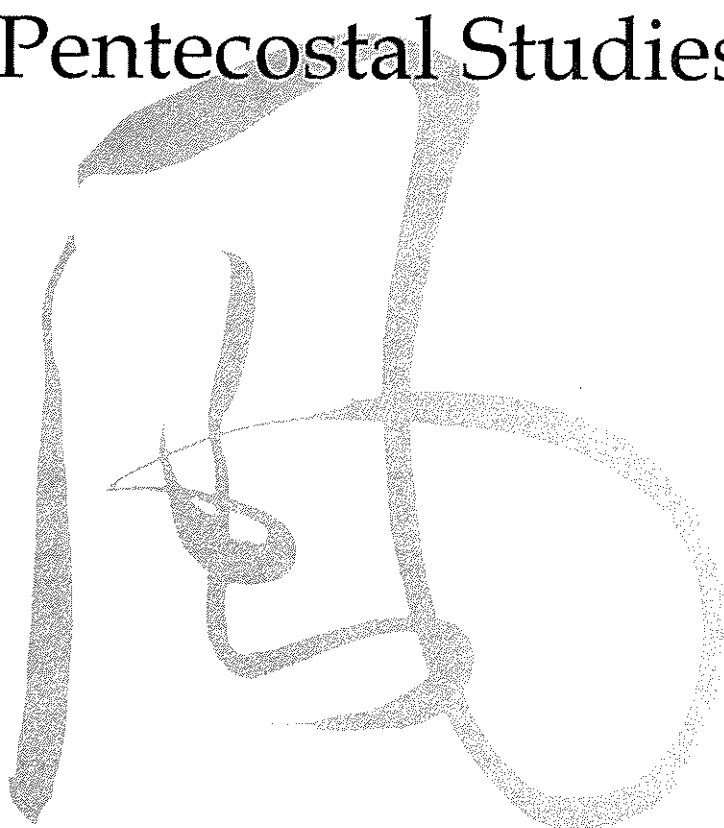


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CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY:  
AN AUSTRALIAN PERSPECTIVE

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1. Introduction

When one hears the word “Australia,” usually one of several images spring to mind: kangaroos and koalas, fun-loving sunbathers lying on the beach, a bunch of mates huddled in the local pub having their beer for the night, a convict colony and/or last bastion of the British Empire. What may not be so readily apparent is that this fully independent, sparsely populated island-continent nation is one of the most multicultural havens in the world. It forms a juxtaposition for East Asia, the Pacific Isles and, yes, Antarctica, which is a mere five thousand kilometers away. Though clearly located in the South Pacific, Australia is firmly a member of “the West,” with all the attendant benefits and plagues of any other western nation.

With thirty thousand kilometers of coastline, a sun-baked interior, an inhospitable northern coast but fertile underbelly in the southeast, this Australia is also known as an enclave of prosperity, liberal democracy, a relaxed lifestyle and high standard of living. Indeed this relatively young nation has excelled in many areas. Little wonder it is one of the few favored havens for migrants from around the world, not to mention millions of tourists who are willing to brave the long flights (fourteen hours non-stop from Los Angeles to Melbourne, or nineteen hours from London) to experience this attractive and prosperous land.

While Australia’s background as a penal colony is very well known, what may not be so clear is that there has been a conspicuous, even dominant, Christian presence in this land, beginning with the First Fleet of 1788. One of the ironies of the Australian psyche is that there is both an anti-authority mindset yet a strong Christian underpinning. Even with

a strongly sterile secularism in today's culture, around sixty seven percent of Australians identify themselves as "Christian."<sup>1</sup>

A good snapshot of the dynamic of Australia at the beginning of the third millennium is Melbourne, the second largest city. Its population is three and a half million, with one hundred forty languages spoken by migrants from all over the world. According to the national census, ninety thousand Muslims, eighty-eight thousand Buddhists, forty-five thousand Jews, and twenty eight thousand Buddhists, call Melbourne home.<sup>2</sup> Christian life is represented by thirty denominations, three hundred Christian ministry organizations, 1,600 local churches that open their doors to 220,000 Melbournians on a weekly basis, of which, 60,000 consider themselves "born again" according to the National Church Life Survey.<sup>3</sup>

