of the ‘religious discourse’ which individuals use to define their identity. In the previous section of this chapter, we presented a critique of Davie’s notion of ‘belief’ as utilised in the ‘belief without belonging’ thesis, and of the lack, in many sociological discussions, of a holistic view of religion which sees it as involving personal commitment to a ‘faith’ which is a whole way of being and living, with components of beliefs, attitudes, moral principles, rituals and private practices. We argued that this understanding is traditional in sociology, and not a theological accretion. There is much common ground between our position and that of Brown.
Experiences of the ‘great transcendences’ in the religious mysteries, through which believers encountered God, death, the afterlife, are giving way to experiences of ‘minor transcendence’, which take place entirely within the everyday life world (Luckmann 1967, 1990). Instead of embracing the worldview and ethos of one particular tradition and religious community, the individual assembles items from a variety of sources available in the ‘spiritual marketplace’ (Roof 1999) into a loose collage. Similarly, Wuthnow (1998) argues that the interest in spirituality is evidence of weak religious socialisation and the dominance of everyday life by the secular.

In 2003, the European journal of sociology of religion, Social Compass, devoted a special issue entitled ‘Invisible Religion in Europe’ to an exploration of the applicability of Luckmann’s (1967) thesis in the late modern period (Knoblauch 2003). In some respects, religious life in Australia has more in common with that of Europe than with that of the United States. In particular, the decline in participation by younger people in mainstream religion mirrors rather the European pattern of secularisation than the American pattern of apparent continuing vitality (but see later in this section for evidence of decline in the US also). Luckmann’s approach appears to have the potential to explain some important aspects of our situation.


Hirst 2003.

Wuthnow 1998.

For example Grose 2005; Salt 2006.


See for example, McCrindle, 2006a.

Twenty interviews were conducted during pilot testing, and a further seventy-one usable interviews were obtained in Stage 1. The sample selected, and the qualitative methods employed in Stage 1, are fully documented in the first progress report of the project, and in a published article (see Singleton, Mason & Webber 2004).

To be able to draw conclusions with confidence about the whole Australian population of Generation Y, a ‘probability sample’ is required. A random sample of phone numbers across all States and the Northern Territory was drawn by means of the ‘random digit dialling’ technique. Obviously, households without telephones were not included. Respondents were stratified by age, gender and capital-city/rest of State. At the same time, a ‘control group’ aged 25-59 was more lightly sampled so that Generation Y could be compared with the rest of the population up to age sixty. A full account of the technical details of the survey will be found on the project website: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/ccls/spir/sppub/sppub.htm, in Appendix I: Technical report on the survey.

The increased numbers in each age group permit statistically reliable comparisons between them. For reporting results on the whole, the ‘oversampled’ groups then need to be ‘weighted back’ so that they influence the total only in proportion to their true proportion in the population. The tables in this book show percentages based on the weighted figure, which restores the oversampled age groups to their population proportions.

Constraints of cost and interview length dictated a limitation here: the ‘control group’ (25-59) received a shorter form of the survey.


There are some differences between State education systems.

The age group 25-39 corresponds to ‘Generation X’, and 40-59 with the ‘Baby Boomer’ generation. However, note that we are comparing these three generations as they are now, at different stages of life. We will see in chapter 12 that the picture is a little different if we compare Generation Y with the Boomers when they were closer to Generation Y’s present age. We do know that they are notably less religious than the generation before them (the ‘pre-Boomers’, born 1930-1945). On Boomers, pre-Boomers and post-Boomers see Bouma and Mason (1995). (Generation X were called ‘post-Boomers’ before the name ‘Generation X’ was settled on.)
Chapter 3

