THE STUDY OF AUSTRALIAN FOLK RELIGION
SOME THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

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This paper is concerned with an analysis of the variety of empirical manifestations which can be subsumed under the general heading of folk religion in Australian society. It is based on the premise that *a priori,* there is no reason to assume that the processes of secularization in contemporary society necessitate the total demise of religion. Hence there is an attempt to specify some theoretical approaches which may help articulate the reasons for this assumption within a sociological framework.

I have summarised elsewhere the evidence suggesting that secularization is indeed occurring in our society.[1] This evidence is not without its limitations, which may be briefly summarised thus: secularization has become something of a *social myth* for sociologists who have used (or in some cases misused) specific studies and concepts developed in a variety of empirical and theoretical settings and applied them to contemporary societies for ideological reasons (Glasner, 1976). In most cases, these reasons are implicit (and doubtless also unrecognized) in their work, and usually take the form of some notion of what Robertson (1970:240) has called 'presentism' or 'that posture which tends to claim the uniqueness of the modern period, clouds our judgement as to the long-drawn-out historical unfolding of changes we diagnose in the modern world and also persuades us that the changes we see are inevitably coming to some early point of termination or fruition'.

However, in spite of this, changes in the nature of religion in modern society are occurring, and these are often not wholly welcomed by those whom we may refer to here as 'traditionally religious'. They would see religion as an ailing institution, a mere reflection of its glorious past. Whatever our own views, this position has its advantages, as Demerath (1974:1) has noted, for it allows the sociologists to legitimately don the garb of the physician who learns more by studying *illness* than he does by investigating *health*.

Two further points need to be made before the 'illness' can be diagnosed. The first concerns the commonplace that the decline of religion should not be identified with its demise. Institutions in society may come and go for various reasons, but these have to be very carefully specified before religion can be banished forever. Secondly, religion and religiosity must not always be identified with their *institutional* manifestations. There is a conceit, as David Martin has rightly noted in his now classic attack on the concept of secularization, that assumes an 'historical baseline (eleventh to thirteenth centuries?) when men were "really religious",' (1969:36). Studies are now becoming available which suggest that religion in feudal society had nowhere near the hold over the people that history of institutional religion may suggest. Keith Thomas in his *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971) has gone so far as to suggest that we do not know enough about feudal society to make any judgements concerning the decline of religious institutions in modern society. In his judgement, the distinction between religion and magic was not one made by the common people of the 16th and 17th centuries, let alone any earlier. He concludes (Thomas; 1971:516) that such people not only held both sets of beliefs together, making no distinction between them, but also would have been indignant if anyone had suggested they were anything other than devout citizens.

These two points bring us to the heart of the matter at hand; if religion is alive and well and living in Australia, would we do best to look for it among the 'common people' and not the religious institutions? In addition, should we be surprised to find that the

religion of the 'common people' (and I clearly use this term to designate you and me) is more than a little tainted with traditionally non-religious beliefs? For example, I am reminded of a parish minister interviewed on television during the Whitlam administration who had, along with his congregation, prayed to God that Jim Cairns be sacked. The parallels with this instrumental approach to the manipulation of this–worldly means and ends and those of magic need not be elaborated on further.

However, we may certainly agree with Thomas Luckmann who notes, in *The Invisible Religion* that:

> One thing we may assert with confidence:
> The norms of traditional religious institutions – as congealed in an 'official' or formerly 'official' model of religion – cannot serve as a yardstick for assessing religion in contemporary society. (Luckmann; 1967–91)

Official religion, that is, institutional religion, may include the religion of the common people, but this is not to suggest more than an empirical correlation.