Awkward, ambiguous and, at times, antagonistic are some adjectives that could be applied to the average Australian attitude towards church. The traditional, though somewhat fading, stereotype was a masculine, athletic Australian who nursed a suspicion and skepticism towards church, while still being baptized, married and buried by that same church. This distance from church could also be found towards other symbols of authority, including the government and the Crown. A term that was often applied to the church is "wowser," which was once defined as "fanatical puritanicalism," or as Ronald Conway says, "...the most common objection of the ordinary Australian to religion is that it spoils his fun."<sup>4</sup> Church is often viewed as boring, intolerant, irrelevant and lacking in compassion. Yet Andrew Bolt, Associate Editor of Melbourne's *Herald Sun*, Australia's largest-selling newspaper, and a self-proclaimed agnostic, declared at TRENDS 2000 Conference in Melbourne that Australia needed the church because it was a "civilizing influence."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Christian Research Association Bulletin* 12:4 ([www.cra.org.au](http://www.cra.org.au), December 2002), checked: Nov 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "National Census" ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au), 2002), checked: Nov 2002.

<sup>3</sup> "National Church Life Survey" ([www.ncls.org.au](http://www.ncls.org.au), 2002), checked: Dec 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce Wilson, *Can God Survive in Australia?* (Sydney: Albatross Books, 1983), p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew Bolt, "Credible Churches in Incredible Times" (A speech delivered at TRENDS 2000 Conference, Melbourne, October 2000).

The day that Australia became a federated nation (Jan 1, 1901) coincided with the birth of modern Pentecostalism, when Agnes Osman received the baptism in the Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues at Charles Parnham's Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas. Having appropriated Pedro Fernández de Quirós label of 1605, originally given to the New Hebrides, that Australia was the "Southland of the Holy Spirit," it is perhaps more than a coincidence that Australia has experienced some of the European-style struggles and decline in some churches, while enjoying the Asia-style mega-church growth and progress in others. As the Asian-Pacific church continues to encounter major challenges and dynamic growth, Australia is uniquely positioned to be both benefactor and beneficiary to these thrilling phenomena.

Years ago, a former Australian prime minister commented that Asia was the place Australia flew over to get to Europe. This same man became a "convert" to Asia and worked energetically for Australia to engage more constructively with its northern neighbor. He became one of the prime movers for the formation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). This is another confirmation of Australia's important, perhaps indispensable, link to the emerging Asia-Pacific region—economically, politically and spiritually.

A good example of this Australasian form of interaction is found in the Asia Pacific Theological Association (APTA). The purpose of APTA is to serve the churches of Asia Pacific by advising and accrediting "ministry-producing" Bible colleges. From APTA's point of view, Australia and New Zealand are included as part of their constituency in Asia Pacific. When APTA was formed in 1990 at Port Dickson, Malaysia, Australians were involved along with Asians and Asia-based American missionaries to Asia. At the time of this writing, about sixty-seven schools from twenty-three countries are members of APTA, with an estimated twelve from Australia. Educators with masters degrees and doctorates from Asia, America and Australia, serve side-by-side in the Theological Commissions, Teacher's Certification Commission and Accreditation Commission. As APTA is led by educators with graduate degrees, again Australians have been involved with higher education, including doctorates, serving alongside each other visiting the various colleges to provide them with extensive resources in building a better school. Australian ministers have always taken a major role in the "Asia Pacific" Theological Association, without anyone questioning "why."

As we consider the topic of Asia and Christian leadership in the future, Australia must be given a place. By proximity, recent association, an unmistakable Christian presence and move of the Holy Spirit, Asia

and Australia need to walk into the third millennium together. With this in mind, let us focus on the Australian scene.

## 2. A Snapshot of the Australian Church

Bruce Wilson wrote the following observation in 1983:

...after a decade or more of constant religious declines, the Christian Church remains a powerful force in Australia. There is no other movement centered around a creed or ideology which can attract anything like the number of 2.8 million Australians who voluntarily attend church services each week.<sup>6</sup>

Like other “western” nations, Australia is considered part of the Christian world. The following chart provides a summary of Australia’s Christian orientation.

2002 Census Statistics<sup>7</sup>

Christianity				
Church Groups	2001		1996	
	Members	%	Members	%
Anglican	3,881,162	20.68	3,903,324	21.99
Baptist	309,205	1.65	29,5178	1.66
Brethren	19,353	0.10	2,2063	0.12
Catholic	5,001,624	26.65	4,798,950	27.03
Church of Christ	61,335	0.33	75,023	0.42
Lutherans	250,365	1.33	249,989	1.41
Oriental	36,324	0.19	31,342	0.18
Orthodox	529,444	2.82	497,015	2.8
Presbyterian	637,530	3.40	675,134	3.81
Salvation Army	71,423	0.38	74,145	0.42
Seventh Day Adventist	53,844	0.29	52,655	0.3
Uniting	1,248,674	6.65	1,334,917	7.52

<sup>6</sup> Wilson, *Can God Survive in Australia?*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Christian Research Association, “Census Reports” (<http://www.cra.org.au/pages/00000219.cgi>), also available at Australian Bureau of Statistics ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)), check date: Dec, 2002.