1 After each Census, Jewish community organisations are quoted in daily newspapers pointing out that they have more members than the number recorded in the Census.
2 The first tables from the 2006 ABS Census of Population were released just as we went to press. For more detailed information, not yet available from the 2006 Census, we have used data from the Census of 2001.
3 These figures were calculated from the first-release tables of the ABS Population Census of 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007) (©ABS).
4 Uniting Church: in the 2006 census, 4.7% of the 15-24 age group were recorded as UCA. In the survey, only 2.7% of Gen Y (aged 13-24) indicated Uniting Church as their denomination; however the small number involved makes this percentage less than completely reliable.
5 The data necessary for this table were not available from the 2006 census when we went to press.
6 The group aged 15-19 in the 2001 Census is not completely identical with that aged 10-14 in the 1996 Census: age cohorts are reduced by deaths, emigration or temporary absence overseas, and are increased by immigration or return from overseas. The only obvious way in which these variations affect the relative balance of religions/denominations is when immigration favours some denominations over others – for example, Buddhists from Vietnam or Catholics from the Philippines. Larger changes from one census to the next in a denomination’s numbers within an age cohort, and particularly in its percentage of the cohort, clearly involve either an increase by individuals joining or newly identifying, or a reduction by others disaffiliating or abandoning a former identification.
7 To avoid tiresomely repeating ‘religion, or, within Christianity, denomination’, the single word ‘denomination’ will most often be used, despite the fact that it does not properly apply to religions other than Christianity.
8 The respondents were aged 13-24; so for some, it was 12 years since they were aged 12, and their change of denomination may have taken place at any point over this period; others were aged 12 the year before the survey; each individual is not measured over the same length of time; the results give us an idea of what has been happening for this moving cohort as a whole.
9 It seems plausible that in the Census, some respondents tick the box corresponding to the denomination in which they were raised.
11 During pretest telephone survey interviews, respondents who indicated that they were not believers and never had been, became quite impatient – understandably – if they were later asked detailed questions on what church they belonged to or their own or their parents’ other religious beliefs or practices. We did not want to insist on these questions if it meant that many would lose patience and hang up the phone – their views were very important to us for obtaining a complete picture of Generation Y. So a series of questions implying religious belief was omitted in these cases.
12 The survey employed CATI technology (Computer-Aided Telephone Interviewing). People’s replies were entered immediately by the interviewer into the computer. Their response to some questions – especially this question on belief in God – determined what other questions they would be asked. As explained in note 1 above, those who stated that they did not believe in God and (in response to a separate question) that they had never done so at any time in the past, were not asked their denomination, nor several sets of questions on religious beliefs and practices.
13 See the discussion of secularisation in Australia in chapters 2, 8 and 12.
14 All the differences by denomination in the bottom row of the table are statistically significant.
15 Statistical significance of our estimates and differences: if you can remember some elementary ‘Stats’ from school or uni, read on. If not, skip this note. With our Gen Y sample of 1219 cases, the margin of error either side of estimates of proportions (percentages) based on the whole of Generation Y is about 2%. Whenever, in this book, we point out a difference between two groups, we mean (unless we explicitly state otherwise) that there is a ‘statistically significant’ difference at the .05 level or better. In simple terms, this means that if someone took repeated samples of this size from the same population, a difference of this magnitude would occur by chance (as a result of random fluctuations in the samples, without there being any real difference in the population) in only one sample out of 20. The margin of error, or ‘confidence interval’ around estimates of differences between one group and another varies greatly, depending on the numbers in
the two groups and the size of the difference. For example: if a difference of 20% on some measure is found between two groups, each containing 400 respondents, the margin of error around this 20% difference is plus or minus 6% - i.e. in repeated samples, nineteen times out of twenty, the difference will fall between 14% and 26%. (Our ‘control sample’ of people older than Generation Y has 400 cases.) Smaller groups or smaller differences will result in larger margins of error. To keep the book accessible to the general reader, the statistical apparatus throughout is kept to a minimum. Other reports from the project contain full statistical details.

16 ‘Other Religions’: Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Neopagan, Other.

17 However, these churches face a new challenge on the relationship between tolerance and inclusiveness, and the need for clearer boundaries; this issue is dealt with in Chapter 5, in the section titled ‘Anglican, Catholic and Uniting churches: the question of boundaries’.

18 As a general rule, the smaller numbers in the Anglican and Other Religions categories make it difficult for differences in the percentages for these two groups, compared with the others, to attain statistical significance, unless the difference is very large (say, more than 12%). But in the ‘Many’ row of the table, all the other differences of 5% or more between denominations are significant at .05 or less.

19 The difference between Catholics (71%) and, Other Christians (54%) is statistically significant.

20 A small number who did not respond or were undecided are omitted from the two following tables; and the responses ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘Agree’ have been combined.

21 All differences between denominations in the bottom row of the table are statistically significant.

22 The proportion who affirm belief in life after death seems strangely high in comparison with other beliefs. We will see in chapter 7 that it is inflated by the very large number who believe, not in the Christian version of the afterlife, but in reincarnation.

Chapter 4

1 For the reasons explained earlier, those who did not believe in God, or were uncertain whether God existed, were not asked this question.

2 ‘Not counting weddings, funerals (if respondent is at school: ‘or religious services during school’,) about how often do you attend religious services?’