The Concept of Folk Religion

The concept of folk religion, as originally suggested by Mensching (1964), makes a fairly common distinction between communal and associational forms of sociation and is contrasted with Universal religion. E. Wilbur Bock (1966) extends the discussion by substituting 'official' religion for universal religion, thus bringing it in line with later analyses. He suggests, following Mensching, that

> The folk religions have persisted because people are not completely differentiated from primary group relations but maintain relationships in communities through which . . . . . folk beliefs are transmitted. Individuals are reluctant to relinquish these folk beliefs because they are symbols of group membership and because, as Mensching suggests, the holy or sacred items of universal religion are too remote for the daily lives of the believers. (Bock; 1966:205.)

David Martin (1967:74) has labelled this series of interconnected attitudes and beliefs 'subterranean theologies'. Robert Towler (1974:149) has drawn attention to the complex of often disparate beliefs which lie behind religious institutional framework in his conceptualisation of 'popular' or 'common' religion. Robert Bellah, talking specifically about American society, has isolated a

phenomenon existing alongside, although differentiated from, institutional forms of religion, which he labels 'civil religion', following Rousseau.

This embarrassment of terms constitutes more of a hindrance to the sociologist than a help. It is not entirely clear from the discussion how much similarity of meaning at a theoretical level is involved, and the overall impression is one of empirical sleight of hand. Most definitions of folk religion, whatever it may be called, appear to be negative ones, which delimit it in terms of what it is not, namely official, church or institutional religion. This leaves the field wide open for the sociological entrepreneur to develop a new sub–area, and give it a new name.

One interesting example of this is based upon the 'third term' in the church–sect controversy: mysticism (Troeltsch, 1931). It is generally accepted (see for example, the discussion by Wallis, 1974) that mysticism forms the basis of religious movements called 'cults' in modern society. By virtue of their emphasis upon the role of charismatic authority in their development and organisation they are usually transitory in nature. However, they develop in what Colin Campbell has described as 'the cultic milieu' which sounds suspiciously like some of the elements which give rise to folk religion and subterranean theologies.

> The cultic milieu can be regarded as the cultural underground of society. Much broader, deeper and historically based than the contemporary movement known as *the* underground; it includes all deviant belief–systems and their associated practices. Unorthodox science, alien and heretical religion, deviant medicine, all comprise elements of such an underground. In addition, it includes collectivites, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs. Substantively it includes the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilization, of faith healing and nature cure. (Campbell; 1972:122)

In a similar vein, Charles Lemert (1975) attempts to define 'non–church religion' with reference to three main variables: its ethos, or social base, which corresponds closely to Campbell's 'cultic milieu'; reification, by which the ethos is transformed from human activity into objective facticity; and cosmization, or the rooting of the ethos in something transcendent. He then concludes that non–church religion exists simply 'where persons take it for granted that their own ethos corresponds to the meaning of the cosmos' (Lemert;1975:192). However it is unclear just how the three elements which make it up can be operationalised in the way that Lemert himself considers

necessary. Such broad conceptions can be applied to a variety of non–religious as well as non–church phenomena which poses an insurmountable problem for Lemert's methodology.

We may conclude, therefore, that the exact meaning of such concepts as folk religion, common religion, subterranean theology and civil religion remains essentially unclear. This appears to be the case because they are often inclusively defined in a negative way. Sociologists seem clear about what they are *not*, but a little less clear about what exactly they *are*. The next part of this discussion will look at some more substantive examples of folk religion (or perhaps, more specifically, folk beliefs), in order to clarify the concept more rigorously.

It has been suggested that the study of folk religion is still in its sociological infancy. Most sociologists have concentrated upon more orthodox interpretations of religious phenomena, which have the advantage of being theologically as well as sociologically circumscribed, and present the investigator with coherence and structure. This leaves aside discussion of the point made by Towler (1975:153) concerning those traditional sociologies of religion which fall into what Worsley has labelled the 'natural disease of academics': over systematization. The serious student of subterranean theologies, however, is faced with a diversity that almost beggars the imagination. His plight is furthered by the semi–structured or unstructured nature of the objects of his research, as well as their apparent internal incoherence. Some of the richness and variety can be illustrated by reference to the following cases.