Pentecostal	119,372 <sup>8</sup>	0.64	174,720	0.98
Other Protestant	52,557	0.28		
Other Christian	361,146	1.92	269,383	1.52
TOTAL	12,633,358	67.31	12,454,238	70.15

Thus 67% of Australians call themselves Christian. Australia is predominantly a Protestant country, but Roman Catholicism is the largest denomination with over 26% of the population, followed by the Anglican Church with nearly 21%. In the late 1970s, the Methodists merged with Presbyterians and Congregationalists to form “the Uniting Church.” Virtually all other Protestant denominations are represented locally. Pentecostalism is also part of the Australian church scene, but with a distinction. According to Australian Pentecostal church historian Barry Chant, Pentecostalism in Australia is the only denomination that was not a transplant from overseas.<sup>9</sup> Australian Wesleyan and Holiness groups in the late 1890s earnestly prayed for a visitation of the Holy Spirit, which happened in the early years of the twentieth century. The subsequent formation of the Assemblies of God (AOG) in Australia in 1937 consisted of an existing group of Australian Pentecostals who came into fellowship with the AOG at large; not a group that was started by the overseas Assemblies of God.

Estimates of Sunday church attendance vary, but it is approximately ten percent, or nearly two million Australians. While this percentage is lower than the United States, it is certainly higher than western Europe. For a nation of just under twenty million, there are large and even “mega-churches,” including Hillsong Church, Christian City Church, Wesley Central Mission in Sydney; Waverley Christian Fellowship, Crossway Baptist Church, Richmond Assembly of God, Mount Evelyn Christian Fellowship, and Faith! Christian Church in Melbourne; Christian Outreach Centre and Garden City Church in Brisbane; Paradise Community Church and Southside Christian Centre in Adelaide; and Perth has Riverview, Victory Life Centre and Perth Christian Life Centre. It should be kept in mind that there are many medium-sized (100-500) and many more small churches (under 100).

<sup>8</sup> This number is lower than it should be; in part because the census form does not reflect the spread of Pentecostalism throughout Australia.

<sup>9</sup> Barry Chant’s statement made during the Pentecostal/Charismatic Bible Colleges (PCBC) Conference in Sydney in 1994. Chant is the author of *Heart of Fire* (Unley Park, South Australia: House of Tabor, 1984) on Australian Pentecostalism.

Martin Luther King, Jr., the late American civil rights champion and ordained Baptist minister, allegedly lamented that eleven o'clock on Sunday morning was the most segregated hour in America. If he were alive today, King would be pleasantly surprised to see the composition of Australian churches, particularly the large urban ones. Australia has welcomed a large influx of migrants since World War II, primarily from Europe but since 1975 there has been a steady stream from Southeast Asia. Africans, South Americans and even a few North Americans have become what are called "New Australians." Some churches boast of two to four dozen different nationalities within their congregation; a microcosm of the global community. Mark Connor, Senior Minister of Waverley Christian Fellowship, Melbourne, comments, "Australia is a very diverse culture...and the church needs to model an integrated community where diversity is valued and appreciated."<sup>10</sup>

A dividing line among Australian churches at the beginning of the third millennium could include the generic-sounding labels, "traditional" versus "contemporary." Amazingly, these labels do not necessarily fit along denominational lines, though in general traditional can mean Catholic, Orthodox and the historic denominations of the Protestant Reformation. "Contemporary" can be found in certain Evangelical, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, though some historic Protestant churches would fit this label too. Phil Baker, head of the Australian Christian Churches, defines "contemporary churches" as those who have "relevant preaching, pragmatic social concern and uplifting worship."<sup>11</sup> Peter Corney says that contemporary churches are moving away from traditional denominational structures, not that they are anti-denominational but simply post-denominational. Contemporary churches want to think outside the denominational square and, according to Corney, reject the notion of MacChurch, where one model fits all situations, even within a single Australian city.<sup>12</sup>

The renewal and reinvigoration of the Australian church in the 1980s and beyond has also lead to the founding of several Bible colleges, mainly for the purpose of ministry training. Australian pragmatism and

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<sup>10</sup> An interview with the author (Melbourne, December 20, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> A telephone interview with the author (Phoned to Perth, December 20, 2002). Phil Baker is President of Australian Christian Churches and Senior Minister of Riverview, Perth.