4 If the word ‘church’ was not appropriate, the correct term for the place where religious services are held was inserted here. All questions in the survey were similarly adapted, when necessary, to the religion or denomination of the interviewee.

5 As already mentioned, we are unable to compare with the control age groups on this item.

6 NCLS: The National Church Life Survey is an ecumenical organisation supported by a wide range of churches, which conducts annual surveys of church attenders, and also engages in other research. The survey referred to here was the Australian Community Survey in 1998, a wide-ranging survey on religious topics. One of the publications drawing on data from the survey was Bellamy et al. 2002.

7 Dixon et al. 2007 (fieldwork in 2005).

8 ‘The centre of gravity in religion has shifted from authority and tradition to experience’ (William Ralph Inge, Dean of St. Paul’s, scholar and controversialist, in 1926).

9 Dixon et al. 2007 (fieldwork in 2005).

10 ‘… I find myself doing the very things I hate’ (Rom 7:15).

11 For some religions, and for some denominations within Christianity, the wearing of such symbols is seen not as religious, but idolatrous.

12 The influence of church schools will be discussed later. For Catholics who had left school, the ‘Young Christian Workers’ and ‘Catholic Youth Movement’ groups flourished until about the mid-1970s. Involvement of post-school age Catholics in contemporary groups is much lower than in the organisations of that earlier era.

13 The survey interviewers reported, after the survey was complete, that some young people had difficulty understanding the question on whether they had ever made a personal commitment to God. The research team are inclined to believe that this is more likely to be the case with those to whom the idea had never occurred.

14 One line of research on religious experience would see a certain basic level of experience of transcendence as primordial and virtually universal, although much less explicit and reflective than the more developed forms of personal faith and religious practice. See Mason 2004.
Chapter 5

1 An informative set of publications entitled *Australia’s religious communities* was produced by the Christian Research Association in 2005, updating an earlier version produced in 1996 (Hughes 2005). In the earlier version there was a separate volume for each of the major denominations within Christianity and many of the smaller ones, and also for each of the principal religions other than Christianity. Each volume describes the history, beliefs, practices and organisation of the denomination or other religion, and includes a wealth of statistical information drawn from the 2001 Census and (for the Christian groups) the National Church Life Survey of church attenders. Not all of the revised versions appeared in printed form, but all are contained on the CD-ROM.

2 The belief scale combines responses to six questions: God relates personally, Jesus was truly God and rose from the dead, how close the person feels to God, importance of faith in shaping life, whether one or many religions is/are true, belief in miracles worked by God. The six components of the practices scale are: frequency of attendance at religious services, of private prayer, and of private scripture reading, praying aloud with family members, having had a powerful experience of worship, and having made a personal commitment to God.

3 Among Anglicans, Catholics and Other Christians, there is no difference between men and women on the belief scale; however among those with No Religious Identification, there is a substantial difference, because many women in this group follow New Age spiritualities, which share some beliefs with traditional religion, whereas male NRIs are more likely to be Seculars, and to reject all religious and spiritual beliefs. On the religious practices scale, the only male-female difference is that Catholic women score slightly higher than men. The decline over time in gender difference among adherents to traditional religions will be fully discussed in Chapter 12.


5 By mistake, ABS failed to classify ‘Australian Christian Churches’ as Pentecostal in the first release of 2006 census data, merging them instead into ‘Christian not further defined’. The same mistake was made in 2001 and later corrected. So an accurate figure for members of Pentecostal churches for 2006 is not yet available. It is certainly larger than the 1.11% of the population reported in these first-release tables (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007).

6 Statistical significance depends very much on sample size; since some ‘trends’ in the data were observed which could well have attained significance in a larger sample from the 40-59 age group, it is possible to offer some cautious remarks about possible differences indicated by trends in the data.


9 The apparent exception is the item on belief in a higher being, but this was only asked of those who were now unbelievers or uncertain in their belief in God, and so few Other Christians fell into this category that the percentage is not reliable.

10 Sociologists refer to the first explanation as an ‘age effect’, experienced by successive generations at that age; this alternative explanation invokes a ‘cohort effect’ – not a result of age, but of an experience that this age group have had – something that uniquely affected them.

11 This ‘panel study’ approach with the same participants over a lengthy period is increasingly used in other studies, but demands large resources.


13 It may well be true that many of those who do not state a religion in the Census do not identify with any religion or denomination, but other studies have shown that some people who are religious have other reasons for not identifying themselves as such in the Census.