The Hare Krishna Movement

It is probably a good idea to use a fairly well developed cultic movement as the first example of the kind of social formation under discussion. Cults, as noted earlier, have become objects of interest only recently, and mainly because of the growth of new, exotic and esoteric religions in western society which, according to Wallis (1974:299) reached their peak in the late 1960's. Characteristically, cults are based upon the charismatic appeal of the leader, who propounds a deviant ideology and practice as defined by normal societal conventions.

These factors are probably most clearly seen in the case of the Hare Krishna movement, which was formed in 1966 by 'His Divine Grace A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada' who claims to be in a line of succession to the Lord Sri Krishna who first spoke the Bhagavad-gita. Initially two centres were established in Australia, one in Sydney, which had some 45 devotees in 1972 and one in Melbourne which had 30 (Breckwoldt 1973:70). Krishna Consciousness teaches that there is no reality other than Krishna, rejects any form of rational planning and backs this up with a powerful ritual, the chanting of the Krishna Mantra 2,000 times per

day. As Beckwoldt (1973:71) notes, this has the manifest function of cleansing the spirit and communicating with Krishna. It also has the latent function of keeping the devotee fully occupied and thus unlikely to succumb to the temptations that were the cause of his joining the cult in the first instance. The deviant nature of the group is well illustrated by their distinctive clothing, shaven heads and public performance of San Kirtana – chanting in the street. The group is clearly a part of capitalist society, running a flourishing business in the manufacture and sale of incense, Indian clothing and literature. Its members are also opposed to organised religion, often as the result of disillusionment. Breckwoldt quotes one relatively senior member of the Sydney group

> Christianity tells you what not to do but not what to do or how to do it. Here everything is combined and our life is one . . In the outside world everyone is concerned with 'who am I? . . . . . Am I the great businessman? Am I a great footballer? Am I a great lover?' Here I am one thing, a servant of God!
> (Breckwoldt 1972:7)

Typically, Hare Krishna members are individuals who have had little or no success in the 'outside world', who have experimented with alternative lifestyles in the past and who have frequently been addicted to drugs (Breckwoldt; 1973, O'Brien; 1973). The social organisation of the group is clearly defined and its membership closely circumscribed. It provides an alternative lifestyle and belief system to that commonly found in the existing culture.

Its emphasis on ritual behaviour and its anti–rationalist ideology indicates its close link with the subterranean theologies discussed earlier. In addition, it is one of a variety of such groups which range from the Divine Light Mission to the Church of Scientology. For the sociologist, the Hare Krishna movement and similar cults are relatively easy to study once access has been gained. Their belief systems may be irrational and/or incoherent, but they are clearly functional for the membership and, as with Scientology for example, very well documented. Campbell summarises these concerns in regard to the cultic milieu:

> Both the culture and organisational structure of the milieu represent deviant forms of the prevailing religious and scientific orthodoxies in combination with both expressive and instrumental orientations. Two important elements within the milieu are the religious tradition of mysticism and the personal service practices of healing and divination.
> (Campbell; 1972:135)

Social Movements

Cultic movements are still clearly recognisable as religious movements, even though they fall well outside the sphere of 'official religions'. Social movements, however, may also be religious without apparently laying claim to be so, and in some circumstances rejecting the notion outright. Wilkinson (1971:27) suggests that three main characteristics serve as precondition for social movements:

1. A social movement is a deliberate collective endeavour to promote change in any direction and by any means, not excluding violence, illegality, revolution or withdrawal into 'utopian' community.

2. A social movement must evince a minimal degree of organisation, though this may range from a loose, informal or partial level of organisation to the highly institutional and bureaucratised movement and the corporate group.

3. A social movement's commitment to change and the *raison d'être* of its organisation are founded upon the conscious volition, normative commitment to the movement's aims or beliefs and active participation on the part of the followers or members.