<sup>12</sup> An interview with the author (Melbourne, November 24, 2001). Peter Corney is Pastor Emeritus of St. Hilary Anglican Church, Kew (Melbourne) and former director of the Institute for Contemporary Christian Leadership.

spiritual openness have created a healthy dynamic that has lead thousands of people to study at one or more of these schools. Since the general population, and by extension, ministry-training candidates, is relatively small, some of these schools have opened up to overseas students. It is therefore not uncommon to see students from East Asia, Africa, the Pacific islands and Europe, as well as migrants from these places, studying side-by-side with white, Anglo-Celtic Australians. Student numbers are being supplemented by offering online education to students across the nation and around the world.

### 3. Church Leadership until 2000

In general, Australian church leadership before the 1980s was more pastoral and maintenance. Little emphasis was given to growth and development, nor was there much training and releasing of lay people into church service. Alun Davies says:

In the past, most pastors would have seen themselves not as leaders, but as pastors first; the leadership component was not clearly defined, nor was there a national sense of vision.<sup>13</sup>

According to Ian Jagelman, there was the notion that godliness was the key to effective leadership and books were written on the life of the leader, but there was little emphasis on leadership skills. The ability to cast vision, initiate change, foster innovation and even exhibit an entrepreneurial flair were neither recognized nor encouraged in the maintenance model of the past. In some cases, the past leaders of the church were the lay people of influence and substance, who often served on the board. The pastor was, to a great extent, their employee in running the church.<sup>14</sup>

Add to this portrait the traditional Australian “laid back” attitude and suspicion against the institutional church, along with massive changes in the 1960s and onward, it becomes obvious that the maintenance-model

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<sup>13</sup> An interview with the author (Melbourne, November 24, 2002). Alun Davies is President of the Assemblies of God in Victoria and Senior Minister of Faith! Christian Church, Dandenong, Melbourne.

<sup>14</sup> A telephone interview with the author (Phoned to Sydney, December 20, 2002). Ian Jagelman is Senior Minister of Christian City Church, Lane Cove, New South Wales.

would find it an exceeding hard challenge to “maintain.” As a result, some churches and even denominations today are in danger of dying out altogether if something dramatic does not occur within the next ten to twenty years.

A fascinating change—and challenge to the maintenance model—happened in the Australian church in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Fuller Theological Seminary and its church growth movement began to introduce new ideas into the Australian church scene. In one sense, a line was being drawn between traditionalists and progressivists.

An interesting example of an entire Australian movement embracing a progressivist stance was the Assemblies of God in Australia, founded in 1937, as an indigenous movement in fellowship with the Assemblies of God worldwide. By its fortieth anniversary in 1977, the Australian AOG had a full-time superintendent with around 100 churches and approximately 9,446 members and adherents. During the 1977 AOG biennial conference, David Yonggi Cho, Senior Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul Korea, the world’s largest,<sup>15</sup> challenged the movement to set goals and see the “big picture,” by using the principles of the church growth movement. Alun Davies, who was present at this conference, said that Cho was the catalyst of casting vision and inspiring faith: “If he could do it, so could we.” A second thing that happened at the 1977 conference was the election of Andrew Evans as the General Superintendent. Evans, a former missionary, continued to pastor Paradise AOG in Adelaide, while taking the lead of a movement which was about to experience a communal transformation. Evans’ successor, Brian Houston, commented that his leadership style was “embrasive, empowering, exemplary and had an open spirit.”

Another defining event happened the very next year in 1978. Under the leadership of David Cartledge, a group of nearly 200 Australian AOG ministers participated in a pilgrimage to Korea and Israel. During their visit to Seoul, they caught the spirit of what was happening at Yoido Full Gospel Church, including cell groups and intensive, prevailing prayer. In Israel many pastors were exposed to a greater infusion of the prophetic as well as praise and worship. These dynamics were imported into Australia upon their return and began to spread throughout the entire fellowship.

By the 1980s, the Australian Assemblies of God began to experience consistent growth across the board. Churches of under 100 now grew to

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<sup>15</sup> In 1977 the Yoido Full Gospel Church had approximately 30,000 members; by 1994 it had around 800,000. Even the smaller number proved to be impressive, in and out of Australia.