Chapter 6

1 All differences between denominations in the table are statistically significant except those on the Nominal row.

2 We wanted an indicator of the socio-economic status of families. Information was obtained from each participant about parents’ occupations, however teenagers were unlikely to be able to give us accurate information about family income. So we used an indirect measure based on the postcode area where the
family resided. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has developed four ‘Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas’ (SEIFA). Each index summarises a different aspect of the socio-economic conditions of the Australian population using a combination of variables from the Census of Population and Housing. The four indexes are: Education and occupation, Disadvantage, Economic resources and Advantage-disadvantage. They are available for various geographic areas, including postcodes, the area used in this study.

3 Bivariate relationships are those between just two variables – in this case, the first variable is whether the person is Active or not, and the second is e.g. Mother’s church attendance. As explained later in the chapter, this is only a first step of analysis, and not a decisive one: the bivariate relationship may turn out to be ‘spurious’.

4 All factors included here were statistically significant at < .05 (which only indicates that they were unlikely to have occurred as a chance result of sample variability), and more importantly, the relationships were strong, as can be seen from the tables.

5 Multivariate analysis considers simultaneously the relationships between more than two variables. It is explained in more detail below.

6 Fee et al. 1981.

7 The significance of this trend is more fully discussed in chapter 12.

8 There must be a statistical association between the two variables; the putative causal variable must be temporally or logically prior to the effect; other relevant variables which may confound the relationship must be controlled.

9 These relationships are called ‘spurious’: when a third variable influences the other two (a and b), and there is no real relationship at all between a and b. E.g. it is a fact that the birth rate in Norway is higher in areas where the population of storks is also higher. The explanation is in the third following endnote.

10 ‘Explain’ has a limited, technical sociological meaning in contexts like this. Sociologists do not pretend to be able to explain (in the ordinary sense of the word) a person’s relationship with God! God is beyond the ken of social scientists. They are limited to observing human social behaviour. In its technical sense, ‘explain’ means here only to account for the statistical variation between those who are Active and those who are not, by showing the other factors which apparently influence/cause this difference.

11 In the study of complex realities like human beings and societies, only a modest proportion of the ‘variance’ (the variation in the sample, in this case between being Active and not being so) can ever be ‘explained’ or accounted for in terms of known factors. Many significant elements will be unique to the life-history and circumstances of this or that individual – material for the biographer - or will remain hidden from even the most intensive research.

12 ‘Controlling for variables x and y’ in non-technical language means something like this: taking these variables into account in the calculations, so that when we are exploring the relationship between, say, parents’ attendance and child’s level of commitment, we allow for the influence of the denomination to which they all belong, and the type of school the child attends, and perhaps also age and gender and social class. And when we calculate a statistical estimate of their combined influence, does mother’s attendance still make a difference to the child’s level of commitment, or is the latter sufficiently accounted for by the other variables? Using variables as ‘control variables’ refers to the same procedure.

13 Storks and babies in Norway: there are more of both in rural areas. The urban/rural difference explains the increased incidence of both storks and babies, and the apparent relationship between the latter two is spurious.

14 The ‘Nagelkerke R-squared’ of the final model was .65, and the model classified 85% of cases correctly. The apparent relationships between Active status and some demographic variables such as metropolitan residence, noted above, were most likely due to sampling variability: in any large sample, there are numerous apparent associations of this kind, statistically significant but weak. When all variables were considered together, these associations did not retain significance.