One such social movement which may also qualify as a folk religion is the Conservation and Environmentalist Movement.[2] It is clearly apocalyptic in nature, and John Maddox (1972) has gone so far as to label it the 'Doomsday Syndrome', describing the techniques used by its followers as similar to those of

> old preachers who would usher their listeners towards heaven with graphic accounts of what hell is like (p.101)

A 1970 issue of *Environment* includes the now classic cartoon of the bearded prophet whose tattered placard bears the immortal 'Prepare to meet the recycler'. However, the Environmental Movement is more closely related to those deviant forms of scientific orthodoxies mentioned by Campbell above. Instead of the perfection of a world created by God, there is an ecosystem in stable equilibrium. Certainly, it is a social movement concerned with promoting radical change, but it is not so much concerned with equalising social inequality as it is with restoring the balance of nature, with its pre-Christian and Eastern mystic overtones. Its membership is active and vociferous (as in the Lake Pedder controversy) and occasionally violent, as shown recently in Western Australia.

A more introversionist off-shoot of the Environmentalist Movement which rarely hits the headlines is the commune or 'alternative community' (Rigby 1974). These have always been popular in the history of Christianity either as Utopian communities or millenarian movements (Cohn, 1970). In contemporary society, however, they have a broader ideological base, and often exhibit an idealistic back-to-nature syndrome also characteristic of some aspects of Environmentalism.

By their very nature, such alternative communities are difficult to find and harder still to study. Peter Cock, in his article on Alternative Life Styles (1974) suggests that they vary tremendously in style and membership in Australia. Rigby and Turner (1972), in their study of the Findhorn Community in Britain argue that a re-orientation of the sociology of religion can start at this level. The community is a religious one, but not in any official way. This is made clear in Rigby and Turner's quotation from a statement about the history of Findhorn.

> The community at Findhorn consists of a group of people pioneering a new way of living. There are no blue prints . . . . . my wife Eileen hears the still small voice within and receives detailed guidance which we have followed with astonishing results . . . . . We are living a way of life which is undenominational and therefore cannot be labelled . . . . Our aim is to bring down the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth **and therefore everything must be as near perfect as possible** . . . . .

Although the community is sited on a sandy and wind-swept part of the Scottish coast, it produces sufficient vegetables on two acres of ground to be virtually self sufficient. This is seen as the working of divine laws demonstrated specifically so that others, who are willing to learn, can see and recognise. The authors conclude that it is difficult to label Findhorn as just another sect:

> While Findhorn draws on the mystical Christian theme, it also combines adventism (the Age of Aquarius), dualism (the light and darkness), animism (the elementals) and aspects of the drug culture. (Rigby and Turner 1972:84)

This last point, of course, opens the way to analysing a very broad range of phenomena in this way. They may be loosely characterised by the term counter-culture, as used for example by Theodore Roszak (1970) or the anti-science movement (as discussed by Cotgrove, 1976). However the extent to which, for example, the Politics of Ecstasy can be classified as a folk religion is open to some reservation, although the noted Catholic sociologist Andrew Greeley in his article on 'Superstition, Ecstasy and Tribal Consciousness' (1970) describes it as one of the new religions which is also certainly very old and concludes that: 'the tribal Gods are being worshipped once again, in substantial part as a protest against the hyper-rationalist society'.

The Occult

Another group of tribal gods 'worshipped once again' falls loosely under the heading of the Occult. In terms of social organisation, the Occult, which ranges from Astrology to Witchcraft, is much more individualistic and more clearly instrumental than either cults or religious social movements. Part of this stems from a concern with magic and part from the disparate nature of the so-called 'Occult Sciences' themselves. For example, Astrology, the belief that the time and place of a person's birth affects his or her personality and reaction to the world, does not require any elaborate form of social organisation for its maintenance, although it does require practitioners who, in principle, can be you or I. Recently 186 prominent American scientists publicly discredited Astrology in stating that there is 'no scientific foundation for its tenets' (National Times, 15-20/9/1975:32). Defendants of Astrology argue, however, that it is more than fortune-telling and is based upon ancient and pre-scientific conceptions about the universe and man's position in it.