200 to 400. Churches of around 200-400 grew to over 1,000 or 2,000. Many of the current AOG church buildings were constructed during this 1980s growth spurt. In addition, Youth Alive was birthed in the 1980s at Portsea near Melbourne, and from this movement emerged rallies of up to 10,000 young people as well as branches in different nations.

Brian Houston, Senior Pastor of the 14,000 member-strong Hillsong Church succeeded Andrew Evans in 1997 as AOG Superintendent, now called National President. In 1986 the Hillsong Church started the annual Hillsong Conference which grew from 150 delegates in its first year to over 15,000 registered daytime delegates in the Sydney Superdome in 2002. Houston launched the Australian Christian Churches, an umbrella group of Pentecostal/Charismatic churches (and, under the leadership of Phil Baker, into the paradigm of “contemporary churches”). In addition to the leadership, Houston describes his passion this way:

I believe the local church is the answer. I believe if we can get local churches to grow and be strong and healthy examples, and take up the mandate of evangelism, community concern, and spiritual power, the Church will make a greater impact than ever before.<sup>16</sup>

During the twenty years (1977-1997) that Andrew Evans served as Australian AOG Superintendent, the number of members and adherents grew from 9,446 to 115,912, or a twelve-fold increase. Five years after the accession of Brian Houston as National President, the Australian Assemblies of God grew again to 158,391 members and adherents (an increase of 42,479), 944 churches and 2,333 credentialed ministers in 2002, including 464 women or 19.8% (these figures must be measured against the backdrop of an Australian population of 18,972,350 people in 2001).<sup>17</sup>

When asked the question, “What do you attribute the main reason for the growth of the AOG,” some will posit methods and others leadership style. One well-placed insider commented vehemently that the real reason for growth was simply “the sovereignty of God...one hundred percent.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> A telephone interview with the author (Phoned to Sydney, February 13, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> Statistics provided by the Assemblies of God National Office, PO Box 336, Mitcham VIC 3132 Australia ([www.aogaaustralia.com.au](http://www.aogaaustralia.com.au)) in Nov 2002. Australian population statistic provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)).

<sup>18</sup> An interview with the author in Melbourne, November 21, 2002.

Other Australian Christian “success” stories include the Wesley Central Mission in Sydney under the leadership of Gordon Moyes. This church has an impressive array of outreaches and community services, with 3,000 paid staff and 3,000 volunteers, 470 plus buildings, a program on commercial television, an income of \$1,000,000 every two to three days and more. Australia’s largest Protestant group, the Anglican Church, as a strong, highly respected, influential and evangelical branch in Sydney, accounts for one third of all Anglicans in the country. Some parts of the Anglican Church are declining, a fact highlighted in Caroline Miley’s book.<sup>19</sup> In reviewing the book, Chris McGillion of the *Sydney Morning Herald* comments that contrary to the trends elsewhere, the Sydney diocese and its archbishop are thriving. Though accused of being moralizing, Bible-thumping and even elitist, McGillion says, the Sydney diocese goes against the declining trend of Anglicanism elsewhere. “From the point of view of pure organizational health—forget for a moment orthodoxy, faithfulness to tradition, and questions of tolerance and inclusion—it is obviously doing something right”<sup>20</sup>

#### 4. Postmodernism and Present Challenges

Though clearly positioned in the southern hemisphere, Australia has been a western outpost in every area—cultural orientation, historical roots and alliances economic, political and spiritual. Virtually every major trend to hit North America and Europe has found its place in Australia, even if the timing is different.

Of these, postmodernity, with its radical relativism, its abhorrence of metanarrative, its exaltation of the subjective and demotion of the rational, has blown with gale-like ferocity throughout the Australian churches. Fidelity to a denomination or local congregation is no longer guaranteed as competing activities and a consumer mindset permeate the lives of Australian Christians. Political correctness and the notion that there is no absolute truth renders Christians reluctant to make a public stand on even the most fundamental of beliefs, like “Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father” (John 14:6).

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<sup>19</sup> Caroline Miley, *The Suicidal Church: Can the Anglican Church Be Saved?* (Sydney: Pluto Press, 2002).

<sup>20</sup> Chris McGillion, “Sydney’s Vitality Offers Anglicans a Way to Retrieve Their Lost Souls,” *Sydney-Morning Herald*, November 26, 2002 ([www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/11/25/1038173690975.html](http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/11/25/1038173690975.html)), checked: November 26, 2002.