15 Evans & Kelley 2004, p. 32.

16 Evans & Kelley 2004, p.72.

17 Findings from a sample can only be ‘generalised’ (i.e. said to hold also in the whole population) if the sample was drawn from that whole population by probability sampling methods. In non-technical terms, if you want to generate findings from a sample which will be valid for the whole Australian population, you must draw the sample in such a way that every person in the population has an equal probability of being selected. That is called simple random sampling; there are other forms of probability sampling; but they are all variations of this basic form.
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18 The notable Australian series of studies by the late Br. Marcellin Flynn, beginning with Some Catholic schools in action (Flynn 1975) and concluding with Catholic Schools 2000 (Flynn & Mok 2002) was limited to selected schools in NSW, but utilised increasingly sophisticated analytical methods, so did not suffer from the second limitation mentioned above.
19 e.g. Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore 1982 in the USA.
20 e.g. Greeley 1982.
21 Neuwien’s Catholic schools in action (1966) appeared in the same year, but was not based on a probability sample, and was heavily criticised on methodological grounds.
22 Greeley & Rossi 1966.
23 Even this classic study was criticised for not adequately separating the effect of family religiousness from that of schooling; but the multivariate techniques of multiple regression and path analysis had at that time not long been developed.
24 Greeley, McCready & McCourt 1976.
25 Notable among subsequent studies were Fee, Greeley, McCready and Sullivan (1981), the third publication in the series based on nationwide probability samples collected by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) of the University of Chicago; also the later series of studies sponsored by the National Catholic Educational Association, including work by AS Bryck and his associates (1984), who pioneered educational applications of the technique of multilevel analysis. Outstanding among the smaller number of later studies which dealt specifically with religious outcomes was Guerra, Donahue and Benson’s The heart of the matter (1990). The contribution of these and many other studies to the question of the impact of denominational schools on religious outcomes is extensively discussed in Convey (1992).
27 Anderson 1971.
29 The issue of valid attribution of effects to causes is called in statistical terminology ‘internal validity’.
30 There was unfortunately not time to ask whether the primary school attended was Government or private, and if private, what if any was its denominational affiliation.
31 Instead of using, as a measure of student religious outcome, whether the student was Active or not (a dichotomous variable), the outcome measures were the (continuous ) scales of belief and practice described earlier in the chapter. Multiple linear regression is the technique of choice for dependent variables of this type. Recall that a student is Active if he /she is either Committed or Regular.
32 The project team made the following statement in response to a concern raised as to whether the project was seeking to evaluate church schools without adequate data or appropriate methods: ‘The project does not seek to evaluate religiously-affiliated private schools, their religious education programs, school liturgies, or chaplains. To do so would require a different method and the collection of quite different data. Taking religious education as an example, evaluation research would require, besides canvassing students’ experience of RE, exploration of the learning objectives / desired outcomes which the various education agencies and schools have established for their programs, the content of the curricula at different levels, the structure of the programs themselves, the manner in which they are implemented, the provision of resources, the preparation of staff, and so on. This is not within the scope or purpose of the Spirit of Generation Y project.
33 The inclusion, within a highly structured survey interview with a large sample, of these interludes of free discussion, usually possible only in the context of a small number of lengthy interviews, brought a unique richness and depth to the data gathered in the survey.
34 Matching the NSYR categories as closely as possible, the denominations in Australia included in ‘Conservative Protestant’ are: Baptist, Churches of Christ, Lutheran, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist, Evangelical, Christian nfd.
35 The Australian denominations included in ‘Mainline Protestant’ are: Anglican and Uniting Church.
36 NSYR uses a 6-point scale, SGY 5-point; for comparison, the ‘top’ half of each scale is used in the table.
37 NSYR and SGY: in this and the following question (‘boring’), the percentages are of teens who attend more than once or twice a year.
38 NSYR asked whether currently involved; SGY whether involved in past year
39 Adding together responses of ‘A lot’, ‘Some’ and ‘A little’.

Chapter 7
Notes

1 Metlikovec, J 2006, ‘God takes an almighty battering’, Herald Sun, 4 August. This article appeared the day after the SGY team released a summary report of the survey findings and made reference to our findings. As will be seen below, the percent of Gen Y who have ever seriously got into Tarot is actually very small, less than 10%.


3 According to the 1996 Australian Census, there were 10,000 Neo-pagans, 0.05% of the population. No counts for these less numerous religious categories were available from the 2006 Census at the time of going to press.

4 Hughes 2005.


6 Bouma 2006.

7 Roof 1999; Lyon 2000.

8 See, for example, Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999; Partridge 2004; Carrette & King 2005; Heelas & Woodhead 2005.


10 Smith 2005, pp. 81-83.


12 Only believers and former believers in God were asked about their exploration of other religions, meaning that 10% of Gen Y New Agers and 36% of Gen Y Seculars were not asked this question. These missing are included in the calculation of percentages and noted in the last row of the table.

13 Time constraints in conducting our survey meant that we could not enquire about the depth of exploration for each of the five religions; if a person had found out general information about one and more specific information about another, then the participant was coded as ‘going a bit further’. Therefore, we cannot provide an accurate breakdown for each religion.


15 Ezzy 2006.

16 Huntley 2006.


18 Bainbridge 1997.

19 Cited in Carrette & King 2005.


21 In her UK study of Iyengar yoga practitioners, Hasselle-Newcombe (2005), found that 60% of her respondents ‘began their practice as an alternative form of exercise’ (p. 311).