Undoubtedly Astrology, or at least its representation in newspapers and magazines in the form of horoscopes, is popular in Australia. Hans Mol, in his Religion in Australia Survey in the late 1960's asked adult respondents whether they ever acted upon the advice of their stars. Although 85% said they never did, 13%, a significant proportion, said they did often or sometimes. In fact, Mol was forced to conclude that for 'some of these people the horoscope takes the place of Christianity . . . . . .' (Mol; 1971:3). It should also be noted that astrologers are not limited only to stargazers, but include such groups as palmists, graphologists, numerologists and tea-readers. Abercrombie *et al* (1970) have labelled them: 'Gods of the Gaps'.

Practitioners of Astrology in Australia have formed a Federation, which clearly acts as some form of professional association. Thus it reacted strongly to the 1975 Anglican Church report on the Occult, calling it a 'classic example of cheap sensationalism' and suggesting that the members of the Anglican Church should 'look within the structure of their own church to find the cause for falling attendances instead of blaming us and the occult sciences' (Daily Mirror 18/8/75:7).

This report suggested that the Occult is a growing force in Australian society, investigating a whole range of practices including astral projection, black magic, bone pointing, seances, white magic and witchcraft. It even suggested prohibiting the sale of Ouija boards and Tarot cards, basing the recommendations on studies of the involvement of Australian school children in the Occult. Further evidence for the popularity of Witchcraft and Satanism can be found in the rapid growth of magazines devoted specifically to it, such as *Man, Myth and Magic* and *Witchcraft Today*, and the popularity of such films as *Rosemary's Baby*.

Together these elements of the Occult form a very basic return to old faiths and pagan religions which modern Christianity has increasingly dismissed as nonsense. Whereas early Christianity was

happy to accommodate many elements of folk religion, including such symbols as the Christmas tree, holly, ivy and mistletoe, these have now become sources of tension and conflict. Bock (1966) uses the example of St. Nicholas to show how Christianity institutionalised folk deities and pagan gods by providing a functional alternative. The official churches now complain that Christmas has become de-Christianised, on the one hand, and that the old folk beliefs are reasserting themselves, on the other. The point was made, at the start of this whole discussion, that folk beliefs and practices may well always have been present as part of the official religion. It is of interest to the sociologist, of course, to discover whether they are now becoming increasingly autonomous.

Anzac and All That

The concept of civil religion developed by Robert Bellah (1967) has had quite a disproportionate impact upon the sociology of religion. It is based upon the fairly well-known phenomenon that as society moves from communal to associational social ties, the normative structure, once very specific, becomes generalised. Thus, in modern society

> "An area of flexibility must be gained in economic, political and social life in which the specific norms may be determined in considerable part by short-term exigencies in the situation of action, as by functional requisites of the relevant social sub-system. Ultimate religious values lay down the basic principles of social action . . . . the religious system does not attempt to regulate economic, political or social life in great detail." (Bellah, 1958)

American society, like Australia, is made up of people from many countries and cultures. The separation of Church and State has guaranteed their religious liberty. However, suggests Bellah, there still exists a unitary religious dimension:

> Although matters of personal religious belief, worship and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share . . . . . (They) provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life . . . . . The public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that I am calling American civil religion.
> (Bellah, 1967)

The term and tone was set in the basically Christian elements of the Declaration of Independence and Thanksgiving Day speeches.