Mark Connor identifies the problem of consumerism and the church when he says: people are less committed to their local church and will simply move on if they do not perceive their needs are being met. "This places a lot of pressure on pastors and leaders to not cater to the spirit of the age, but to ensure that the church is meeting the needs of the people," he concludes.<sup>21</sup>

Peter Corney, who has taught on leadership and postmodernism for years, makes these observations:

Managing the change process is really tough. Discipling Australian Christians is hard work; the Aussie Church, along with western churches, is slack. Communication is a major issue, especially in this media-saturated world, making it harder; we are one electronic noise among thousands. Mobility is a problem which destroys community. Related to discipleship affects the attendance pattern; those under 40s have not absorbed the duty and loyalty factors. People are more self-centered and individualistic: what will suit my lifestyle, hence bringing irregular attendance. Evangelism is a big challenge and despite all the books and conferences, the Australian church is weak on evangelism: weak in doing it and lacking in effectiveness.<sup>22</sup>

In essence, postmodernism is only part of the problem facing the church. Another is Australia's material prosperity. A high-standard of living, sound infrastructure, first-world conveniences and political stability have birthed a society that is relatively well-off and, like the church at Laodicea in Revelation 3, sees itself as rich, increased with goods and needing nothing, including God. But massive changes in the world, including the war on terrorism and the traumatic aftermath of the October 12, 2002 Bali bombing, has plunged this easy-going nation into grief, insecurity and uncertainty. These unsettling factors could be transformed into the very ingredients to help turn this nation around.

Church growth of the 1980s and 1990s appears to have peaked in those denominations that were once soaring. Rowland Croucher comments:

Between 1986 and 1991, Pentecostal denominations grew by 42%. Between 1991 and 1996, they grew 16% (half of this by the birth of children). National Christian Life Survey (NCLS) discovered in 1996 28% of worshippers in Pentecostal churches had transferred from

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<sup>21</sup> An interview with the author (Melbourne, December 20, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> An interview with the author (Melbourne, November 24, 2001).

elsewhere in previous 5 years and 10% of newcomers had no church background. But also 15% of that number went to another denomination and 17% drifted out of church completely.<sup>23</sup>

With church growth as a major goal, these backward trends alarmed many. As church numbers began to plateau, Australian pastors were eagerly looking for ways to reinvigorate the past momentum. Plane-loads of ministers made visits to such places as Willow Creek Community Church, First Assembly in Phoenix Arizona, Brownsville Church, Toronto Airport Church, as well as Yoido Full Gospel Church, looking for the “recipe” of sustainable, explosive growth. Many eagerly applied the method, only to find it was of limited effectiveness in Australia.

While church attendance in Australia is better than other parts of the western world, it still constitutes around 10% of the population. The following chart shows some of the reasons people are not attending church:

Figure 1: Stated Reasons for Not Attending Church  
Among Infrequent and Non-Attendees<sup>24</sup>

Reasons for Non-Attendance	%
Church worship services are too boring or unfulfilling	42
The beliefs the churches hold	35
The moral views of churches	35
No need to go to church	34
Other things I prefer doing	31
I do not have strong beliefs	27
The way the churches are organized	24
I have too many other commitments	21
Personal bad experiences of church people or ministers	16
Not enough time to go because of work	15
I feel uncomfortable with the sort of people who go to church	14
I lack a previous involvement with churches	8
My family or friends don't like church	6
No churches of my denomination nearby	4
No good churches nearby	4

<sup>23</sup> Rowland Croucher, “Does the Australian Church Have a Future?” *Grid 3* (2001), pp. 1-4 (2).

<sup>24</sup> 1998 Australian Community Survey conducted by NCLS Research and Edith Cowan University (WA) [[www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=929&sao=1](http://www.ncls.org.au/pages.asp?page=929&sao=1)].

I have poor health, disability or infirmness	3
I have no transport to get to church	2

Other reasons that people give for what discourages them from attending church can be grouped into some broad categories in order of importance:

- 1) Lack of motivation: Rather than rejecting the churches outright, many have never seriously considered church involvement or are more attracted by other activities.
- 2) Lack of time: There is no sense of hostility, but other things are given priority.
- 3) Lack of access: This includes a lack of transport, poor health, a lack of churches nearby or a lack of churches of the respondent's denomination.<sup>25</sup>

Rob Isaachsen who runs the Melbourne Pastors Network has pointed out that there is a serious crisis regarding the decline and potential demise of certain denominations. To use Melbourne as an example, during the five year period of 1991 to 1996, there was a population increase of 5% but a church increase of only 0.6%. Of greater concern was that every year there was a 3.5% exodus from church attendance and faith, including 9% of Anglicans, 11% of Uniting Church, 17 % Pentecostals, 13% of Churches of Christ, 7% of Baptists and 10% of Salvation Army, making the total loss of these six denominations, based on Sunday attendance, 14,300 or 2,860 per annum.<sup>26</sup> Isaachsen also estimates that 25% of all Melbourne church members will be dead within the next ten years, implying an aging congregation.<sup>27</sup> Unless church membership is replenished with younger and newer members, the church will decline numerically at an even more alarming rate.