22 Source for US data: Smith 2005, p. 43.

23 Aupers & Houtman 2006, p. 201.

24 Francis 2001, p. 194


26 A small few do not hold a mix of alternative beliefs, but have undertaken at least three New Age practices and thus we deemed them to be New Age Participants. They must ‘believe’ in their New Age practice, otherwise they are unlikely to do it.


Chapter 8


2 See Bouma 1992; Beckford 2003.


5 Evans & Kelley 2004, p.35.

6 Section 116 of the Australian Constitution states: ‘The Commonwealth of Australia shall not make any law establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious tests shall be required as a qualification for any public office or public trust under the commonwealth.’
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8 See, for example, Stark and Finke 2000.
10 Bouma 2003, p. 59.
11 Every Australian census has had a question about religious affiliation.
13 See, for example, see also: Ozorak 1989; Roehlkepartain & Benson 1993; Myers 1996; Bao et al. 1999; Regnerus et al. 2003; Bellamy, Evans & Kelley 2004; Mou & Castle 2004; Smith 2005; Regnerus & Uecker 2006.
15 Kolenda 1995.
16 Kolenda 1995.
17 Kolenda 1995.
18 Kolenda 1995.

Chapter 9

1 The phrase ‘from obligation to consumption’ was coined by British scholar Grace Davie (2005), who has argued that there has been a shift in the nature of religion in Northern Europe, from forms of religion that are inherited to forms that are chosen. Much of this change can be attributed to broader socio-cultural factors of the kind we describe in this chapter.
3 Grose 2005; Salt 2006.
4 Hamblett & Deverson 1964. These two authors were the originators of the phrase Generation X. US novelist Douglas Copeland published his book Generation X: Tales of an accelerated culture in 1991 and is widely credited with inventing the term. Copeland was the first, however, to describe the post Boomer generation as ‘Generation X’.
7 Birch & Paul 2003, p. 52.
8 See Trinca & Fox 2004.
9 Grose 2005.
10 Castles 2003, p. 212; de Vaux 2004, p. 184. The fertility rate is the Total Fertility Rate, which ‘represents the number of children a woman would bear in her lifetime is she experienced current age-specific fertility rates at each age of her reproductive life’ (ABS 2003 in de Vaus 2004, p. 204).
11 Salt 2006, p. 72.
12 ABS 2005; data on this topic from the 2006 Census were not available at the time of going to press.
13 Huntley 2006, p. 78.
14 de Vaux 2004, p. 42.
15 see Lash 1990; Featherstone 1991; Bocock 1993.
18 Gauntlett 2002.
20 Harris 2004, p. 4
22 Harris 2004, p. 5.
23 Huntley 2006, p. 16.
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28 Olds, Ridley & Dollman 2006.
29 Olds, Ridley & Dollman 2006.
30 Savage et al., p. 26.
31 Clark 2003.
32 Clark 2003, p. 225.
33 See Possamai (2005) for a discussion of those spiritualities linked more directly to popular culture.
34 See Gibson 2006.
35 Bouma 2006, p. 56.
37 Bouma 2006, p. 45.

Chapter 10
1 See Smith (2005, pp. 233-240) for a discussion, exemplary for its clarity and thoroughness, of the difficulty of establishing that an association between religion and some outcome is actually a relationship of cause and effect.
2 Savage et al. 2006.
3 Clydesdale 2007, p. 199.
4 Saulwick & Muller 2006, p. 2.
5 The NSW Commission for Children and Young People 2007.
6 Mission Australia 2006.
7 This series of statements was developed by Philip Hughes, based on the work of Rokeach (1973) and Schwartz (1994). See Hughes et al. (2003).
8 Percentages in some tables throughout this chapter may not add to 100 because of rounding or because trivial proportions of ‘Don’t know’ or ‘No answer’ responses have been omitted to simplify the table.
9 Nilan & Threadgold 2004.
10 Bocock 1993.
12 Inglehart 1997, p. 4.
13 Mission Australia 2006.
14 Erasmus, Thomas More and a host of Christian humanists since the Renaissance were clearly not exalting the human in a way that rejected the Divine.
15 Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn 2006.
16 These questions were developed by Philip Hughes on the basis of previous research.
17 Eckersley 2005.
18 Active Christians very clearly derived meaning from their relationship with God: believing in God and the afterlife establishes a transcendent dimension of meaning which can transform the significance of even the smallest of life’s details. In addition, nearly all of the Committed, and two-thirds of the Regular said that they had made a ‘personal commitment’ to God. See Table 6.3.
20 Argyle 2002; Myers 2005; Olson & DeFrain 2006.
21 Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott & Hill 1999; Olson, & DeFrain 2006.