However, it transcends Christianity by incorporating folk beliefs dear to the hearts of all Americans such as Democracy, American Israelism and sacrifice - especially in just wars on foreign soil. Bellah sees civil religion as the overarching generic form of religion in American society. Clearly, the situation in Australia will be slightly different, because the specific nature of Australian religious history differs from the American case. However, elements of a *potential* Australian civil religion are readily discernible in the essentially Christian nature of many of our institutions (for example, the use of the Lord's prayer at the start of each session of Parliament), the whole Anzac ritual and the myths of mateship and sacrifice associated with it. It is worth noting, in conclusion, that Thomas and Flippen (1972) in their empirical study of American civil religion, found little direct evidence that such a concept existed in reality.[3]

The Great Australian Religion

No discussion of folk religion in our society would be complete without mention of that great Australian religion 'Aussie Rules'. Sport as religion is not a new sociological conception. Cohen, discussing America's great 'religion', baseball, makes the following points (and it is instructive to substitute football for baseball in this passage) :

> To be sure, there may be people who go to a baseball game to see some particular star, just as there are people who go to church to hear a particular minister preach; but these are phenomena in the circumference of the religious life. There are also those blasé persons who do not care who wins so long as they can see what they call a good game - just as there are people who go to mass because they admire the vestments or the intoning of the priest - but this only illustrates the pathology of the religious life. The truly religious devotee has his soul directed to the final outcome; and every one of the extraordinarily rich multiplicity of movements of the baseball game acquires its significance because of its bearing on that outcome. Instead of purifying only fear and pity, baseball exercises and purifies all of our emotions . . . . .(Cohen 1964:37)

Robert Coles (1975) has argued recently that, at the very least, football is a form of 'surrogate religiosity'. He notes that individuals rarely go to games alone, that allegiances are symbolically displayed (rosettes and car stickers), that the movement between the world of the profane and that of the sacred is facilitated by the exchange of feelings, sentiments and expectations over several drinks before the game, and that the sins of the past (the sins of the opposing team) are given symbolic absolution through the rehearsal of various possible outcomes (Coles 1975:67). During the game itself, the feelings of the

individual members of the crowd are transcended and all become one. Two further points can be made within the Australian context. The first concerns the role of the charismatic figures on the field, like Ron Barassi, and the charismatic appeal of some clubs, like Richmond or Carlton. Clearly these provide a possible focus for religious fervour not unlike that which characterises cultic movements. The second, also with reference to cultic movements, concerns the deviant nature of the participation. This may range from the wearing of club colours in normal non-game situations such as going to work, to the quite frightening displays of aggression which are part and parcel of spectator participation at every game. Professor Turner (The Age, 7 /10/1972:13) observed at one football match

> a youngish junior-executive type removed his beer can from his lips long enough to remark to the umpire: You rotten, bloody, commo, poofter, mongrel bastard!

Turner then went on to comment that this 'fine assembly of Australian political, racial and sexual prejudices' seemed to act as a satisfactory form of purgation for the barracker. Certainly the threats and violence are integral rites in the ritual of the game and allow patterns of behaviour which, if repeated outside, would incur the wrath of the wider society, as evidenced by the reaction of the police and public to the hooliganism of English soccer fans (Harrison, 1974).

Sport generally, and Aussie Rules in particular, plays a significant role in the makeup of folk beliefs in Australian society. Along with mateship and beer, it forms the basis of Australia's cultural style. Little wonder, therefore, that a combination of all three, with a chance to release the tension of daily monotony and the possibility of achieving, if only for a few moments, ecstatic self-transcendence, results in an experience which even non-sociologists would describe as religious.

Some Theoretical Considerations

Finally, it is necessary to bring together some of the diverse threads illustrated by the empirical variation of folk religion and belief in Australia. This project needs to be carried out on both micro- and macro-levels. The place of folk beliefs, or subterranean theologies or common religion, needs to be theorised within the social formation we call the capitalist mode of production. This locates them clearly within the wider social structure and allows us to introduce such sociological concepts as anomie and alienation, social class and social status. The fabric of social structure in industrial capitalism is a frail one, which is easily pierced. Ideology is part of the thread that holds it together. While the Protestant Ethic may represent the spirit of capitalism (Weber 1930) it is not enough to keep it alive in the present day. Most of the examples discussed above indicate a rejection, in one form or another, of the dominant Christian mode and its replacement

by a range of alternatives rooted in a bewildering variety of backgrounds ranging from Eastern mysticism, through pre-Christian symbols, to modern science.