Of even greater concern is the issue of evangelism in Australia. Australians, in general, can be described as affluent, sports-loving, irreverent in humor, egalitarian, pragmatic, wary of authority, yet committed to community and mateship. Already skeptical about religion and the motives of the clergy, churches are perceived to be irrelevant,

<sup>25</sup> Embargo: July 2002, "Why people don't go to church...and what churches can do about it," National Church Life Survey.

<sup>26</sup> Rob Isaachsen, "Statistics: Religion in Melbourne" (an email message, [melb.pastors@pastornet.net.au](mailto:melb.pastors@pastornet.net.au), Nov 2002). Isaachsen is Coordinator of Melbourne Pastors Network.

<sup>27</sup> Isaachsen, "Statistics: Religion in Melbourne."

out-of-touch and after one's money. Ian Jagelman says starkly: "Christian leadership is realizing that the church has fundamentally failed in effectively reaching the unchurched in Australia."<sup>28</sup>

### 5. How Now Shall We Live?

The Australian church is at a crossroads. One way leads down the path of insularity to a place called "sect." It is the easier road. To get there, all the clergy and their people need to do is to keep looking inward, put up strong barriers to outsiders and withdraw from the wider world as much as possible. The other road is harder. Its destination is a place called "church." The road is more like a tightrope than a path. It requires a careful balance between theological purity and compassion. It requires clergy who are convinced deeply of the truth of their Christian faith, but who also understand the modern world better than it understands itself.<sup>29</sup>

These complicated, change-filled, crisis-riddled, yet opportunity-filled times have no roadmap on how to proceed forward, save for that which the Holy Spirit places the quickened word into the hearts of Christian leaders and those in touch with the Spirit. While we must always remember that God is sovereign and he will move according to his set times and seasons, there are some things we can do—practical things—that will facilitate and perhaps multiply the effect of God's move. Alun Davies puts it this way, "Overall, the times ahead will require greater visionary, purposeful, deliberate and decisive leadership than ever before."<sup>30</sup>

Jagelman made an excellent summary of what is required:

Today there is recognition of the distinction between leadership and ministry. Now there is a deliberate attempt to train people with ministry skills and leadership skills; second, there is a trend towards the senior pastor seeing himself/herself as a leader rather than a minister. Third, a trend towards the formation of leadership teams and not just ministry

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<sup>28</sup> The author's telephone interview to Sydney, December 20, 2002 with Ian Jagelman, Senior Minister of Christian City, Church Lane Cove, New South Wales.

<sup>29</sup> Wilson, *Can God Survive in Australia?*, p. 158.

<sup>30</sup> The author's interview with Alun Davies in Melbourne, December 20, 2002.

teams. Fourth, pastors recognize the need for leadership mentors, not just ministry mentors. Fifth, leaders are connecting, not on the basis of denominational affiliation, but on the size of their churches (500 Plus Network).<sup>31</sup>

David Wilson, former Principle of Kingsley College, Melbourne, argues that the terms “pastor” and “shepherd” are biblical to the core.

Consequently, to suggest that the church does not need Pastors is a move away from the biblical mode. The dichotomizing of leader and pastor is false and can be very damaging to the church when one is played off against another as being “better” or more needed today.<sup>32</sup>

Issues of character are becoming more and more advocated. Several “job descriptions” are given of the godly Australian, who is still hard working, straightforward, loyal, competent, courageous, enterprising and modest. Christie Buckingham sums it up well when she says:

Pure is the new luxury! Pure water. Pure soil. Pure food. Pure Air. Pure is good. The church must be a pure zone. A place for people to be free. To breathe the breath of the Spirit and be revived again. To sense the fire of God and be reenergised and refocused. A place where integrity and honesty are par for the course. A place that encourages sexual purity. This is only possible where people are accountable.<sup>33</sup>

Stuart Robinson continues the “job description” of a future leader, especially in the face of postmodernism, when he says:

The historic church does not permit the emergence of leadership, vision, and direction, except probably the Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, a new generation of leadership will come forth from the fringes, which historically is from where all revival starts. These emerging leaders will be the mouthpiece.