Chapter 11
1 Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Teaching and Training 1991; Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Teaching and Training 1989.
7 Smart, Sanson, da Silva & Toumbourou 2000.
9 Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood 2002.
Notes

10 SEIFA Index of Education and Occupation, in which a high score indicates a relatively large proportion of people with a higher educational qualification or who are undergoing further education; SEIFA Index of Disadvantage, in which a high score indicates that an area contains, relative to other areas, smaller proportions of people on low incomes or in unskilled occupations.

11 See the discussion of Wuthnow in the Spirituality section of Chapter 2.

12 Schwadel 2005.

13 In 2004, a large tsunami devastated parts of several Asian countries, particularly Indonesia. An appeal was launched which received very strong support.

14 If the amounts are arranged in order of magnitude, the median amount is the middle one. A mean, or average, can be excessively influenced by one or two extreme cases.

15 Lyons & Nivison-Smith 2006.


18 Will and Cochran classified US Protestants as: Conservative Protestants i.e. Baptists, Protestant fundamentalists; Moderate Protestant i.e. Lutherans, Methodists etc; Liberal Protestant i.e. Presbyterians, Episcopalians.

19 Wuthnow 2002.


23 Smidt 2005.


26 Smidt 2005, p.23.


29 Roehlkepartain & Benson 1993.


31 This is a rather different type of scale. It ranges from -2.5 to +2.5, and the mean of the scale is 0.24 (pretty near zero).


33 Lam 2002.

34 Kanagy 1992; Schwadel 2005.


37 Smith 2003b.

38 Weidenfeld 2003.


40 Smith 2005.

41 Putnam 2000.

42 Smetana & Metzger 2005.

Chapter 12

1 Wuthnow 1999.

2 See the discussion of ‘belief without belonging’ in Chapter 2.


5 Mol 1971.

6 Smith 2005. But the male-female difference in adherence to Traditional religion is no longer universal; some of the more secular societies in Europe show a lack of difference between younger men and women similar to what has been found in Australia.


8 Chapter 11, Tables 11.2, 11.7.
In terms of Weber’s classic division of the sources of authority into charismatic, traditional and rational, the churches have moved some distance from traditional towards rational, whereas it is the ‘charismatic’ elements in religion which are likely to appeal more to women.

McCrindle 2006a, p. 15.

See chapter 2, endnote 66, at the end of the section discussing the IsssA.

Data for this table were derived by ‘online analysis’ of the most recent WVS surveys, available on the site: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.com/ by cross-tabulating responses to the question on belief in God by age group from the 1981 WVS in Australia. This is as close as we can get to a Boomer group matching the age range of Gen Y in 2005. The World Values Survey data online offer only the age range 15-29. This age range is a mismatch in three obvious ways: it includes one birth year, 1966, which is actually the first birth year of the oldest members of Generation X, it extends 5 years beyond age 24, and it includes only the oldest 15 years of the 20-year Boomer cohort, omitting those born 1946-50. However, it enables a comparison between Gen Y and the Boomers at periods when each generation was in its teens and twenties. It is adequate for the point we need to make here.

We do not have survey data for pre-Boomers when they too were in their teens and early twenties; the closes we can come is when they were aged 30-49. The source is the same World Values Survey of 1981 – looking this time at the two older age-groups.

Bouma and Mason 1995, pp. 39-53, especially pp. 42, 44. That study used data from the National Social Science Survey of 1989, when the Boomers were aged 24-43. Bellamy et al. come to the same conclusion from their analysis of the Australian Community Survey data: “… all age groups born in the postwar era [are] much less likely to be church attenders than age groups born in the prewar period” (2002, p. 22).

Only a sociology that is also deeply historical can provide a full account of the factors shaping the Baby-Boomers and Generations X and Y. We have confined ourselves to studying their spirituality, but the changes we have noted must be seen in the context of the world economic developments and political movements of the last half-century which have impacted on Australian society and culture, such as the student revolutions of the late sixties and seventies, the Vietnam war and the polarisation of Australian society around it. Historians and sociologists will be engaged for many years yet in weighing the consequences of these developments for today’s society and its youth.

These percentages were calculated conservatively: the base of the percentages is the entire 15-29 group, including the ‘missing’ – those who responded ‘Don’t know’, or did not answer. If, as is often done (legitimately, in some circumstances) one omits the missing from the base on which percentages are calculated, the percentage (of valid responses) can appear much higher.