In addition, many of the examples quoted can be seen as a return to pre-industrial, communal forms of sociation. The impersonality of social life, the lack of individual control over individual destiny, the dependence upon secondary social relationships and the apparent inhuman rationality all contribute strongly to this desire. Only a very few are in the position to abandon their lifestyles in order to seek new ones and such individuals are usually already marginal in society. For the rest, such preoccupations become part-time affairs, to be indulged in at the weekends, or on holidays, or even on the occasional evening. In this way, of course, such alternative forms of religiosity in no way differ from those found in official religions, which David Martin once described as clubs for the clubbable classes. Truzzi, in his discussion of the Occult revival in the United States, notes that for the majority

> involvement in the Occult is a leisure-time activity and a fad of popular culture, rather than serious religious involvement in the search for new sacred elements (Truzzi 1972:29)

My contention here is to state that this viewpoint, although it has some truth, bypasses the most important element: the concept of the religious. I have explored this concept elsewhere in some detail (Glasner 1976) and will therefore only reiterate the major points here.

I would argue that a truly theoretical account of folk religion and belief is possible at the micro-level through the posing of a distinction between religion on the one hand and the religious on the other. The former identifies the common-sense, taken-for-granted definition of religion in our society: churches, sects and denominations. The latter bypasses these and provides a sociological account of the specific form of social interaction which allows us to isolate religion in the sorts of areas discussed above. *Religious* forms of interaction are found in essentially communal forms of sociation; they are characterised by piety, authority and mystery; and they are not necessarily present all the time. In short, religious forms of interaction are characteristics of both official religion on the one hand and folk religion on the other. This conceptualisation allows the sociologist to get beneath the facade of taken-for-granted reality in order to illuminate the real mechanisms of societal formation.

In conclusion, it is clear that folk beliefs or folk religion are an important element in the religious life of Australian society. It is also apparent that they lack precise formulation within the sociological literature, which treats them on the one hand as derivations of the mystically-based cult and on the other as some loose form of generalised civil religion. In between ranges the depth and breadth of the 'cultic milieu' and its various subterranean theologies. Macro-

sociological theorising has not yet managed to come to terms with the phenomenon, except in general functionalist terms and clearly a lot of work needs to be done to show just how such movements articulate with capitalist social formations. My own attempts, at the analytical level of social interaction, at least provide a key to identifying religiosity and distinguishing it from its non-religious modes, independently of the institutional manifestations commonly labelled religion.

In summary, three main points stem from this conclusion. Firstly, it is necessary for sociologists to 'tune in' to aspects of Australian Society that are suggestive of overarching, normative structures with sacred reference at the macro-level and the specific nature of religious social relationships at the micro-level. This will help isolate folk religion and distinguish it from the 'official' forms. Hence, secondly, the study will require a necessary historical and Australian dimension. Folk beliefs are, after all, the property of the folk who hold them. Finally, it is necessary to recognise that such a study may well reveal areas of religiosity which, by their nature, have not previously been considered 'religion'.

Notes

1. In Glasner (1975). This evidence, however, is very sketchy. Australian Gallup Polls, in December 1972 found, for example, that a random sample of 3,000 Australians aged 16 and over, when asked: *'Apart from weddings, christenings, funerals and similar occasions, about how long is it since you last went to church?* replied:

Last in Church	1961(%)	1971
1-7 days ago	29	21
8-14 days ago	7	4
3-4 weeks ago	8	6
In last month	44	31

   A good critique of the usefulness of these kinds of figures can be found in an article by Bernice Martin (1968).

2. See my (1973) discussion of Environmentalism as a contemporary religious movement. For a broader discussion of environmentalism, see Cotgrove (1975, 1976). For a more general discussion see Musgrove (1974).

3. In fact they concluded:

   Perhaps all of this indicates that a well-defined thesis of civil religion may be more the creation (and fantasy) of the liberal, political and intellectual elite than active faith among the masses. (p.224).

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