This leadership will stress the ancient absolutes of truth as objectified by Jesus and the Bible. They will be uncompromising in the relativism of truth, ethics, and morality, as is common in the church,

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<sup>31</sup> Jagelman interview.

<sup>32</sup> David Wilson, “N.T. Model for Church Leadership in 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Theological Journal of Kingsley College* 1 (September 2000), p. 45.

<sup>33</sup> The author’s interview in Melbourne, January 15, 2003 with Christie Buckingham, Senior Minister of Bayside Community Church, Cheltenham, Melbourne.

which has adjusted to accommodate itself to contemporary postmodern society. This leadership will stress objective truth and experientialism in relationship to God.<sup>34</sup>

Complexities of life yet limitations on individuals make it imperative to work as a team. The leader in essence becomes the team captain. But he or she would be rendered helpless if not for the united efforts of the team members. Brian Houston espouses his philosophy on “team” this way:

Most pastors, consciously or subconsciously, rule by degree to the lowest common denominator, i.e., catering to what people will think. I am not suggesting one should be autocratic as I believe in eldership and Presbyterian leadership. When I run a meeting, it is the “team” that makes the decision. A leader will know how to bring the best out of others. In a church, the proof of a leader of leaders is that you will be raising leaders.<sup>35</sup>

Relationship has been a war cry among many; this is an amazing thing for the Australian church, which, for its adherence to nominal notions of mateship, can still be detached and insular from the community and each other. Relationships outside one’s local ministry can, to some extent, be treated as an extension of the concept of team, albeit for the expansion of the greater kingdom of God. Phil Baker, President of the Australian Christian Churches (ACC), speaks about relationship and challenges:

With so many current obstacles, it is imperative to have good relationships with peers, where real accountability takes place. The answers to our problems and keys to our destinies are in the hearts of other leaders. In Australia, we have ACC and 500 Plus (multidenominational, 130 churches in Australasia where 500 are actually in the service—today 100 churches are involved) where church pastors meet and be honest with each other. If we got together and learned from each other, we would solve our problems.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The author’s interview in Melbourne, November 19, 2002 with Stuart Robinson, Senior Minister of Crossway Baptist Church, Melbourne.

<sup>35</sup> The author’s telephone interview to Sydney, February 13, 2002 with Brian Houston, President of Assemblies of God in Australia and Senior Minister of Hillsong Church, Sydney.

<sup>36</sup> A telephone interview with the author (Phoned to Perth, December 20, 2002).

Contact and involvement with the local community is becoming emphasized more and more. The proliferation of church-based charitable works has been staggering. Like the legacy of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, churches are learning to show genuine care and compassion with the common touch. Erstwhile apolitical denominations are taking a more positive and active role. The Australian Christian Lobby (ACL), under the leadership of Brigadier Jim Wallace (Ret.), learning from the successes and failures of similar groups elsewhere, is taking a “military strategy” of how to influence in public square in biblical values, without rancorous campaigning, polemical politics or endorsing political parties or candidates. Though still in its emerging stages, the ACL has already made its influence felt on a state and national level. Of especial interest is that, since the turn of the new millennium, two key Christian leaders have entered into their respective state parliaments, including Andrew Evans in South Australia and Gordon Moyes in New South Wales.

One of the pitfalls leaders need to avoid, especially pragmatic Australians, is to remember that there are no formulas for big churches and big Christians. Concepts like prayer, fasting and “waiting on God” should not be viewed as abstractions for those who have nothing better to do, but as non-negotiable foundational practices which will lead to God’s plan for the ministry and community. The truth of the gospel and the scripture must be held to like a lifeline. The most likely scenario is that God will use a unique, Australian-made solution, for Australia’s unique challenges and psyche. Some have postulated, rightly, that the settlement of Australia in 1788 was part of a divine plan to raise up a continent-wide mission station to Southeast Asia and the world. Australian missionaries, both short and long-term, are making a great impact on every inhabited continent. Without question, faithfulness to the Great Commission will also bring untold blessings to the sending church and nation. Let us always bear in mind that when we sow, we must do it liberally and regularly; when we reap, it must be joyfully and abundantly, but in all things it is “God who gives the increase” (1 Cor 3:7).