Data for this table were derived by ‘online analysis’ of the most recent WVS surveys, available on the site: http://www.worldvaluessurvey.com/ by cross-tabulating responses to the question on belief in God by age group.

‘Establishment’ in the technical legal sense, meaning that the religion is established by law (usually in the Constitution) as the religion of the country.

The data for French and English-speaking Canada are apparently combined in the version of the WVS available on the Web for online analysis.

The question was simply: ‘Do you belong to a religious denomination?’ Yes / No.

Question: ‘How often do you attend religious services?’ The table shows the total of the response percentages indicating attendance monthly or more often.

Martin 1978.


Geertz 1973, pp. 109ff. The very word ‘authority’ now evokes sensations of oppression; but may still be understood in its authentic sense: that of a legitimate claim on the free cooperation of rational subjects possessed of human dignity.

See the evidence cited in the project’s second report, p. 19.

Ireland 1988, pp. 30, 44.


Sociologist of religion Andrew Greeley has done more hard-edged statistical analysis of religious beliefs and values than anyone else in the field, yet some would consider his finest and most insightful book to be his later work *Religion as Poetry* (1996).

This NSYR question about the truth of religions was rather complex, and not too much weight should be attached to any particular response. The response options were: ‘There is very little truth in any religion’; ‘Many religions may be true’; ‘Only one religion is true’. The responses are insightfully interpreted by Smith (2005, pp. 73-75), highlighting especially the multiple potential meanings of the ‘many religions’ option.

The NSYR question was: ‘Some people think that it is okay to pick and choose their religious beliefs without having to accept the teachings of their religious faith as a whole. Do you agree or disagree?’

Those with no religious identification in the SGY were not asked this question, which contained the phrase ‘without accepting the teachings of your religion as a whole’; a high proportion of them did not believe in God or were uncertain, and had already responded that they had no religion or denomination with a set of teachings.

Smith 2005, p. 143.

Chapter 10, Table 10.1.

Table 10.5.

Talcott Parsons, doyen of a previous generation of US sociologists, translator of several key works of Weber and founder of the once highly influential ‘structural functionalist’ school of theory, often drew attention to the extent to which important humanistic elements of the Judaeo-Christian ethic had become embedded in the foundations of formerly Christian Western societies, and no longer depended for their maintenance on the existence of a large body of active Christians or on religious institutions.

In one of her novels set in the not-too-distant future, Iris Murdoch pictures youth, frighteningly, but not unrealistically, as ‘the ferals’.

Savage et al. 2006, pp. 36-37.

See the more extensive description and analysis in Savage et al. 2006, pp. 38-89.

The classic study of the intellectual roots and current manifestations of individualism in American life is Robert Bellah et al. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and commitment in American life* (1985). Except for his discussion of the uniquely American traditions he identifies as Republican and Biblical, his analysis of individualism, its philosophical heritage and its current effects, especially on religion, applies not just to the US, but to Western society generally, especially to English-speaking nations. The same is true of Christian Smith’s analysis of individualism among youth in *Soul Searching* (2005).

Gen Y may not know the Sinatra version – it’s far from their kind of music; but it still seems to have the power to provoke a raucous, approving chorus from men of their parents’ generation when it comes over the music system in a public bar.


Gehlen, cited in Berger & Luckmann 1972, pp. 53-4

Eckersley 2005, pp. 170-184; Durkheim 1897/1951.

Chapter 13

1 One of us (Mason), wearing another hat, has past experience and a continuing interest in youth ministry.
2 McCrindle 2006a, p. 13.
5 McCrindle 2006c.
7 McCrindle & Beard 2006, p. 25.
9 Commanding from the rear – like Gilbert and Sullivan’s ‘General Who Led His Army From Behind’ – an older style of leadership still in use here and there.
10 Mason 2004.
11 McCrindle 2006a, pp. 11, 15, 17.
‘Experience,’ so runs the proverb, ‘is a great teacher of fools’. This does not deny that in some matters experience is the best or even the only way to learn; but deplores the inability of some to learn in other ways things that, if experienced, may be severely damaging: it would be tragic if someone were to ‘learn’ only by experience that 10,000 volts kills, or that LSD can cause psychosis.

Until a few years ago, ‘analysing an argument’ was a component of Year 12 English in at least some states.

See the analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 of the reasons given in the survey for non-affiliation and non-attendance, and in chapter 8 for non-belief. Evans and Kelley (2004, pp. 81-94) report Australian views on evolution from the IssA.


Dawkins 2006.